

Grace Academy Darlaston

Address: Herberts Park Road, Darlaston, Wednesbury, West Midlands, WS10 8QJ

Unique reference number (URN): 135956

Inspection report: 21 April 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

Leaders' work to develop pupils personally has a notable positive impact. They have planned in a highly strategic way to make sure that the curriculum and offer of wider activities are accessible to all and meet pupils' needs.

Pupils participate in the vibrant array of extra opportunities in great number. Leaders track pupils' participation with care and take action when pupils or groups of pupils do not participate fully. This means that any barriers to pupils' access are addressed and the school's exciting wider offer is fully inclusive.

The curriculum for personal, social and health education is appropriate. Pupils have ample opportunity to explore their views and those of others. They learn about building successful relationships, personal safety and fundamental British values, such as democracy, tolerance and the rule of law. Pupils talk in detail about what they have learned and the way it shapes them as they grow up. This knowledge prepares pupils well for life beyond school. It helps pupils keep themselves safe, including online.

Many pupils enjoy contributing to the school community by becoming mentors to younger pupils. This popular, well-planned programme has a profound impact on both the mentors and mentees. It helps younger pupils feel safe and confident in school as they get to know the older pupils. It also supports older pupils to reflect on their experiences over time and use these to support others. Pupils' character, thoughtfulness and sense of community are enriched by this initiative.

Pupils say that there is always someone to support them should they need it. Leaders work as a team to make sure that pupils get the right wellbeing support at the right time.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Leaders identify pupils with gaps in their knowledge effectively, particularly in the foundations of reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers support these pupils well to catch up and keep up. Where pupils need help with reading, staff identify the precise knowledge and skills that pupils need to work on. As a result, pupils' reading is improving over time, allowing them to progress well across the curriculum. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

There were some dips in pupils' attainment in national tests and examinations in 2025, largely due to some turbulence in staffing. However, over time, pupils have consistently made similar progress as their peers nationally. This includes a large cohort of disadvantaged pupils who typically achieve well.

Pupils are generally well prepared for their next steps. They go on to positive destinations, either in the school's growing sixth form or to education, employment or training elsewhere.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders understand the picture around pupils' attendance and behaviour well. Overall, attendance is improving and the number of pupils who are absent for a significant amount of time is decreasing. Leaders recognise that regular attendance is a complex and persistent challenge for a small number of pupils. Their approach to supporting these pupils' attendance is proactive, tenacious and rooted in safeguarding principles and practice. Leaders work effectively with families and external agencies. They use personalised strategies and practical pastoral support to secure improvements in attendance.

Typically, pupils behave well. Suspensions are used appropriately and their number is reducing over time. Pupils say that their lessons are rarely disrupted by poor behaviour and staff agree that pupils typically behave well. Pupils move around the school calmly, safely and respectfully, needing few reminders from staff. Staff understand and apply the school's approach to managing behaviour well. Leaders have listened carefully to pupils' views on bullying. They have responded to this strategically by adapting the curriculum and assemblies, and exploring pupils' views in tutorial time. This has been effective. Pupils now say that they know what bullying is, can report it, and are confident that on the rare occasions it might occur, it will be dealt with well.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have improved the quality of teaching and curriculum over time. For example, they have introduced new expectations for the way teachers check pupils' understanding across the school. While there is some work to do in order to make the impact of this work consistently effective, in many subjects it is having a notable, positive impact on pupils' progress. This is because it enables pupils to reflect on their learning and shows teachers where gaps in their knowledge are emerging. The approach is having a particularly positive impact on pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Typically, teachers have secure subject knowledge. This means that they can explain content simply, enabling pupils to understand. On the whole, teachers make adaptations to their teaching and check on pupils' knowledge effectively in order to make sure that pupils build their knowledge securely over time. However, leaders have rightly identified that there is more to do to make this consistently effective across the school.

The school identifies any pupils with weaker foundational knowledge and helps them catch up effectively.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders place inclusion at the heart of the school's work. They demonstrate an accurate understanding of pupils who face barriers to learning and wellbeing. Leaders identify needs early through careful assessment, close work with families and agencies, and attention to pupil voice. This supports disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs

and/or disabilities (SEND) and those known to social care to feel safe, known and supported. Leaders use additional funding effectively in order to provide relational, pastoral and academic support. This support is effective in helping pupils to engage with learning and school life.

The inclusion hub is a particularly effective feature of the school. The school uses it as a short-term provision to prepare pupils for school life. The hub provides a calm and purposeful environment in which pupils develop regulation, confidence and readiness to learn. Many pupils who attend the hub make improvements in their independence, behaviour and engagement, and are successfully reintegrated into mainstream lessons.

While leadership of inclusion is secure, inclusive practice in classrooms is still developing. Mostly, teachers adapt the curriculum and check understanding well for pupils with additional needs. However, occasionally, adaptations are less effective and pupils do not secure knowledge and skills as consistently as they might. Leaders know this and have made it a priority for improvement.

