

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Darlington Academy

Pavilion Drive, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex SS9 3JS

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 January 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that the school's work may have improved significantly across all areas since the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Emma Nicholls. This school is part of the Legra Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Bev Williams, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Kathy Herlock.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy school. They chat happily in breakfast club as they arrive. Pupils value their friendships and prepare for lessons eagerly. Staff have the highest expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning. Pupils follow the 'Darlington direction' to be ready, respectful and safe consistently every day. As a result, pupils behave very well, work hard and have extremely positive relationships with everyone.

Pupils live the school's values of 'achievement, belonging, confidence, determination and excellence'. They understand that these characteristics help them to be the best they can be. Consequently, pupils try their best, are resilient learners and achieve very well.

Pupils trust the adults in school and their friends to be kind and listen when they have a problem. Being there for each other is a priority in Darlington. Pupils feel safe here.

Pupils are proud and excited about the very wide range of opportunities to develop personally as well as academically. They learn about the world and the people and events in it. They take part in the many sporting opportunities on offer. Pupils develop their talents and interests by singing in the choir, entering competitions and helping in the community. They become respectful, healthy, active citizens.

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

The curriculum is well planned and highly ambitious. It highlights key vocabulary and important information that pupils must know and remember. Learning is sequenced effectively. This means that pupils, including children in the early years and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), learn the right things at the right time. Staff are well trained to recognise what pupils know and can do. They teach the curriculum consistently well. They use the same familiar resources, vocabulary and routines in lessons. This allows pupils to focus on their learning.

Staff check that pupils remember what they learn. For example, they provide regular quizzes and revisit aspects of learning that pupils are unsure of. In the early years, staff allow time for children to practise letters they need help with to read and write. Staff provide additional lessons for pupils who may have missed learning. As a result, pupils make strong progress through the curriculum and achieve very well.

The phonics curriculum is planned and taught very effectively. The school prioritises reading. It acts urgently to provide additional support if pupils need help to keep up. This ensures that all pupils meet the school's very high expectations. Children start learning to read in Nursery where they develop high levels of listening and attention. They progress to reading letters and words in the Reception Year. They pay close attention to their teacher during phonics lessons. Children learn to read books that match the sounds that they know. Pupils become confident, independent readers.

Staff expect the same behaviours from all pupils. They use common, consistent phrases and signals to ensure everyone is listening and following rules. Pupils listen carefully and discuss their learning cooperatively with their friends. As a result, the school is a calm place to learn. Pupils love coming to school. Their attendance is high. When leaders identify that help is needed to improve attendance, they provide it. Pupils' attendance improves over time as a result.

Staff know individual pupils, including pupils with SEND, very well. They identify pupils' unique strengths and areas for support. The school has developed effective resources and adaptations to ensure that all pupils make the best possible progress from their varied starting points. Pupils with SEND learn the same curriculum as their friends. They take part in a range of additional development opportunities and enjoy times to shine in lessons alongside their peers.

The school prioritises the personal development of pupils. It wants all Darlinghurst pupils to be rounded individuals. Pupils experience a very carefully planned experience that allows them to think, participate and contribute. They learn about the diverse range of people in the world. They celebrate and respect their differences. Pupils access many sporting competitions. They love to take responsibility as members of the eco-committee. They develop their understanding of mature concepts such as discrimination. Pupils are reflective, active citizens who contribute responsibly to their community. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education and life in the wider world.

Leaders at all levels aim high for every pupil. They share ambitions to continually improve learning for all. They check to ensure this happens. Staff are proud to work at the school. They appreciate leaders' support to manage their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 June 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	140536
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	10345389
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	561
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Kathy Herlock
CEO of the trust	Bev Williams
Headteacher	Emma Nicholls
Website	www.darlinghurst.uk
Dates of previous inspection	6 and 7 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There is a breakfast and after-school club run by the school, which provides before- and after-school care.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Legra Academy Trust.

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 the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at pupils' work and books.

- The inspector met with school leaders, the CEO, the chair of the trust and representatives of the local governing body.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, pupils, parents and carers; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector evaluated a range of documents, including leaders' strategic plans and the school's self-evaluation.
- Teachers, support staff and subject leaders met with the inspector to discuss their views of the school.
- The inspector evaluated the responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys and took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Debbie Rogan, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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