

Inspection of St. George's Church of England Academy

Neasham Road, Middleton St George, Darlington, County Durham DL2 1LD

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 February 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

Ofsted has not previously inspected St. George's Church of England Academy as an academy school under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections.

Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection of the predecessor school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff at St. George's Church of England Academy have high expectations of all pupils. The school's Christian ethos threads through every aspect of its work. It is reflected in the respect and tolerance that pupils show towards adults and to each other. Behaviour around school, and in class, is calm and orderly. Pupils have high expectations of each other. They know what is expected of them. Pupils understand the reasons for consequences, which rarely need to be applied.

Pupils learn what actions constitute bullying. They are confident that staff will address any incidents of bullying quickly. Inspectors' findings during the inspection support this view.

New leaders have developed ways in which the school works in partnership with, and communicates to, parents and carers. Pupils, and their families, benefit from appropriate and timely pastoral support when needed. Feedback provided to inspectors indicates that parents value and appreciate this refreshed approach.

There are several extra-curricular activities for pupils to participate in. These include a popular and long-standing history club. Pupils enjoy attending a range of sports clubs at school. Some pupils have experienced significant success in these, including reaching the national schools' football final last year.

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

In the past year, the school has experienced some significant changes. New leaders in the school quickly identified the school's strengths and areas for development. Leaders have brought about a shared vision for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to experience a high-quality education. Pupils are benefiting from this. Leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, recognise that there is still work to do. They acknowledge that standards have declined in recent years. This was most notable in the Year 6 published progress data at the end of the last academic year. However, strong foundations are now in place on which to build, moving forward.

Leaders have carefully considered the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. In subjects such as mathematics and history, this is clearly mapped out, from the early years through to Year 6. Teachers' strong subject knowledge in these subjects supports pupils effectively. Teachers present information clearly and break down new concepts into small steps. Pupils are able to use what they learn to make links to prior learning. Teachers do not, however, routinely check that pupils have learned and remembered the key knowledge that they have been taught.

Leaders have ensured that all pupils study a broad curriculum. They are ambitious about what they want pupils to gain from it. Some areas of the curriculum need to be developed further. Leaders are aware of this, and have plans in place to address this area for development.

In subjects at an earlier stage of development, such as physical education (PE), leaders have thought about what needs to be taught. They have ensured that the subject is resourced appropriately. Core tasks are developed as pupils progress through the school. For example, in gymnastics, pupils develop an increasing understanding of different types of balances and jumps. Many of these changes have only recently been implemented. Leaders are aware of the need to regularly check the impact of the changes that have been made.

Children in Reception learn phonics as they start the school year. They quickly begin to learn the sounds that letters make. Children use this knowledge to learn how to spell words. This work continues in key stage 1. Pupils apply these skills when reading. This helps them to read with increasing fluency. Leaders track pupils' progress in phonics closely. They provide support to pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Additional support is provided for the small minority of pupils in key stage 2 who have gaps in their phonic knowledge. Leaders recognise that, currently, this support does not accurately meet these pupils' needs.

Children in the early years make a positive start to their school career. At the beginning of the school day, children are eager to come into school. They enjoy sharing their news with adults. Adults are responsive to children's needs. Activities in Nursery and Reception are carefully considered. Over time, children learn how to develop independence and take responsibility for themselves and the equipment that they use. Children in Nursery can fluently count to 10, and many beyond 10. There are many opportunities for children to engage in activities that develop skills in early mathematics.

Pupils with SEND are supported well in school. Teachers break activities down into smaller tasks so that pupils can complete their work with success. Established routines in the school day enable pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour to begin each lesson ready to learn.

Leaders have recently implemented a new curriculum for personal, social and health education. This clearly sets out the key knowledge that leaders want pupils to learn over time. Pupils have many opportunities to learn about diversity and respect. They are taught about healthy relationships and how to keep both mentally and physically healthy. Lessons and assemblies provide regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own experiences and how these may be different from others'.

Members of the academy council visit the school regularly. This enables them to see first hand the impact of the recent changes that have been made. Their work would benefit further from considering a wider range of evidence when they evaluate the impact of leaders' actions.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive regular training to ensure that they know the signs that suggest that a pupil may be at risk of harm.

Staff know pupils well. They provide appropriate support to them and their families, working with outside agencies where necessary.

The school's curriculum teaches pupils how to stay safe near areas of the village that can be dangerous, such as the railway line and a river. Visitors, including the police community support officer, support the school's work in this regard.

Leaders ensure that checks are carried out to confirm that adults working with pupils are appropriate. These checks are carefully recorded.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to revisit important knowledge. Some pupils are not able to recall knowledge that they have been taught. Leaders need to ensure that pupils regularly revisit and revise key concepts so that they are better prepared for the next stage of learning.
- Leaders are taking the right steps to bring about the necessary improvements in the school. Some of these changes are recent and need time to embed. Leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, need to ensure that they have clear, strategic oversight of the impact of these changes and take action accordingly.

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	138000
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10255639
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	415
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Taylor
Headteacher	Judith Skirving
Website	www.stgeorges-darlington.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Church of England Diocese of Durham.
- The school joined the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust in April 2022. Prior to this, the school was part of the Sage Multi-Academy Trust.
- The headteacher started in September 2022. Prior to this, she had provided executive leadership support.
- The academy council provides some local governance. Trustees of the board support their work.
- The school's most recent section 48 inspection was in January 2020.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders to discuss key aspects of the school's work.
- Deep dives in early reading, mathematics, PE, history and French were carried out to evaluate the curriculum. For this, inspectors spoke to subject leaders, visited lessons and reviewed pupils' work. Meetings were also held with pupils and staff separately.
- Meetings were held with the chief executive officer and the school's improvement partner. An inspector spoke to a representative from the Diocese of Durham on the telephone.
- Inspectors reviewed responses to Ofsted's survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also spoke to parents at the beginning of the day and to parents on the telephone who had requested a call. Ofsted's surveys of staff and pupils were also reviewed.

Inspection team

Matthew Harrington, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Eleanor Belfield	His Majesty's Inspector
Emily Stevens	His Majesty's Inspector

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