Leaders ensure that alternative provision is safe and purposeful for pupils. They use it appropriately to support pupils to make better progress.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

School and trust leaders, and those responsible for governance, have a clear understanding of the school's context and the challenges pupils face. They have prioritised inclusion, safeguarding and attendance appropriately and demonstrate strong commitment to meeting pupils' needs. There have been recent changes to the senior leadership structure, and leaders have established stability and clarity of purpose during this period.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive and supportive of school leaders, saying that they listen to and respect staff. Many say that the school's vision and values are clear and that they feel a sense of pride in the way the school is meeting pupils' needs. They feel well supported by leaders in terms of workload and feel that the professional learning they undertake meets their needs.

Those responsible for governance ensure that the school has what it needs to successfully meet pupils' needs. They meet their statutory duties. For example, governors and trustees ensure that leaders use funding for disadvantaged pupils effectively, meaning that these pupils feel a sense of belonging at the school. Across school and trust leadership, governance and staff, there is a consistency in commitment to, and engagement with, the community the school serves.

The majority of parents would recommend the school to others.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the post-16 provision. Most students in the sixth form take vocational courses. They consistently achieve well in these courses as a result of effective curriculum and teaching. Teachers' checks on learning are notably effective in these subjects. Teachers support students to be well organised with their

work. They keep track of what has been learned well and what needs further work. Typically, teachers' feedback helps students to further improve. In the few academic courses offered, students' attainment is less consistent as teachers' use of checks to plan future teaching is less well developed.

The sixth form is inclusive. Leaders consider the needs of students who face barriers to their learning and support them effectively. For example, where students need it, they receive extra, well-targeted careers advice, pastoral support and academic support.

Students in the sixth form undertake an appropriate range of wider activities in addition to their study programmes, for example visiting speakers, trips to universities and volunteering opportunities. Students receive suitable careers advice and guidance. This includes work experience and opportunities to meet employers and apprenticeship providers. As a result, students are well prepared for their next steps after school.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Grace Academy Darlaston is a happy and calm place to be. Pupils behave well and are proud to do so. They move around the school respectfully and calmly. Typically, they are polite and kind to one another and have positive relationships with staff. If bullying occurs, staff deal with it effectively. This means that pupils feel safe and able to be themselves at school.

In lessons, pupils apply themselves to their learning and achieve well. In national examinations and assessments, typically, pupils' achievement has been in line with national averages over time. Leaders and staff have high expectations that pupils will work hard, always reviewing and improving their work. They meet these expectations, generally listening carefully to their teachers, attending well and enjoying school.

Pupils particularly enjoy the wide range of activities the school offers. Many gain a sense of achievement from supporting younger pupils to settle in and thrive. Leaders have developed an exciting array of wider activities and trips. These enliven the curriculum and develop pupils personally. Pupils take part in a great number of activities, and leaders ensure that any barriers to participation are addressed.

Overall, pupils are well prepared for their next steps and for life in modern Britain. During their time in school, pupils learn to be increasingly self-motivated, taking responsibility for their own development. Where pupils struggle academically, teachers help them to keep up or catch up.

Students in the sixth form have a mature approach to their studies. They act as role models to younger pupils and contribute to the school through volunteering. Students in the sixth form achieve well and are appropriately prepared for their next steps.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to develop teachers' skills in adapting their teaching to meet pupils' needs so that all are able to access the curriculum successfully and achieve well.
 - Leaders should ensure that their agreed approaches to assessment are consistently applied throughout the school so that any gaps in pupils' knowledge are accurately identified and addressed.
 - Leaders should continue working with a range of partners to further improve attendance, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
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About this inspection

This school is part of the Tove Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Dr Jamie Clarke, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Linda Brooks.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs

Inspectors spoke with a representative of the trustees, a representative of the governing body, trust and school leaders during the inspection.

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 inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of 10 alternative provisions, including 6 that are unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection: there is a new principal and 2 new vice-principals.

Principal: Henry Holland

Lead inspector:

Dan Owen, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Chris Pollitt, His Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Steer, Ofsted Inspector

Stuart Clarkson, His Majesty's Inspector

Elizabeth Lawson, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 21 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,068

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,075

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

51.96%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

4.03%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

20.88%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	29.7%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	30.1%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	36.0%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	41.2	46.0	Below
2023/24 (final)	42.1	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	46.3	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.04	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.07	-0.03	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	21.8%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	21.8%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	21.1%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	36.4	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	39.1	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	40.0	35.0	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.30	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.22	-0.57	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	21.8%	53.1%	-31.3 pp
2023/24 (final)	21.8%	53.1%	-31.3 pp
2022/23 (final)	21.1%	52.4%	-31.4 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	36.4	50.4	-14.0
2023/24 (final)	39.1	50.0	-11.0
2022/23 (final)	40.0	50.3	-10.3

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.30	0.16	-0.46
2022/23 (final)	-0.22	0.17	-0.38

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	89%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	88%	93%	Below
2021 leavers (revised)	84%	94%	Below

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	24.95	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	20.87	34.38	Below
2022/23 (final)	25.93	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.8	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	-0.3	0.0	Below

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	10.3%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	9.9%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	9.0%	9.0%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	34.2%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	33.0%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	30.7%	26.5%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional 

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard ●

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard ●

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention ●

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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