

Inspection of Discovery Special Academy

Sandy Flatts Lane, Middlesbrough TS3 9DB

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 January 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Discovery Special Academy is a place where leaders want pupils to learn that 'through discovery we grow'. Leaders aspire for pupils to take control of their own learning. Pupils are taught a well-thought-out curriculum. Leaders design this to meet pupils' individual needs. The curriculum includes a variety of learning pathways to meet pupils' stage of learning. Leaders prioritise developing pupils' phonic knowledge. Pupils develop their reading and communication skills well. They learn from well-trained staff who understand their specific needs. Leaders are ambitious for all pupils. They have high expectations for them.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff meet pupils' needs well. They build secure and stable relationships with pupils. Staff have a deep understanding of each pupil. Learning environments are well resourced. Pupils can access a variety of specialist resources and therapeutic interventions.

Leaders have created a highly inclusive school environment. Pupils are happy at school. They feel supported by staff. Pupils behave well and the school is calm. There is a high number of staff available to support pupils. This helps pupils feel safe. Bullying is not an issue in school. Pupils know that staff would intervene swiftly if it were to occur.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have a detailed overview of the school curriculum. They ensure pupils learn a range of knowledge and skills that meet their specific needs. An effective communication curriculum means pupils can access all curriculum areas. Pupils learn how to interact with others confidently to further develop their writing and spoken language. Pupils develop their reading skills well. They follow a systematic synthetic phonics programme. Pupils read often. They develop their phonic knowledge well. Books are well matched to pupils' ability. Pupils who are unable to access phonics learn pre-phonics skills. Reading is well led and resourced. Leaders ensure that all teaching and support staff are well trained to teach phonics.

Leaders map out well-structured curriculum pathways. Each pathway has been developed to meet pupils' needs. The pathways enable pupils to work towards their education, health and care (EHC) plan targets well. Leaders have considered the important knowledge and skills that pupils should learn. Learning builds carefully over time. Pupils revisit prior learning often. The deliberate use of repetition and overlearning meets the needs of pupils with SEND well. Pupils are taught at a pace that allows them to embed learning. Skilled staff teach them to apply knowledge and skills in new ways. For example, teachers use a range of sensory and practical activities to help engage pupils in lessons. This ensures pupils develop their understanding securely.

Leaders have mapped out an effective early years curriculum. They have considered what early learning goals mean for their children in their context. Leaders place a strong focus on communication. They help children to make small steps as they learn to read. Children learn about the links between letters and the sounds they make. Children are taught number and artistic skills well. They also explore the links between subjects and this helps them to connect their learning.

Pupils are polite and behave well. Leaders ensure all staff contribute to the positive school culture. Staff and pupils are respectful towards each other. Staff use positive language well. They support pupils to make the right choices. This ensures pupils feel happy in school and develop good habits for learning. Leaders have developed strong systems to ensure pupils attend school regularly. They support parents and carers to establish consistent attendance routines with their children. Most pupils attend well because of leaders' highly effective work. Despite this, some pupils are persistently absent. This includes some children in early years.

Pupils' personal development is supported by a well-designed personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. Pupils feature strongly in all aspects of school life. They experience a range of learning opportunities to support their personal development. They learn about democracy and enterprise. Pupils take part in residential visits and sing in a choir for members of the community. The curriculum enables pupils to achieve milestones at different points in school. Pupils learn about keeping safe, healthy lifestyles and well-being. They learn cooking skills and experience outdoor pursuits, such as horse riding. Physical education lessons teach pupils about healthy lifestyles. The school's '8 milestones' ensure pupils develop an understanding of the world around them. They prepare pupils well for adulthood and their next steps.

The school is well led by knowledgeable and caring leaders. Leaders receive strong support from trustees and the multi-academy trust. Together, they share an ambitious vision for pupils with SEND. They are working to create a 'SEND village' at the school for pupils in the local community. Trustees know the school well. They rigorously hold leaders to account. Staff feel well supported by leaders. They say leaders are approachable and considerate of their workload. Early career teachers receive regular training and feel positively supported by their mentors. They appreciate the development they receive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding across school sites. Procedures to check adults before their employment are robust. Staff are well trained. They receive regular updates to further develop their practice. Record-keeping is detailed. Leaders are quick to respond to any safeguarding concerns. They work well with external agencies. This ensures pupils' needs are identified and supported promptly. Staff are aware of pupils' additional vulnerabilities due to their complex needs. Staff understand the risks pupils face in the community.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know adults will support them if needed.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' work to improve pupils' attendance ensures that most pupils attend school well. However, some pupils are persistently absent. This means they miss valuable learning and prevents them from developing positive school routines. Leaders should continue their work with parents to support them to improve their child's attendance so that they attend school regularly.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	145877
Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	10255578
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	2 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	126
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jason Brine
Headteacher	Jennifer Duncan
Website	www.discoveryspecialacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Discovery Special Academy is a special school for pupils aged between 2 and 16 years. It is based across two sites.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. Some pupils attend nursery provision while being assessed for an EHC plan.
- The school makes provision for pupils with complex special educational needs. This includes pupils with severe learning difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, physical disabilities, and multi-sensory impairment.
- At the time of inspection, the school makes provision for children in Nursery to Year 7.
- The school is part of the Tees Valley Education multi-academy trust.
- The school does not use alternative education provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspectors met with the head of academy, members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, teachers and early career teachers.
- The lead inspector met with members of the board of trustees in an on-screen meeting. They also met the chief executive officer and executive headteacher.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, art and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with the school's designated safeguarding lead. The inspector reviewed the school's safeguarding records, relevant policies and other safeguarding documentation. The inspector reviewed the processes that leaders use to identify and help pupils who need support. In addition, the inspector scrutinised the school's records of checks carried out on adults who work at the school.
- Inspectors visited lessons across the school.
- The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally, including pupils who receive support to improve their reading.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- An inspector spoke to the local authority designated officer.
- The inspection team spoke to staff about their workload and pupils' behaviour in the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for pupils, staff and parents, including any free-text responses.

Inspection team

David Mills, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Milligan

His Majesty's Inspector

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