

Inspection of a good school: Erasmus Darwin Academy

Pool Road, Burntwood, Staffordshire WS7 3QW

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 May 2023

Outcome

Erasmus Darwin Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and achieve very well at Erasmus Darwin Academy. This is because leaders and teachers have carefully designed an ambitious curriculum. Pupils value the support that staff give them. Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school, with one saying that staff 'exceed expectations every day'.

Pupils have responded very well to the school's high expectations for their conduct. The school explicitly teaches students how to behave via a well-designed behaviour curriculum. As a result, students behave respectfully to each other, to their teachers and to visitors. This means that the school is a harmonious and well-ordered community, where warm and respectful relationships characterise life and where inclusion and equality are demonstrated by all. Pupils are attentive in lessons and say that they can focus on their learning.

Leaders across the school and trust have high expectations for pupils' academic achievement. Pupils are rising to these expectations thanks to the effective delivery of the curriculum. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and support pupils well to learn the curriculum.

Leaders have placed pupils' personal development at the heart of their curriculum. This means that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils appreciate the wider opportunities which are available to them, including the breakfast club, and other lunchtime and after-school activities.

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

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum retains breadth and rigour for all pupils. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). On occasions, its ambition goes above the requirements of the national curriculum. For example, in geography, pupils study about Asia and Africa in considerable detail to challenge any misconceptions they might have about the individual countries in these continents. Leaders update and review the curriculum regularly. When they do this, they consider

effectively how they can improve the design of the curriculum to help pupils learn better. Leaders are taking effective action to place the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) at the heart of the curriculum. To achieve this, they are supporting more pupils to study modern foreign languages through a redesigned curriculum in this subject.

Leaders have identified the key knowledge that pupils need to learn. Teachers use recall activities to check pupils' understanding. For the vast majority, teachers identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge and address them rapidly. This means that pupils can quickly move to more complex learning. However, sometimes teachers' explanations are not clear enough, or they do not check effectively what pupils understand. This means that gaps in pupils' knowledge are not identified and persist, which makes it harder for them to learn new things.

Leaders are clear about what they want pupils with SEND to achieve. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is very knowledgeable about the pupils with SEND, and ensures that they receive effective support. There is a clear strategy for adapting teaching across the school to meet the needs of these pupils.

Low-level disruption is very rare, and pupils understand leaders' expectations. This is because all staff take time to explain leaders' expectations. Pupils say they appreciate this. On the rare occasions that pupils do not meet leaders' expectations, staff deal with this well.

Leaders have taken action to ensure that all pupils can read well. This includes reading time for all pupils and reading lessons in the library for Years 7 and 8. These have been effective in establishing a culture of reading. Leaders are aware there is more to be done to accelerate the process of support for weaker readers, and have plans in place to do this. This includes ensuring that there is training in phonics for key staff.

The school provides a range of opportunities to support pupils' personal development. There is a well-planned programme of personal, social, health and economic education that is delivered discretely in lessons across the school. Leaders are working to increase pupils' participation in clubs and activities. The school has a comprehensive careers programme in place to ensure that pupils have the information they need to access ambitious destinations. This includes pupils in the sixth form, where leaders support them to ensure that all can access their chosen destinations. Leaders have reintroduced a full work experience programme in Year 10, which means pupils gain early experience of the workplace.

The trust has invested time and resources to develop leaders. Those responsible for governance are clear about their responsibilities, and work effectively with school leaders. Leaders in the school have a clear and precise understanding of the provision and priorities for development. They promote an honest and transparent relationship with all staff. Staff workload and well-being constitute a high priority. For example, staff report that they are very happy working at the school, and they appreciate how leaders consult with them and review decisions in the interests of pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know the pupils very well and work in their best interests. They take proactive action to ensure that all pupils are kept safe. Leaders keep detailed records, which they scrutinise carefully to spot any concerning patterns of concerns. They are tenacious in following up concerns, including with external organisations. Leaders ensure that staff receive regular safeguarding training and updates. Staff know how to report any concerns. Pupils know who to speak to if they have a concern about themselves or their peers. They have every confidence the school will act appropriately. They are taught how to stay safe through a well-designed curriculum for pupils' personal development.

Leaders have carried out appropriate recruitment checks on their staff to ensure that they are suitable to work at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, teachers do not check well enough if pupils' learning is secure. As a result, any gaps in pupils' learning persist and pupils struggle to complete more challenging work. Leaders should ensure that all teachers precisely identify and then address any misconceptions and gaps in pupils' learning, giving them secure foundations to move to more challenging work with success.
- Leaders are yet to implement systems to support pupils with weak reading skills. This means that pupils struggle to fully engage with the curriculum. Leaders need to ensure that all pupils who are weaker readers are supported effectively to enable them to become fluent readers.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in September 2014.

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	136886
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10268812
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,139
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	190
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jason Marsden
Headteacher	Philip Walklate
Website	www.eda.staffs.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 September 2014, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider for one pupil.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, trust leaders, other senior and middle leaders, the SENCo, the designated safeguarding leader (DSL),

the careers leader, early career teachers, the chair of governors, the chair of trustees and the trust CEO.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in modern foreign languages, geography, science and mathematics. For each of these subjects, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke to pupils, looked at some of their work and spoke to teachers.
- Inspectors met with members of staff and spoke to pupils formally and informally at various points in the inspection.
- Inspectors took account of responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors looked at records and spoke to staff about behaviour, bullying and safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by checking the school's approach to staff recruitment, scrutinising policy documents and meeting with the DSL. They also looked at how incidents are recorded and analysed.

Inspection team

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