

Inspection of NCEA Grace Darling CofE Primary School

Central Parkway, Newbiggin-By-the-Sea, Northumberland NE64 6RT

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 July 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Sharon Cole. This school is part of Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Alan Hardie, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Brearley.

What is it like to attend this school?

Everyone is welcome and valued at Grace Darling CofE Primary School. Pupils are encouraged and empowered to 'let their light shine'. This school knows its pupils and families extremely well and understands the important role it plays in the community. Pastoral support for families is greatly appreciated by parents.

Pupils behave well. They know to 'be ready, respectful and safe'. Classrooms are calm and orderly. Pupils look after one another. Bullying is extremely rare and pupils trust adults to sort out any problems. Pupils are happy and well cared for. Relationships are positive and warm.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils and have set about creating a curriculum that will ensure that pupils have the knowledge and aspirations to lead a 'life without limits'. The music curriculum is a fine example of this. All pupils have the opportunity to learn to play an instrument to a good standard, to play in ensembles and to perform regularly. A group of pupils playing the steel pans for parents at pick up time beamed with pride and self-belief.

There are numerous opportunities for pupils to experience learning outside the classroom, such as 'Beach School', which features water safety lessons and care for the environment. Every child is encouraged to take part in numerous school clubs.

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

Learning to read is the priority at this school. Preparation for reading starts from Nursery, where familiar rhymes and stories are shared repeatedly over time. By the time they reach Reception class, children are ready to make a strong start to formal phonics teaching. The teaching of phonics is consistently effective across all groups and pupils quickly learn to decode and spell. Alongside this, children in the early years are taught how to write their letters correctly. However, they do not have sufficient opportunity to practise. This results in them making many errors in their writing. These are not addressed consistently by adults.

The school's curriculum is ambitious and meets the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The provision for pupils with SEND is holistic and highly effective. Staff make appropriate adaptations to the curriculum and pupils with SEND are supported to be successful in accessing the entire curriculum. Leaders have given much thought to creating a curriculum that reflects the unique, local heritage of Newbiggin so that pupils are proud of their roots and not afraid to branch out further afield. Year 3 pupils were enjoying a miners' picnic and pupils work with the local RNLI branch to understand the vital work they do in this coastal town.

In some subjects like mathematics and music, the curriculum is precisely sequenced and the most important knowledge for pupils to learn is clearly identified. As a result, pupils can remember what they have been taught over time. In some other

subjects, such as history and Mandarin pupils do not consistently remember what they have been taught.

Pupil outcomes in national assessments in reading, writing and mathematics demonstrate the good progress that pupils make over time in these subjects.

Pupils say they enjoy school. However, attendance figures are stubbornly low and declining. This includes for pupils with SEND. Leaders analyse absence carefully and have introduced many initiatives, such as rewards for good attendance. They have also sought external support to help address persistent absence. Nevertheless, too many pupils are absent too often. This means they are missing valuable learning opportunities. This is hindering their progress. Leaders recognise the need to establish a school culture where everybody understands the importance of regular attendance for pupils to achieve well at this school and in the future.

The school's curriculum and provision for early years, including for two-year-olds, is well planned. Adults focus on developing children's communication and language. This is effective. The learning environments are stimulating and children enjoy their play. Children make strong progress from their starting points.

The school's personal, social and health education curriculum teaches pupils to stay healthy, both physically and mentally. They also develop a good understanding about healthy relationships and the meaning of consent. Pupils have a good knowledge of a range of different religions and protected characteristics and feel strongly that everybody should be treated equally and with respect. Diversity is celebrated at this school. Some pupils hold posts of responsibility in school. The head boy, head girl and Worship Leaders are proud of the role they play in school and feel that they could do even more to help.

Leaders at all levels, including those responsible for governance, share the highest ambitions for the pupils at Grace Darling, and play an active part in the work of the school. Governors and trustees support and challenge the school effectively. Staff feel well supported and listened to. They are proud to be a part of the Grace Darling family.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's approach to improving attendance is not having the desired effective. Too many pupils, including those with SEND, are absent too often. They miss valuable learning and enrichment opportunities. The school should ensure

that the entire school community, including parents, understands the value of regular attendance and review its approach to improving attendance.

- In the early years, children do not get sufficient opportunities to practise the correct letter formation they are taught during phonics lessons. They make many errors in their writing and these are not addressed swiftly or consistently. This means that children are not ready for the Year 1 writing curriculum. The school should ensure that children consistently form their letters correctly by the end of the early years.

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	148765
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10323146
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	439
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Brearley
Headteacher	Sharon Cole
Website	gracedarling.ncea.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This school opened in September 2021 following the de-amalgamation of the predecessor academy, NCEA Bishop's Primary School.
- The inspection in August 2021 was for pre-registration as part of the de-amalgamation process.
- This school is part of Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust.
- The school has provision for two-year-old children.
- The school uses three alternative providers.
- As the school is designated as having a religious character, it is inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not yet had its first section 48 inspection.

Information about this inspection

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

- 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.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, other school leaders, school staff, some parents, representatives of the governing body, representatives of the board of trustees, other representatives of the trust, the CEO and a representative from the diocese.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, music and history. For each deep dive, the inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector listened to pupils from Years 1,2 and 3 reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspectors also looked at pupils' work and discussed the curriculum with leaders in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the online staff survey and the online parents survey, including free-text comments.

Inspection team

Tracy Duffy, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Mark Hassack	Ofsted Inspector
Kathryn McDonald	His Majesty's Inspector

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