

Inspection of Beacon of Light School

Beacon of Light, Stadium Park, Beacon of Light, Stadium Park, Sunderland SR5 1SU

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 September 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade Requires improvement

The principal of this school is Denise Taylor. This school is part of The Laidlaw Schools Trust which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by two chief executive officers, Rob Hughes and Sally Newton, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Susanna V. Kempe.

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils at Beacon of Light School have previously experienced considerable interruptions to their schooling. Many join with significant gaps in their English and mathematics knowledge. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), study a curriculum that helps them fill many of these gaps. They grow in confidence and re-engage with learning. Pupils gain the knowledge and qualifications they need for the next stage of their education.

Pupils understand adults' high expectations for their behaviour. Pupils respect the daily routines, including those around punctuality and uniform. They forge positive relationships with staff. Pupils respond well to adults' firm, calm guidance. Pupils' conduct improves the longer they remain at the school.

Pupils receive high-quality pastoral support. They feel safe and are taught how to make safe choices. Pupils rarely experience bullying. When they become anxious, or life gets tough, pupils turn to trusted staff who give them the help they need. This helps pupils to reset and return to their studies.

Pupils enjoy and learn a lot from activities, such as those in art, music, sport and land-based studies. These activities broaden pupils' horizons and help them to develop greater self-belief.

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

Leaders and staff share a commitment to provide pupils with education that helps them 'to learn more, do more, be more'. The curriculum combines academic ambition with nurture and support for pupils with complex academic and social needs. The curriculum is delivered well. Pupils make good progress in their time at Beacon of Light School.

Pupils join the school throughout the academic year. Staff use well-established induction processes to welcome new pupils to the school. Adults are quick to identify each pupil's capabilities and needs, including any SEND. Equipped with this information, teachers usually shape the curriculum and how they teach it to each pupil's needs.

Teachers consistently use the school's agreed lesson structure. Pupils, including those with SEND, know what to expect in lessons. Teachers present new knowledge clearly and in small chunks. They give pupils plenty of time to practise and learn this knowledge. Usually, teachers check with care that pupils have a secure grasp of this information before moving on to new learning. This helps pupils to fill the gaps from their previously disrupted education. Pupils' work is typically of a good quality.

Sometimes, teachers are not thorough in checking or deepening pupils' understanding. Where this is the case, pupils do not achieve as well as they might.

Many pupils join Beacon of Light School with gaps in their knowledge of, and a lack of enthusiasm for, reading. In English lessons, pupils read a broad range of challenging texts. Teachers in most subjects place a great deal of emphasis on teaching pupils important subject-specific vocabulary. Pupils learn to use this vocabulary with accuracy. Pupils become more assured readers and understand the value of reading. However, many do not read extensively across the curriculum. The school is in the early stages of a revamped strategy to ensure pupils read more widely. It is too early to see the impact of this work.

A large proportion of pupils join the school needing considerable help to manage their behaviour. At times, there are incidents of disruptive behaviour. Expert guidance from teachers and support staff helps pupils to better regulate their emotions and conduct. Pupils normally return to their studies promptly and usually learn in calm, purposeful classrooms.

Pupils benefit from the school's comprehensive careers and vocational curriculum. They become more ambitious for their futures. Pupils continue in further education, employment or training.

Staff speak highly of the training and support for their well-being that leaders provide for them. Knowledgeable governors provide leaders with well-judged support and challenge. Trustees have formed an accurate overview of the effectiveness of the school.

The school makes sure that parents are kept informed about their children's education and welfare. Parents, pupils and commissioning schools hold Beacon of Light School in high regard.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On occasion, teachers are not thorough in checking or deepening pupils' understanding. Where this is the case, pupils do not achieve as well as they might. Leaders should make sure that teachers check pupils understand what they study before moving on to new learning.
- Some pupils do not develop a love of reading. The school is in the early stages of a renewed strategy to ensure that pupils read widely. Leaders should review the

impact of their work and take further steps to ensure that pupils read widely across 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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's pupil premium funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	142882
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10268255
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Susanna V. Kempe
Principal	Denise Taylor
Website	www.beaconschool.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	2 and 3 July 2019

Information about this school

- Beacon of Light School is an alternative provision free school for 80 pupils aged between 13 and 16. There are currently 54 pupils attending the school. Pupils are dual registered. This means that they are on the roll of two schools; the commissioning school and Beacon of Light.
- Pupils join throughout the academic year. Of the current cohort, almost half have joined within the last term.
- A high proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many have social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school joined the Laidlaw Schools Trust on 1 September 2023.
- 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.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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 held several meetings with the principal and other senior staff during the course of this inspection.
- Inspectors also met with several groups of teaching and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with six members of the local governing body.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the Laidlaw Schools Trust (the trust) and the trust's two chief executive officers.
- The lead inspector met with two representatives of Sunderland local authority and also with representatives from four commissioning schools. These meetings took place online.
- Deep dives were carried out in these subjects: English, information technology, mathematics and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons alongside school leaders, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke with leaders and looked at samples of pupils' work in a small number of other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning and about their views on behaviour and the wider experiences they receive at school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school day.
- Inspectors also considered the views of former pupils of the school.
- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at safeguarding documentation, spoke with staff, pupils, governors and trustees, and spoke with representatives from Sunderland local authority, commissioning schools and the registered alternative provider.
- Inspectors reviewed the parental responses received through the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, including free-text responses. Inspectors also considered the responses received through Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

John Lucas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Patricia Head

Ofsted Inspector

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