

Inspection of Rift House Primary School

Masefield Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS25 4JY

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 March 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Rift House is a very inclusive school. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and positive. Right from the beginning of their school journey, the school's 'CHOICES' approach supports pupils to develop caring, honest and respectful relationships. Pupils learn how to make positive choices to keep themselves and others safe. They learn about healthy lifestyles and the importance of being active. During breaktimes, they like taking part in activities such as running, listening to music and dancing.

The school is ambitious for all pupils to achieve well, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils are encouraged to be imaginative, confident and enthusiastic in every area of their learning. They know that staff will support them to do their best. Most pupils attend school regularly. The school supports families to improve attendance, where needed. The school helps pupils to prepare for their next steps very well.

Pupils are safe and well cared for. They are confident that staff will always help them if they have a problem. Pupils say that any bullying or other bad behaviour is quickly dealt with.

Pupils and staff are proud and happy to be a part of the Rift House community.

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

The school has developed a curriculum that is rooted in an ambition to ensure that every individual reaches their potential. The foundations of this curriculum are well established in the early years. In every subject, leaders have taken care to ensure that the curriculum enables pupils to build their knowledge, skills and vocabulary over time. The school provides all pupils with an engaging curriculum. Wherever possible, pupils' learning is enhanced by practical experiences and educational visits. As a result, pupils learn and achieve well.

An increasingly high proportion of pupils who attend the school have SEND, some with more-complex needs. The school takes effective steps to ensure these pupils are able to access the whole curriculum. Overall, they receive the support needed to learn well from their individual starting points. Some pupils benefit considerably from the skills and expertise of staff in Class 7.

When starting school in the early years, individual children's skills and abilities vary considerably. Some children's knowledge and understanding are much lower than typically expected at that age. Similarly, an increasingly high number of children have more-complex SEND. Making sure that the widely varying and individual needs of all children are consistently met is challenging. Despite this, children's learning gets off to a good start. Staff quickly get to know children and work well with families. Developing children's vocabulary is a priority. This is done well, such as through well-chosen books and rhymes, high-quality interactions between staff and

children and encouraging use of appropriate vocabulary. The school has already taken steps to ensure that staff develop their expertise to better meet the needs of children with more complex needs and this is paying dividends. However, the delivery of the early years curriculum does not fully support the good progress of all children. Opportunities to interact with some children during their independent play, for example, are sometimes missed.

Reading is at the heart of the school's curriculum. Nursery provision means that children are ready to make a strong start to learning the phonics programme in Reception. Staff are well trained to teach pupils at the early stages of learning to read. They adapt learning appropriately to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. At the early stage, pupils read books that are well matched to the sounds they know. The school's approach to teaching fluency and comprehension ensures that pupils develop the confidence to read for pleasure and to support their learning.

Teachers structure lessons so that pupils have plenty of opportunities to recall prior learning. Day-to-day, staff check carefully what pupils know and can do. They use this well to adapt lessons so that all pupils are able to make good progress. This includes pupils in Class 7. Across the curriculum subjects, teachers also routinely check pupils' learning at the end of each study unit. In mathematics, these checks are used very effectively to make sure that any gaps in pupils' knowledge are identified and used to plan future learning that will allow pupils to gain a deeper level of understanding. However, this approach is less well developed in some other subjects. Leaders have already identified this and work to address it is already underway.

The school has a well-developed curriculum for personal development. The computing curriculum ensures that pupils know how to keep themselves and others safe online. Religious education (RE) contributes to a developing understanding of other cultures. Overall, the school is strongly focused on teaching the knowledge and skills pupils need to make positive choices now and in the future. Older pupils talk confidently about their career ambitions.

The school is highly committed to the professional development of all staff. Staff appreciate the well-informed guidance and resources, which help them to develop their subject knowledge and expertise. For example, recent training on teaching computing has rapidly strengthened the quality of this curriculum. Staff feel valued. Many describe the school as a 'family', where they can rely on the support of everyone around them.

Leaders have cultivated a culture of continuous reflection across the school community. Incisive self-evaluation ensures that leaders remain alert to the changing needs of the school. They are able to take decisive action where needed. For example, they continue to refine the curriculum so that it remains responsive to pupils' needs. Governors are committed to the development of the school. They challenge leaders to ensure the actions taken benefit all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Approaches to checking pupils' knowledge at the end of a study unit in some curriculum subjects are less effective than in others. In particular, opportunities to check that pupils have the necessary disciplinary knowledge to secure their understanding over time, are sometimes missed. The school should ensure that checks of pupils' knowledge at the end of each unit are used effectively across all curriculum subjects.
- In the early years, the way in which the curriculum is implemented does not consistently meet the widely varying needs of children, specifically those children already identified as having more-complex SEND. This means that, from their individual starting points, some children do not make as much progress as they could. The school should revisit the early years curriculum and the way it is delivered to ensure that it fully supports good progress for all children.

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	111640
Local authority	Hartlepool Borough
Inspection number	10297269
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	268
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Melanie Siddell
Headteacher	David Turner
Website	www.rifthouse.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 October 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has provision for two-year-olds.
- The school has its own in-house provision called 'Class 7' for pupils with SEND.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is well-above average.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 had 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.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders and curriculum leaders. The lead inspector met with the chair and the vice-chair of the governing body. She also spoke to the school improvement partner and the director of education/SEND at Hartlepool Borough Council.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, RE, computing and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education.
- 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.

Inspection team

Gill McCleave, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Cathy Lee	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Baines	Ofsted Inspector

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