

Inspection of St John's Church of England Academy

Fenby Avenue, Lascelles Park, Darlington, County Durham DL1 4UB

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this school and are proud to be part of it. Staff create an atmosphere in the school which is calm and productive. They have high expectations of all pupils and as a result pupils achieve extremely well.

Pupils' behaviour is exceptional. They fully understand the school ethos and rules. During lessons, they support each other with learning. At playtimes, older pupils check that younger pupils have someone to play with. Bullying is rare. If it does happen, pupils say that adults deal with it quickly.

Pupils lead on a wide range of aspects within school. For example, the school council are introducing new playtime activities such as den building and making swings. Pupils regularly take part in community and charity work. They visit the local home for the elderly to sing carols at Christmas, take part in debates with the local Member of Parliament and vote for charities to support. Many pupils take part in after-school clubs. There are a wide range on offer from sports activities, such as football and dance, to online learning.

The school offers excellent pastoral support to pupils and their families. This ensures that pupils feel happy and safe in school and are ready to learn.

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

Leaders have designed a rich, inclusive and ambitious curriculum that has the pupils' needs at its heart. The quality of pupils' work is consistently high in a wide range of subjects. Pupils are able to talk about their learning with ease and in depth. They can make links between learning in different subjects, such as geography and history. Teachers are crystal clear about what pupils need to know and remember. They regularly check what pupils have learned. This means pupils are not at risk of falling behind. Pupils' achievement across the curriculum is exceptional.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported to access the curriculum alongside their peers. They receive expert support from teachers and teaching assistants to help them reach their full potential. They have full access to the range of extra-curricular opportunities on offer. They achieve extremely well across the curriculum.

The curriculum in early years has recently been redesigned. Leaders have identified the key knowledge and skills that children need to have by the time they leave Reception. Sometimes, however, activities in classrooms are changed too soon. This means children do not get the most out of some of the activities on offer. They do not get enough chance to practise and refine their skills before the activity is changed. Leaders understand the importance of strong relationships with parents and carers so that children are supported both at school and home. Events such as

mathematics 'stay and play' sessions and 'rhyme time' sessions help parents to find out what their children are learning at school.

Leaders know how vital it is that pupils learn to read as soon as possible. Pupils benefit from highly effective phonics teaching in the early years and across key stage 1. Reading books match the sounds that pupils know. Staff are highly skilled at delivering interventions. This means that pupils who are struggling with reading catch up quickly with their peers. Teachers read to pupils every day. Pupils say that they enjoy this and talk animatedly about favourite books they have had read to them. There are a range of approaches in place for promoting a love of reading, for example visits to book shops and organised book swaps.

Pupils are very respectful of both each other and adults. During the inspection, they offered their seats to inspectors, held doors and demonstrated impeccable manners. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and show commitment to their education. They attend school often. They aspire to careers such as physiotherapy, teaching and veterinary practice. They know which subjects they need to do well in to achieve their ambitions.

The wider personal development curriculum is another strength in this school. The curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is planned and sequenced with precision. Over time, pupils build up knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy and lead safe, active lives. There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils to contribute to the life of the school, the local community and the wider world. For example, the rota kids club has recently sent surplus reading books to children in Kenya and are now working on raising money for World Polio Day. Pupils show substantial knowledge of different faiths, types of families and relationships. They know how important it is to treat everyone equally and respect those who have different beliefs or opinions to them.

Staff in the school work well together to achieve the best outcomes for pupils. They are highly successful in doing so. They are supported by the trust effectively. Local academy councillors have a clear understanding of the community the school serves. They offer challenge to leaders and fulfil their statutory duties. There is a strong culture of mutual respect and teamwork among those with responsibility for running the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders know pupils and their families well. They support vulnerable families highly effectively, making use of outside agencies for support where necessary. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe both inside and outside school. They know about risks in the local community, such as the railway line and the river. Initiatives such as the 'cyber squad' help pupils to stay safe online.

All staff and local academy councillors are trained in safeguarding. They know how to spot concerns and how to report and record them. Leaders have put processes in place to make sure that they recruit the right staff.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138128
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10228934
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	249
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of local academy council	Valerie Cadd
Headteacher	Marco Ramsay
Website	www.stjohnsceaacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to academy status in May 2012. It became part of Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust in April 2022.
- The school is a Church of England school within the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle. The most recent section 48 inspection of the school's religious character took place in June 2018.
- The school has nursery provision for two- and three-year-old children.
- The school operates a breakfast club for pupils, which is led and managed by school staff.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work in English, geography, art, science and PSHE.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and the leadership team. Inspectors also met with subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the chair and other members of the local academy council, the chief executive officer of the trust, the chair of the board of trustees and the assistant director of education for the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle.
- Inspectors reviewed the curriculum for PSHE and relationships and sex education.
- Inspectors observed pupils reading to familiar adults.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils in lessons and during breaktimes.
- Inspectors examined the single central record and looked at how safeguarding incidents are reported. Inspectors spoke to leaders, teachers, support staff, governors and pupils about the culture of safeguarding in the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses made by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. This included any free-text responses. Inspectors also considered the responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Philippa Kermotschuk, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Deborah Ashcroft	Ofsted Inspector

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