

Inspection of a good school: Grace Academy Darlaston

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

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 April 2022

Outcome

Grace Academy Darlaston continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has a purposeful atmosphere. Its modern building provides a pleasant environment for pupils and staff. Pupils enjoy the wide range of activities that the school offers beyond the curriculum. They feel safe in the school. Leaders and staff are attentive to the variety of needs pupils have.

Excellence is one of the key values of the school. This value is the guiding principle of the curriculum. The school encourages pupils to achieve high academic aims and to develop as well-rounded individuals. Pupils have ample opportunities in lessons and enrichment activities to broaden their horizons. Teachers support pupils' progress well with rigorous planning of learning and helpful advice on how to improve.

Pupils behave well in lessons and during breaks in the morning and at lunchtime. Pupils say that bullying is not a problem because there are effective ways of reporting it. Staff deal with behaviour incidents and bullying well.

Leaders encourage parents and carers to get involved in their child's education. The school provides practical information and activities on its website for parents to help them support their child's learning.

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

Leaders and staff are implementing a well-designed curriculum. Leaders' intentions are to raise aspirations and to promote academic achievement. The school offers the full range of national curriculum subjects at key stage 3, and a wide choice of options at key stage 4 to meet these aims.

In the sixth form, the curriculum includes a range of vocational and academic courses. There is only a small number of students in the sixth form, but this year the school has increased the number of academic subjects available. Leaders and governors have ambitious plans to expand the sixth form over the next few years.

Subject leaders have devised an effective curriculum to secure pupils' progression from their transition into Year 7 to the end of Year 11 when they take GCSE examinations. Teachers check pupils' progress during lessons and in tests well. This way of checking progress allows teachers to adapt their plans for pupils who miss key learning points.

Teachers plan activities that help pupils remember well what they have learned. For example, in mathematics, pupils revise and use key concepts at regular intervals as they progress through the years. In history, pupils learn about past events through enquiries that bring historical periods to life and capture their imagination.

Very few pupils opt to study a language at key stage 4. Pupils' attitudes towards languages have been negative for several years. Leaders are taking action to address this issue. Leaders have designed a well-planned and engaging Spanish curriculum. The school has appointed a new director of languages whose task is to develop the subject and engage more pupils in it.

Teachers encourage pupils to read widely and often. The English department leads the promotion of reading. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 have regular sessions in the school library. The library has reorganised its fiction section in response to a survey of pupils' interests in books and their use of the library. This sustains pupils' interest in reading.

Pupils have good attitudes towards learning. They respond well to the challenging tasks that teachers provide. Students in the sixth form are focused and work well in lessons.

The school provides a balanced and helpful programme of careers advice to pupils throughout the school years. Pupils learn about diversity, democracy, tolerance and the rule of law in lessons and in assemblies, when external speakers give presentations. Pupils also follow an age-appropriate and comprehensive programme of relationships and sex education and health education. After-school clubs and extra-curricular music, sport and drama activities are popular and well attended.

Staff from the special educational needs department support pupils well. They work with teachers to make sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have appropriate materials and individual help when they need it. They also ensure that pupils with SEND can access all the activities the school offers.

There is a strong sense of teamwork and cohesion among the staff. Staff appreciate how leaders ensure that workload is reasonable. Leaders encourage staff's professional development. Staff enjoy working at the school.

The governance of the school is very effective. The governing body and the multi-academy trust work well together to support and challenge leaders and to hold them to account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. All members of staff receive regular training. They are vigilant and know how to identify and report concerns.

Leaders follow up concerns and work well with families and external agencies to protect pupils who are at risk. They follow safe recruitment processes.

The school raises pupils' awareness effectively of the range of risks they can encounter when online, at home or when they go out through the curriculum and in assemblies.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils tend to have negative views about modern foreign languages. Many do not find learning a language engaging or appreciate its value. As a result, very few pupils opt to study a language to GCSE level. Leaders need to support the development of the modern foreign languages curriculum and the promotion of the subject to ensure that more pupils recognise the benefit of learning a language at GCSE level.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in April 2017.

How can I feedback 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	135956
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10227019
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	984
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	60
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Christopher Watt
Principal	Julie Anstey
Website	https://darlaston.graceacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 and 27 April 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The principal has been in post since April 2019.
- A small number of pupils on the school roll study full time at seven other Walsall local authority institutions.

Information about this inspection

- 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 met with the director of education, the principal, vice-principals, assistant principals and the special educational needs coordinator. They also spoke with the chair

of the governing body and two governors, the chair of trustees, and the multi-academy trust's chief executive officer.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history and modern foreign languages. 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 checked safeguarding arrangements and school records. Inspectors discussed safeguarding policies and case studies with designated safeguarding leads. They talked to teachers and other staff about the safeguarding training they had received and how they put this training into practice. Inspectors looked at safety measures around the school site.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They gathered information about behaviour and attendance. They held formal meetings with groups of pupils.
- The inspectors considered responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including written responses. They also considered responses from staff and pupils to their respective online questionnaires.

Inspection team

Patrick Amieli, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Clare Considine

Ofsted Inspector

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