

Inspection of Darnhall Primary School

Sandyhill Road, Darnhall, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 1JL

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 October 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend this school which sits firmly at the heart of its community. Pupils said that they feel safe and happy. They know that they are valued and that everyone is welcome in their school.

The school has high expectations of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils work hard and try their best. The atmosphere in school is calm and purposeful. Relationships are respectful. Pupils in key stage 1 and 2 achieve well. However, children in the early years do not learn equally well across all areas of the curriculum. Some children are not as well prepared for their next steps as they should be as a result.

Pupils enjoy being with their friends. At breaktimes, they play happily together. Pupils, including children in the early years, are sensible and polite. They know the school rules and keep to them.

Pupils develop as well-rounded citizens who contribute to society. For example, pupils attend a forum at the Council Chambers which enables them to actively contribute to the decisions made about their town. In addition, the charity and events team raise money for charities that are close to pupils' hearts. Pupils appreciate the wide range of opportunities that the school offers. They relish being responsible for leading different aspects of school life, such as being a member of the leadership team, the fund-raising committee or a well-being worker.

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

The school provides an ambitious curriculum. Pupils typically progress well through the curriculum. However, this is not reflected in the 2022 published data. In part, this is due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 had too many gaps in their learning by the time of the tests and assessments. Mobility into the school also played a part in the published outcomes. In 2020, almost one third of the Year 6 cohort had not been at this school for their full primary education.

In most subjects, the key knowledge that pupils should learn in key stage 1 and 2 has been identified. This means that pupils are able to build on what they already know as they progress through the curriculum. The school makes sure that teachers have the expertise that they need to deliver the curriculum well. Teachers use assessment strategies well to check on pupils' learning. This ensures that those pupils who struggle with their learning receive the support that they need to catch up.

In a small number of subjects in key stages 1 and 2, the school's curriculum-thinking is less well developed. This means that teachers are not clear about some of the key knowledge that they should teach. This hinders pupils from deepening their

knowledge. In addition, some activities do not support some pupils to remember what they have learned over time.

Children in the early years, including those who attend the two-year-old provision, settle quickly into the routines of school. However, in some areas of the early years, some staff do not have the knowledge that they need to ensure that children have the very best start in learning. While some children in the early years achieve well, this is not the case for all.

The teaching of reading is prioritised. This begins as soon as children start in the Reception Year. Trained staff deliver the school's phonics programme well. Reading books are carefully matched to pupils' phonics knowledge. Pupils who struggle to read are supported to catch up. Older pupils are encouraged to choose appropriate books. They read confidently and are keen to talk about the books that they enjoy. Pupils are motivated to read regularly. For example, they are delighted when their reward means they can choose a book from the reading vending machine or to choose a reading buddy.

Pupils with SEND are swiftly identified, including in the early years. The school makes sure that SEND pupils access the same curriculum as their peers. In the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND (specially resourced provision), pupils have a curriculum that is tailored to their individual needs.

Pupils behave well. They are curious learners who have positive attitudes in lessons. Pupils enjoy playing together in the playground. Staff are highly skilled and provide effective support for the small number of pupils who struggle to manage their emotions.

Parents and carers hold the school in high regard. They said that their children, including those with SEND, thrive. The school goes above and beyond to engage parents in their children's education. In particular, this is helping to ensure that pupils attend school regularly.

The school actively promotes pupils' personal development. It has thought carefully about the opportunities that it provides beyond the curriculum. This includes asking pupils which activities that they would like. As a result, pupils enjoy a rich and diverse range of clubs to develop their interests. The school enables pupils to extend their everyday experiences. For example, by taking part in residential trips and visits to the theatre and a restaurant. Pupils said that school helps them to raise their aspirations. This includes a 'world of work' week that enables pupils to find out about careers. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

The governing body are committed to their roles. They know the school and its community well. Governors draw upon their substantial expertise to provide the right balance of support and challenge to the school.

The school takes positive action to consider the impact of changes to the curriculum on staff's workload. Staff well-being is a high priority. Staff said that they feel valued.

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 has not ensured that some staff in the early years have the expertise to design learning activities that build on what children know and can do already. This means that some children in the early years are not as well prepared for key stage 1 as they should be. The school should ensure that they provide staff with suitable guidance so that they can deliver the curriculum consistently well across the early years.
- In a small number of subjects, the school has not considered carefully enough the most important content that pupils need to learn. This means that some teachers do not have sufficient guidance about what to teach and when to teach it. This hinders pupils from building their knowledge over time. The school should continue to refine its curriculum-thinking in these subjects, so that the most important content that pupils need to know is clearly identified.
- In some subjects, pupils have insufficient opportunities to embed what they have been taught. This means that they find it difficult to recall their earlier learning. The school should ensure that staff are supported to choose the right approaches to help pupils remember the intended curriculum in these subjects.

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	111133
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10294256
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	436
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Richard Strachan
Headteacher	Sarah Tomlinson
Website	www.darnhall.cheshire.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	19 and 20 June 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a specially resourced provision with 12 places for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. There are 12 pupils aged four to 11 in this class.
- There is provision for two-year-old children in the early years.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, including early reading, mathematics, science and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, spoke with teachers, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum 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.
- An inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, around school and at breaktimes. They discussed behaviour and bullying with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors spoke with parents in the morning as they brought their children to school.
- Inspectors considered the views of the parents who responded to Ofsted Parent View. This included the free-text comments.
- Inspectors took into account the views of staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey.
- There were no responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors spoke with school leaders and members of the governing board including the chair of governors.
- An inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority.

Inspection team

Frith Murphy, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Moira Loftus	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Lawson	Ofsted Inspector

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