

Inspection of Kirk Merrington Primary School

South View, Kirk Merrington, Spennymoor, County Durham DL16 7JB

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Early years provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since December 2011.

What is it like to attend this school?

This school has extremely high ambition for all of its pupils. Its all-encompassing curriculum, together with knowledgeable teaching, ensures that pupils make extremely strong progress across the whole curriculum. Kirk Merrington Primary School is a beacon of excellence.

Pupils thrive in the school's welcoming, safe and well-equipped environment for learning. They benefit hugely from the range of educational opportunities the school provides, including those related to reading. Pupils access the school's high-quality library, situated in a railway carriage on site, regularly. They are inspired by meeting internationally renowned authors, such as Anne Fine and Ian Whybrow.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They look after each other. Pupils concentrate in lessons. They understand and celebrate each other's individual differences. Pupils undertake a wide range of roles of responsibility diligently, such as being members of the sports crew. They enter school enthusiastically and attend regularly. The pupils are wonderful ambassadors for themselves, their teachers and the school.

The school's vision and values are upheld by staff and pupils. Pupils excel academically while exhibiting kindness, courage, respect, perseverance and great teamwork. These attributes prepare pupils exceedingly well for their next stage in education.

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

The school has developed and implemented an extremely high-quality curriculum across all subjects and key stages. Teachers deliver the knowledge, skills and vocabulary, known as the school's core learning, exceedingly well. Pupils have ready access to this core learning. In physical education (PE), for example, this core learning is displayed in the school hall and revisited in all lessons. Teachers ensure that pupils recap and refresh their previous learning at the beginning of every lesson. Educational visits play a pivotal part in fulfilling the planned curriculum. Recently, there have been educational visits to Locomotion Shildon, Yorvik Viking Centre, the Tees Barrage and Durham Castle.

Pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those entitled to additional government funding, make exceptional progress in every key stage. In 2023, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined was significantly above the national average.

Reading is given the very highest priority at Kirk Merrington. The school's phonics scheme is delivered expertly by teachers and teaching assistants. Children in Reception, who arrive at the school from 10 different childcare providers, begin phonics lessons straight away. Staff assess children's progress regularly. Gaps in

children's knowledge are closed through the provision of additional phonics sessions. All pupils are very proficient readers on entry to key stage 2.

Pupils develop a love of reading at the school. The school's library is well used and staffed by pupil librarians. Pupils benefit from the wide range of fiction and non-fiction books available. They delight in reading books written by the authors they have met in school and online. Pupils have a deep knowledge of, and respect for, these authors.

Pupils are motivated to learn by the engaging curriculum and the school's high expectations of them. Staff create a calm and orderly atmosphere in lessons. The school makes sure that breaktimes are well organised and purposeful. At lunchtime, pupils exercise through activities such as playing basketball in the multi-use games area and working out on the outdoor gym equipment. During afternoon breaktime, the sports crew of pupils lead physical activities and provide games for other pupils to play independently. The school ensures that pupils have a deep understanding of what constitutes bullying. This rarely happens because of the harmonious environment that staff create.

Pupils with SEND have their individual needs identified and met well. The school works with other professionals, such as health professionals, productively. Pupils with SEND are supported superbly by the well-trained staff in school. The school also supports pupils' mental health and well-being exceptionally well. Pupils access the school's well-being hub and counsellor when they are anxious or worried.

The school's provision for pupils' personal development is exceptionally strong. Pupils talk about the protected characteristics in respectful and insightful ways. Pupils' knowledge of fundamental British values is exceptional. They have a heightened awareness of each other's individual differences and are especially respectful and tolerant. This exemplary provision is because of the school's extremely well-thought-out curriculum for pupils' personal, social and health education.

The school is extremely well-led and managed by leaders and governors. Members of the governing body use their skills adeptly to support and challenge the school in equal measure. The school manages the workload and well-being of staff well, including through the provision of well-being days.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	114074
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10297273
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Pippa Procter
Headteacher	Nicola Murray
Website	www.kirkmerrington.durham.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	7 and 8 December 2011

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than an average-size primary school.
- The number of pupils on roll has more than doubled since the last inspection.
- The current headteacher took up post in April 2016.
- The school moved into new accommodation 10 years ago.
- The school's library and well-being room are accommodated in two reconditioned 'Pacer' train carriages on site.
- The school does not use any alternative providers of education.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.

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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and subject leaders.
- The lead inspector spoke with a group of governors, including the chair and the vice-chair of governors, and the school's school leadership adviser from the local authority.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, PE and computing. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects. The lead inspector listened to a sample of pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors evaluated a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.

Inspection team

Belita Scott, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Louise Mallin

Ofsted Inspector

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