

Skerne Park Academy

Coleridge Gardens, Darlington, County Durham, DL1 5AJ

Inspection dates 1–2 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Good		2
Achievement of pupils	Good		2
Early years provision	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- From their starting points, pupils make good progress across the school. Increasingly, in both Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils are reaching standards typical for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The progress of pupils leaving Year 6 in the past two years has been particularly strong in reading and writing.
- Teachers are quick to address pupils' misconceptions and this is done through good quality questioning and regular checks by teachers, both in lessons and when marking pupils' books.
- Pupils are smartly dressed and enjoy school. They are proud of their school. Older pupils willingly take on responsibilities and show courtesy and respect to each other.
- Parents and pupils have very positive attitudes towards school and say they have confidence in the school's systems for keeping everybody safe.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are usually very positive and this is consistently the case in the older classes.
- The academy works successfully to ensure that pupils feel valued and this helps pupils to feel good about themselves and about their academic success.
- Leaders, including governors, have had a systematic approach to improving provision since the academy opened and are aware of what barriers existed to prevent pupils from reaching their potential.
- As a result, there have been significant improvements in the achievement of pupils who have left Year 6 in the past two years and of pupils still in the school.
- Leaders are aware of where improvements are still needed.
- Leaders regularly check pupils' progress and the rigour with which they are assessed. They also check on the quality of teaching and have been quick to provide support where needed.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The attainment of pupils, especially the most able, although rising strongly is not yet as high as it should be.
- There are some inconsistencies in the quality of marking between some classes. Feedback to pupils is not always strong enough to help them move their learning on quickly.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 26 lessons taught by 17 teachers. Two lessons were observed jointly with the members of the senior leadership team, including the headteacher.
- Inspectors observed, and spoke with pupils during lessons, at break times and at lunchtime. They also met formally with groups of pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2. Inspectors also observed pupils in an assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders. A meeting also took place with members of the governing body and one of the school’s professional partners from the academy trust.
- Inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at a range of documents, including pupils’ work in their books, the academy’s arrangements for safeguarding, performance management procedures, and the pupils’ attendance data. Inspectors also looked at information about pupils’ progress and attainment.
- There were only nine responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) to gauge the views of parents. Because of this, inspectors could not access the views and, therefore, spoke with parents as they brought their children to the academy.

Inspection team

Fiona McNally, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Geoffrey Seagrove

