

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Dowdales School

Dalton-in-Furness, Cumbria LA15 8AH

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 February 2025

Outcome

Dowdales School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils value being part of this warm and welcoming school community. Staff know the pupils well and support them effectively. This helps pupils to settle into school quickly. Pupils get along well with each other. They are safe and happy in school.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school is positive. They understand what is expected of them and follow school routines diligently. This creates a calm school environment. Most pupils enjoy learning.

The school has high expectations of pupils' achievement. Pupils benefit from an ambitious curriculum that is clearly structured. This helps most pupils to progress successfully through the curriculum and achieve well.

Many pupils benefit from a broad range of extra-curricular activities. For instance, pupils enjoy taking part in different sporting events, charity work and drama club. Pupils commit to taking part in all aspects of school life. For example, they broaden their understanding of the wider world through international visits. Some pupils take pleasure in visiting the school's partner school in Munich, where they can develop their linguistic skills. Other pupils relish visits to museums, universities and theatres, many of which are supported by national organisations that work in partnership with the school. This helps pupils to broaden their knowledge beyond the taught curriculum.

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

The school has redesigned its curriculum to enable pupils to study a rich breadth of subjects. The essential knowledge that pupils should gain is set out logically so that they can build on their prior learning securely.

In 2024, Year 11 pupils did not attain as well as other pupils nationally in some subjects. This was due to previous weaknesses in how the curriculums in these subjects were taught. The school has strengthened its delivery of the curriculum so that pupils are supported to succeed. Staff present subject matter clearly and check that pupils have understood the content. As a result, pupils are learning better now than they did in the past. Nonetheless, at times, some staff do not choose activities that help pupils to deepen and connect prior knowledge to new learning. This hampers how well some pupils build on their learning over time.

Recently, the school has strengthened its approach to identifying the additional needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This helps most staff to support these pupils to access the curriculum securely. However, occasionally, learning activities are not adapted consistently well. This limits how well some pupils with SEND achieve.

Reading has increasingly been prioritised across school. Pupils who struggle to read are supported well. This helps them to develop confidence and fluency when reading. The school promotes reading through form time activities such as 'read all about it' and 'reading buddies'. These activities expose pupils to a wide range of suitable texts.

The school has successfully embedded a strong behaviour management system. Staff apply these systems consistently well. This means that learning is rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. Pupils maintain a positive attitude to learning. The school's efforts to improve attendance are beginning to have a positive impact. Nevertheless, some strategies are not as effective as they could be in removing the barriers that prevent some pupils from attending school regularly. As a result, these pupils continue to miss school frequently. This hinders their achievement.

The school has a well-designed programme to promote pupils' personal development. Pupils learn about keeping safe in the community and how to avoid risks online. They develop a mature understanding of the importance of respecting differences between people. They relish projects where they can help others. For instance, they appreciate the opportunities to fundraise for different charities. Some pupils enjoy upholding leadership roles such as subject ambassadors. This boosts their confidence and improves their communication skills.

The school's comprehensive careers programme prepares pupils well for their next stage in life. For instance, pupils are taught about different career pathways and how to prepare for interviews.

The governors are ambitious for the school and support it well to meet these expectations. The school considers staff's well-being and workload when driving improvements. Staff value the support that they receive to improve their practice. This contributes to the high levels of confidence and morale among staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, teachers do not design learning activities that help pupils to build on their prior learning in sufficient depth. When this happens, some pupils struggle to connect new learning with what they already know. They do not achieve as well as they could. The school should ensure that teachers are supported to deliver the curriculum consistently well so that pupils build a strong body of knowledge over time.
- From time to time, staff do not apply adaptive strategies effectively to support pupils with SEND. This hinders how well these pupils access the curriculum. The school should equip staff better to adapt their learning activities so that pupils with SEND achieve well.
- The school's strategies to improve attendance have not had the desired impact for some pupils. As a result, some pupils miss vital learning and do not achieve as well as they could. The school should strengthen its actions to overcome the barriers that prevent some pupils from attending school regularly.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in July 2019.

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	112383
Local authority	Westmorland and Furness
Inspection number	10348116
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	826
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Caren Hindle
Headteacher	Emma Aubrey
Website	www.dowdalesschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 July 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Furness Education Consortium.
- The current headteacher was appointed in September 2019.
- The school makes use of the provision of three registered and four unregistered alternative 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

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection that 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.

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other school leaders. Inspectors also met with a range of other staff.
- Inspectors spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. They also spoke with representatives of the local authority.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour across the school, including at social times.
- Inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders and teachers, visited a sample of lessons, reviewed samples of pupils' work and spoke with some pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with the leaders responsible for pupils' personal development, behaviour and attendance, pupil premium, alternative provision, careers, the provision for SEND and reading.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and records relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour.
- 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.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

Amina Modan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Paul Edmondson

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025