

Inspection of a good school: Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas Primary Academy

Tollesbury Road, Tolleshunt D'Arcy, Maldon, Essex CM9 8UB

Inspection date:

14 March 2024

Outcome

Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas Primary Academy continues to be a good school.

The head of school is Emma Reece. This school is part of the Canonium 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, Lois Osborne, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Andy Hayman. Lois Osborne is also the interim executive headteacher. She is interim executive headteacher for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and attend school regularly. They enjoy learning in the calm and purposeful atmosphere. Staff know and care for pupils. They are considerate of their needs, which helps pupils feel safe at school. Pupils trust staff to help when needed.

There have been many changes at the school recently. Expectations for all pupils have been raised. There is a high priority on pupils' academic achievement through the ambitious curriculum. Pupils are keen to study and learn in all subjects. They talk excitedly about their learning code, 'ready, respectful, safe'. They follow this at all times. Pupils are attentive in lessons and listen carefully to their teachers. There are respectful relationships between everyone. Playtimes are happy and fun for all. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe when online or out in their community.

Pupils enjoy attending many different after-school clubs, such as science, netball and baking. They are encouraged to share their achievements and interests from home in weekly celebration assemblies. Pupils take on leadership roles as house captains, who contribute to school life.

Many parents praise the school. They support the higher expectations. They talk positively about how their children love being at school and learning.

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

The school, supported by the trust, has constructed a broad and ambitious curriculum. It has given careful thought to what it wants pupils to learn and by when. The curriculum is

planned in a logical way, so that pupils build on learning from Reception through to Year 6. Teachers have regular coaching and training. This helps them develop the expertise to share information clearly and confidently. Teachers make frequent checks on pupils' learning. They adapt plans and provide support, so that pupils keep up. There have been some recent changes in staffing. Leaders have provided training for new staff in some subjects, but not all. As a result, some staff still need support to deliver the curriculum using the school's agreed approach.

Reading is very important across the school. Staff select well-chosen books to help develop pupils' love of reading. Visits from authors and daily class reading times inspire pupils to read a range of texts. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about their reading. They enjoy sharing book recommendations with each other.

The school's revised approach to phonics teaching is working well. Pupils engage fully with the high-quality teaching. Teachers skilfully adjust phonics lessons for the mixed-age classes. As soon as children join Reception, they learn how to recognise sounds and build words. They have lots of opportunities to practise the sounds they know in their play. Pupils in key stage 1 continue to build on their phonics knowledge. Many develop good reading habits. Learning is checked frequently. When needed, additional lessons are quickly put in place, so all pupils keep on track. Pupils read books that closely match their ability. Many read accurately and fluently. Sometimes, when pupils get stuck reading a word, the adult helping confuses them. They suggest pupils guess words rather than use their phonics knowledge to read them. This hinders pupils developing their fluency. The school must decide what strategies it wants pupils to learn. Staff need training so that they know how to help pupils be successful.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do well under the new curriculum. Their needs are accurately identified. Teachers receive precise information detailing exactly what support these pupils need in lessons. This means pupils with SEND learn well and make progress alongside their peers.

There has been a strong focus on improving behaviour. Pupils know how they are expected to behave. Most pupils show positive behaviour both in lessons and at social times. Occasionally, a few pupils do not engage well in lessons. They do not work as hard as they should. Teachers address this appropriately. They support these pupils to bring about a more positive attitude to their learning.

Pupils are proud to be part of the school. They know the Christian values and talk fondly about their close links with the local church. They learn about other religions and cultures and understand the importance of tolerance. Pupils listen respectfully to each other and respond sensitively. Older pupils are particularly caring towards children in Reception. They take the time to make sure children are feeling happy and safe.

Governors and trust leaders know what is going on in the school. They hold leaders to account effectively. Together, they ensure that staff's workload is considered and that they are well looked after. Staff agree that leaders support them to do their job well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On occasion, staff teach pupils to read using inefficient strategies. Pupils do not always know the best strategy to use when they try to read an unknown word. As a result, pupils do not develop their reading fluency as quickly as they could. Leaders must decide the strategies pupils use at the school so they can learn and use them independently. Leaders must also ensure all staff have training so they can support pupils using the agreed strategies effectively.
- In some subjects, the planned curriculum is not yet being delivered to a consistently high standard. This means that pupils' learning in these subjects is less well developed. Leaders should continue their work to ensure teachers develop the expertise to teach all subjects to an equally high standard, so that pupils develop and deepen their knowledge across all aspects of the curriculum.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 predecessor school, Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School, to be good in March 2018.

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	147403
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10323792
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	108
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andy Hayman
Executive headteacher	Lois Osborne
Website	www.darcyschool.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the Canonium Learning Trust on 1 September 2019.
- A new head of school took up post in September 2023.
- The school runs before- and after-school wraparound care.
- The most recent inspection of the school's religious character, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, was carried out in November 2019. The next section 48 inspection is due within eight years.
- The school makes use of one alternative provision.
- There is a pre-school provision on the school site, but this is not part of the school.

Information about this inspection

- 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.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 met with the head of school, the two interim co-executive headteachers, the improvement adviser for the trust and subject leaders. They also met with the chair of the local governing board and the chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors spoke to subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at work in pupils' books. Inspectors also heard pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors met with staff to talk about the curriculum, workload and the behaviour and personal development of pupils. They also met with groups of pupils to talk about learning and well-being.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, plans for improvement and minutes of meetings of the local governing board. Attendance records were checked.
- Inspectors visited the before-school wraparound care and the after-school clubs provided by the school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, at lunchtime and at after-school clubs. They talked to pupils about behaviour, bullying and welfare.
- Inspectors considered the 26 online responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, including 15 free-text comments. They also considered the 17 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff. There were no responses to the online questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

Karen Stanton, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Nicola Shadbolt

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