Additional Inspector

Graeme Clarke

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- A much smaller-than-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A much higher-than-average proportion of pupils are disadvantaged. These pupils receive pupil premium funding, which is provided for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils with disabilities or special educational needs supported through school action is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement for special educational needs is well above average.
- The academy opened in February 2013 and is part of the Hummersknott Academy Trust.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the attainment of all pupils further, especially the most able, by:
 - increasing the level of challenge and opportunities for pupils to apply their key skills in all subjects
 - ensuring that all teachers reflect the best practice in the school when applying the marking policy, offering pupils clear next steps and giving them regular opportunities to respond to teachers' feedback.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has a very clear understanding of how the provision in the academy has needed to improve and is supported well by the deputy headteacher, the senior leadership team and the governors in striving to achieve this. She has communicated high expectations to staff and initiated strong improvements since the academy opened. Staff say that there are clear priorities for improvement and they understand their role in supporting these improvements.
- Pupils' work is regularly and rigorously checked by leaders and the information gained is used to provide effective support for pupils who are underachieving. As a result, the achievement of pupils has improved rapidly and is now good.
- Since the new headteacher was appointed, there has been a strong focus on ensuring the quality of teaching is consistently good. As a result, teaching has improved. This has resulted in pupils achieving well across the school. Where teaching has not had sufficient impact in ensuring pupils' good achievement over time, the headteacher and other leaders have responded quickly and effectively to make the necessary improvements.
- Arrangements for managing the performance of teachers are well considered and offer them opportunities to take on key responsibilities and develop their classroom and leadership skills. Teachers report that the quality of training they receive has improved and that this has helped them with both improving their teaching and relating to the pupils and parents. Equally, leaders have trained staff, using the expertise already in the school, to support improvements in priority areas. For example, where there were inconsistencies in teaching, the leaders developed a coaching system so that teachers had the chance to observe one another and share good practice. As a result, stronger and more consistent practices are seen in classrooms.
- The headteacher, supported by other leaders and governors, has focused on raising the attainment of pupils so that more pupils reach national standards in reading, writing and mathematics in both Key Stages 1 and 2. In turn, the progress made by pupils over time has accelerated, and since the academy opened pupils leaving Year 6 have made at least good progress in key subjects. In 2014, Year 6 pupils made outstanding progress in reading and writing. In 2013, Year 6 pupils leaving the school made outstanding progress in reading and mathematics.
- Systems for assessing pupils have been strengthened since the academy opened and this has allowed for accurate and early detection of underachievement. As a result, the gaps in attainment and progress between groups, for example boys and girls, disadvantaged and other pupils, have reduced.
- School leaders evaluate the school's work accurately; they have correctly identified its strengths and equally, they are aware of the need for further improvement in the attainment of the most able pupils and for increasing pupils' ability to manage their own behaviour.
- Overall, the curriculum is organised to ensure that pupils can access and enjoy their learning. This affects the strong behaviour of pupils in lessons. However, there is not enough opportunity for the most able pupils to access work which will challenge them further and reach higher levels of attainment. In the same way, these pupils would benefit from more opportunities to reinforce their skills across different subject areas.
- The curriculum also provides regular opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. The academy's leaders demonstrate a strong understanding of the pupils and families it serves, and as such offers pupils the chance to broaden their understanding and knowledge of the world. For example, the school organises trips to the coast, to a local church and to a Buddhist Temple. They also invite local people to talk to the pupils, for example, members of the local community have relayed their first-hand experiences of the Second World War.
- All adults model respectful attitudes, as well as promoting the importance of working together, listening and communicating effectively with one another. As a result, pupils from the youngest to the oldest demonstrate respect for each other in classrooms and around the school. This prepares pupils for life in modern Britain.
- The academy's leaders have made a concerted effort to work more closely with parents, providing several opportunities for parents to join in activities with their children. For example, the academy has organised a 'Come Dine and Read With Me' initiative, where parents join pupils for lunch and then listen to pupils read. They have activities specifically for fathers and other male role models, organised on Saturdays at the school and in the local area, which are funded by the school. As a result of these events, parents have a very positive view of the school. In turn, this level of engagement has improved pupils' attendance significantly, as well as parents' support for better behaviour when their children are at school.

- Disadvantaged pupils' progress has improved since the academy opened due to leaders' effective use of the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils. Funding is used to offer extra support where disadvantaged pupils are underachieving.
- The additional primary school sport funding has been used to good effect. All pupils have benefited from specialist teaching and extra sporting activities which the school subsidises. The school has used the money to increase the existing teachers' capacity to teach physical education to ensure that the improvements in this area of the school's work will continue.
- The school works in a Trust and the professional partners agree with the school's evaluation of its provision and performance. It is informed about what the school is doing well, where particular improvements have been made, and what is still to be done.
- Safeguarding procedures meet all current statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are well informed and report that there have been significant improvements in the provision since the academy opened. They can identify specifically what has improved and where there is still more work to be done.
 - The governors were mindful that previously they were not equipped to challenge the leaders in the school but that this has now changed because of improved training. Governors are now able to analyse the school's data and question leaders about necessary further improvements.
 - Governors are informed about the quality of teaching and the outcomes of teachers' performance management reviews. They have demonstrated the capacity to make difficult decisions and any decisions relating to pay progression are closely linked to reviews and pupils' progress.
 - The governors effectively manage the school's financial resources. This includes a clear understanding of how funding for disadvantaged pupils is used and the impact it has had.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive throughout the school. As pupils get older and understand the school's high expectations more clearly, their attitudes to learning improve further and there are very few occasions when pupils need reminding how to behave.
- Very occasionally and mainly in the younger years, a small minority of pupils need support to remain on task. They always respond immediately to adults' instructions but they cannot always manage their own behaviour without close monitoring.
- Pupils of all ages report that they enjoy learning and this is seen in lessons and in their books, where pupils respond well to the teachers' high expectations of them. Pupils present their work well, take a pride in what they do and they do not leave work unfinished. Pupils also enjoy the different visits and visitors to school which link into their work in class and as they put it, 'make the learning more real'.
- Pupils, parents and staff all say that poor behaviour is rare. Pupils say they like receiving the rewards for good behaviour and that they know what sanctions are in place if they do not behave well. Pupils receive individual points for good work or good behaviour and they receive class points if they work well as a class.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say that the adults care about them and there are various adults in the school who are specifically trained and employed to talk with pupils if they have any particular concerns.
- The school has a buddy system for the playground. This involves older pupils to whom other pupils can go if they have a problem or if they want to talk about an issue. The pupils use the system well and understand that it means there are more people in the school ensuring they are safe and cared for well.
- Pupils are aware of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying and prejudiced-based bullying. They say that bullying is very rare and that if it happens it is dealt with quickly by adults. Documents kept to record incidents of serious bullying show that this is the case.
- Attendance has improved significantly and is now above average. In addition, the number of pupils who are absent on a regular basis has also dropped dramatically in the past 18 months. This has been as a result of the headteacher and other leaders making a concerted effort to engage with parents and relay the importance of attending school every day. In addition, punctuality to school has improved and the

