

Inspection of Grace College

Saltwell Road South, Gateshead NE9 6LE

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 July 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders are raising expectations of pupils' behaviour at Grace College. Pupils are beginning to respond to these expectations. Many behave well in lessons and show an increasing focus on learning. Despite this, too many pupils are still not behaving well enough.

Pupils experience a variable quality of education. They learn better in some subjects than in others. In too many subjects, pupils have gaps in their knowledge. For some pupils, low attendance impacts negatively on their learning. In contrast, students in the sixth form attend well and achieve well.

Pupils are safe at Grace College. Leaders place a high priority on promoting tolerance and kindness among pupils. However, when bullying happens, some pupils are not confident that it will be dealt with effectively.

Pupils, including sixth-form students, participate in an extensive careers programme that both widens their horizons and makes them aware of possible pathways in the local area. They benefit from contact with a wide range of employers, colleges and universities.

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

Leaders have high ambitions for what pupils should learn. These ambitions are not sufficiently realised, and pupils do not receive a good quality of education. Pupils do not learn the important knowledge and skills across all subjects well enough. This limits their readiness for the next stage of their education.

Leaders are making some important improvements. These are beginning to gain traction. They have mapped out the important content they want pupils to learn. Teachers are planning better opportunities for pupils to revisit this important knowledge regularly to help them to remember.

Teachers do not receive consistently clear guidance on how to best support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This can limit the progression that some pupils with SEND make across the curriculum. Despite this, teachers do make adaptations that enable pupils with SEND to access the same curriculum as their peers.

Pupils in Years 7 and 8 benefit from support with their reading, which is helping them to catch up with their peers. However, leaders have not taken steps to ensure that older pupils have similar support, and barriers to their reading remain. Furthermore, pupils lack knowledge and skills in reading that support their progress through the curriculum.

Leaders have planned a personal development curriculum for pupils in the school. However, pupils cannot recall important aspects of this curriculum. The curriculum does not develop pupils' knowledge of age-appropriate relationships and sex education thoroughly enough. Pupils' understanding of British values and democracy is not sufficiently developed.

Leaders have provided a 'co-curricular' programme for pupils, including trips abroad, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and a range of clubs. Leaders have promoted attendance at extra-curricular activities through the 'Grace us with your presence' programme. However, many pupils do not make the most of this offer. This limits pupils' opportunities to develop a broad range of talents and interests.

Students in the sixth form receive a good standard of education. Teachers provide students with challenging material and individual feedback, which helps them to learn the intended curriculum. Students take pride in their work and understand what they need to do to improve. Through carefully planned opportunities, all sixth-form students engage with leadership responsibilities. For example, they can apply to be student leaders, be a 'buddy reader' for younger pupils, or run a variety of clubs. Sixth-form students are positive about the support they receive to fulfil their future ambitions.

Leaders and those responsible for governance have an ambitious vision for the school. They are making the school a better place for pupils. Governors know the school well. They provide effective support and challenge to leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have taken action to improve safeguarding. Systems for identifying pupils who need help are effective. Leaders work with a range of external agencies, including the police and the local authority, to keep pupils safe. Leaders act swiftly to put support in place for pupils who need it. Recent improvements to policies are helping pupils to raise concerns more easily. For example, an anonymous online reporting tool has enabled more pupils to seek the help and advice that they need. Pupils are supported by leaders to improve their understanding of tolerance and diversity to help make the school a safer place for everyone.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is not fully embedded in all subject areas. Pupils, including those with SEND, do not have secure knowledge on which to build future learning. Leaders should continue improving the curriculum, including methods to check pupils' understanding, so that pupils learn well across all subjects.

- Leaders have not ensured there is a consistently effective approach to improving pupils' reading and wider literacy. This means that some pupils' progression through the curriculum is slower than it should be. Leaders should continue work to build pupils' reading and literacy skills so that they can learn well across the subjects they study.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are not good enough. This is reflected in high suspensions and low attendance. Leaders should intensify actions to work with staff, pupils, and parents so that behaviour and attitudes better support learning.
- Pupils' understanding of aspects of the personal development curriculum is not strong enough. Pupils' do not have secure knowledge of protected characteristics, age-appropriate relationships, democracy, and fundamental British values. Leaders should explore how to enhance pupils' personal development knowledge through the curriculum.

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	147178
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10268413
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	1,250
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	98
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Stewart McKinlay
Principal	Matt Waterfield (Lead Principal) Rachael Hooker (Head of School)
Website	https://www.gracecollege.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected.

Information about this school

- There has been significant change to leadership in the school. The lead principal and head of school have provided support on an interim basis since March 2023 and were appointed to their roles permanently in April 2023. There is also a new vice-principal and a new designated safeguarding lead at the school.
- A small number of pupils access alternative provision. This provision includes one registered provider and two unregistered providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 lead principal, head of school and other senior leaders over the course of the inspection. The lead inspector also held a meeting with the chief executive officer of the trust.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with the chair of the board of trustees and one other trustee. The lead inspector also met with the chair of the school improvement board and two other governors. They reviewed documentation relating to governance, including minutes from school improvement board meetings.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, science, mathematics, geography, and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator and visited lessons to look at the support given to pupils with SEND.
- To inspect the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, the lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and the head of school. They reviewed safeguarding records and the school's single central record. Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding in school.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for personal development and visited tutor sessions.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for the sixth form, visited sixth form lessons and spoke to sixth-form students.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and students formally throughout the inspection and spoke with them informally at social times and in lessons.
- An inspector held telephone conversations with staff from two alternative providers.
- A range of school documents were reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils, parents and staff gathered through Ofsted's questionnaires.

Inspection team

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