number of pupils excluded for serious behavioural issues has fallen significantly.

- Pupils wear the school uniform smartly at all times. The uniform has been introduced since the academy opened and pupils follow the dress code and wear their uniform with pride. The classrooms and other areas around the school are tidy and well organised.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Over time, the quality of teaching is good. This is seen in pupils' test and assessment results, the good progress they make over time, the work in their books, and the monitoring of teaching by leaders.
- Teachers' ability to quickly gauge where pupils have a full understanding of their work and where there are misconceptions is a particular strength across all key stages. They do this through skilful questioning, where they insist on pupils giving full answers and using technical language where appropriate. Teachers and other adults take every opportunity to circulate and support individual pupils as necessary. As a result, they have a clear understanding of what pupils have learnt and what needs to be reinforced.
- Pupils generally are given work that is set at the right level to get the best from them. This is particularly the case in the older years. However, in some classes the most able pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to access work which would fully challenge them and allow them to reach higher levels of attainment. The academy's records of lessons observed and their scrutiny of pupils' work shows that teaching over time is good and that pupils enjoy their work. This is seen in writing, in particular, where pupils have the opportunity to write in different styles on various topics and where skills have been developed well over the past 12 months.
- Teaching in reading and writing in both Key Stages 1 and 2 has been a priority for improvement and this has clearly brought benefits with pupils increasingly reaching the national average for their age. This has impacted positively on writing, with pupils regularly writing at length and in a variety of styles. They clearly enjoy this and is evident from the pride they take in their work. Pupils have regular opportunities to read and where necessary are given reading support by adults during the school day. The school encourages pupils to read with their parents, have access to a large library and are given guidance to choose books they will enjoy to take home.
- Teachers mark pupils' books regularly and in the large majority of cases this results in pupils receiving feedback which helps them to move on their learning. There are high expectations of pupils to respond to corrections and challenges set by teachers when they mark work. Pupils consistently respond and this helps them to make good progress in class over time. When marking, teachers nearly always identify spelling and grammatical errors, which pupils always correct. The teachers' guidance contributes to pupils' good progress, especially in writing. Although occasionally teachers are not as rigorous in identifying errors or in setting further challenges for the pupils.
- In some lessons activities are not engaging enough to maintain pupils' interest and on these occasions pupils can become distracted. This is seen in a small number of classes.
- Teaching assistants work well with pupils, especially in helping them to remember what portrays good behaviour for learning. They also support pupils with special educational needs, which has resulted in these pupils' achievement improving.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils achieve well in all key stages. Children start school with levels of skills below those typical for their age. Across all year groups, since the academy opened, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics have significantly improved, with an increasing proportion in all years reaching the expected standard for their age. This improvement has been seen in Key Stage 1, for example, in 2013 pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics rose faster than that seen nationally. It was sustained in 2014 for reading and mathematics, while in writing, pupils' attainment rose significantly.
- In 2013, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards. However, since then pupils' progress across the school has improved rapidly and while last year's unpublished national test results for Year 6 show below average attainment for reading, writing and mathematics, it is clear that these pupils made strong progress from when the academy first opened. Inspection evidence also shows that the rapid rate of improvement is being sustained by pupils currently in the school in all three key stages.
- In Key Stage 2, of the pupils who are currently in the school, the proportion reaching standards expected for their age and beyond has improved significantly since the academy opened. Equally, the progress of pupils during their time in Key Stage 2 has also improved significantly. This is the case for pupils currently

in the school where progress is consistently good, and for the last two sets of Year 6 pupils to leave the school. Their progress has been at least good since the academy opened and outstanding in some areas.

- In 2014, for the first time by the end of the Reception Year, children's reading, writing and number skills were in line with other skill areas and in line with what is typical for their age. This means that these pupils, on entering Key Stage 1, are well prepared for their learning in Year 1. Furthermore, since the academy opened, the proportion of pupils in Year 1 who reach the expected level in the phonics screening check, has increased significantly and is well above the national average. This has been due to the strong focus on reading for all pupils.
- For pupils who have recently left Key Stage 1, their attainment when they left the Reception class was much lower than average. However, the progress they made in Years 1 and 2 was good. Therefore, by the end of Year 2, since the academy opened, there has been an increasing proportion of pupils reaching the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress. The most recent published data show that in 2013 the gap in attainment between Year 6 disadvantaged pupils and non disadvantaged pupils in the school was less than a term in mathematics. The gap between disadvantaged pupils in the school and non disadvantaged pupils nationally was just over two and a half terms. In reading, the gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and non disadvantaged pupils in the school was one and half terms, compared with a gap of over three terms between these pupils and others nationally. In writing, the in-school gap was a term, compared with a gap of four terms between these pupils and others nationally. Since 2013, attainment for all pupils has increased, including disadvantaged pupils, meaning the gap continues to close between disadvantaged pupils and non disadvantaged pupils in the school. This is due to the effective support provided for these pupils and the school's overall drive for improvement.
- The progress of pupils with special educational needs is now good in reading, writing and mathematics. The academy's leaders have focused on this area in recent months and the better organisation of how support is implemented for these pupils has resulted in stronger progress in the last 12 months.
- The most able pupils currently in school, and those who left recently, make good progress over time. However, the impact of previous underachievement is holding down attainment, especially for the most able, and means that although all groups of pupils now make at least good progress, their attainment is still not as high as it should be at the end of Year 6.
- The achievement of different groups of pupils demonstrates how committed the leaders and teachers in the school are in ensuring all pupils have equal opportunities to make good progress.

The early years provision

is good

- Children start school with skills and knowledge below that typical for their age. The school has implemented many changes to this area of its provision and also provided more training for existing teachers, as well as recruiting strong, experienced teachers. As a result, the progress children now make in the early years is at least good.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year in 2014 is above average for the first time. The improvements made in children's reading, writing and number work means they are well prepared for Year 1.
- In the early years, teaching is good. Children enjoy a variety of activities to support rapid development of their skills both indoors and outside. As a result, children are making good progress.
- The leaders of the early years have been rigorous in ensuring they understand where children in the setting needed the most support. As a result of this analysis and the increased opportunities for children to develop their movement and knowledge and understanding of the world, as well as their reading, writing and number work, children made rapid progress in these areas.
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- The early years teachers and leaders strongly emphasise the importance of polite and respectful behaviour. As a result, poor behaviour is very rare and children trust the adults who care for them. Parents are particularly positive about this area of the academy's provision. The school has good procedures for helping children to settle in and to feel safe in the academy, evident from the very calm atmosphere observed by inspectors.
- Children are well supervised at all times. It is clear from the progress they make and from the school's own monitoring that children enjoy their learning and observations showed that children are always busy. Over time, girls and boys make similar progress. For children with special educational needs, there is strong support to ensure they can access learning and develop their skills well.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that improvements in the early years have enabled children to be

better prepared for the next stage in their education.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	139195
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	447852

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	402
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marjory Knowles
Headteacher	Kate Chisholm
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01325 380381
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	enquiries@skernepark.org.uk

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