

Tonight is a special evening for us all and I am delighted to open our doors once again, providing families with a glimpse of Darlington Academy. Thank you for taking the time to come along and it is a pleasure to welcome you with the hope of new beginnings but also the opportunity to welcome parents and carers of our current Reception children. It has been lovely getting to know you and your children personally over the past month and transitioning from a virtual world to one where we can be here together. Enjoy tonight, seeing Darlington, first hand.

I understand that choosing a school for your child, is an important decision, whether it is your child's very first time at school or moving on to a new school. The decision and the questions remain the same. Why Darlington?

What makes Darlington special and the right place for my child?

Will they be happy here?

Will Darlington meet my expectations?

Can the staff meet my child's needs?

Will they feel inspired?

Will my child be successful now and prepared for their lives ahead?

The answer to all of these questions – is yes!

We know you have been your child's first teachers and starting school is an important milestone in their journey as you entrust your little ones into our care. Family is important to us, in fact the phrase 'Darlington family' is often used to describe the sense of belonging that is experienced here. We actively build relationships and value parental partnerships and look forward to watching your children grow (not too fast!).

Our actions and beliefs are deep rooted in our mission statement - At Darlington Academy, we achieve excellence together. With this as our mantra we work hard to ensure every child is happy and supported in their journey with us.

It is our belief that in today's complex world children need both the knowledge and skills to succeed and also a sense of their humanity – the ability to respect, to empathise and to be caring individuals.

These aspects are central to our curriculum design, which we refer to as the Darlington Design, increases overall effectiveness and life chances.

As you can see, we are truly invested in the lives of our children. They are at the centre of all that we do. Each day, our staff come to Darlington ready to deliver a role that is critically important, vastly rewarding and in essence, to help our children become the very best versions of themselves. I can think of no more important work.

At Darlington, our children wear their uniform with pride. Our academy logo carries meaning to our staff and our children, with regular reference made to, 'our little boat'; setting sail for adventure and challenge, with our sights set on the horizon. We believe that our children are the stars and we encourage them to shine bright, with the warmth of the staff, lighting the way. Everyone at Darlington believes passionately in our academy values.

At Darlington, we install a sense of responsibility, a sense of ownership to learning and because of this, all our children play their active part. We have active citizens who play essential roles and have a positive impact on others. Together they are focused on making sure that Darlington is a great place to be. I am proud of their contributions and commitment. We are an enhanced healthy school with awards in Equality and diversity and engagement in the Emotional health and well-being project. Our commitment to healthy lifestyles and exercise is highly recognised, with receipt of the gold sports award. Our love of the environment led to the gold outdoor learning award and recently becoming the only green flag holder in Southend, as an Eco friendly school. Our active citizens, truly make a difference!

Let's hear from members of our Junior Leadership team, share ... Why Darlington? I would like to introduce our current head boy and head girl. This is the first opportunity they have to speak publicly, currently focusing on the academy value 'confidence'.

Head Boy – Max Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, good evening and welcome to Darlington Academy. My name is Max and I am the newly elected head boy here at the school.

It is a pleasure to talk to you about what makes Darlington special. Hopefully you'll leave tonight with a strong sense of what our school has to offer your child and what we stand and strive for.

With a rich and varied curriculum that is both entertaining and challenging, there is no doubt your child will have an incredibly enriching experience throughout their journey here at the school.

I have experienced first-hand the facilities, values and altogether what makes Darlington Academy stand out.

What better way to start with, than with our PE, art and outdoor learning sessions each week, which support and enrich our curriculum. We have quite a few facilities for this type of learning, such as the field, hive astro turf and many more.

These subject include wildlife adventures, an amazing range of sports activities and fantastic art opportunities which allow our creativity to grow. The field eve has a 200 metre running rack for running and keeping healthy.

Finally, our school values, we have A for Achievement, B is for Belonging, C for Confidence, D for Determination and E for Excellence. Whenever any child in the school shows any one of these values, they will be sent a postcard home in celebration. We love receiving these through our letterboxes!

It has been an honour telling you about the school I love and I hope I will see you at some point this evening.

Head Girl – Jemima Hello everyone and welcome to Darlington open evening. I am Jemima, Head girl, at Darlington Academy and I am delighted to speak to you this evening.

This school is not only a great learning environment but has also won various awards such as the Gold Award in PE, the outdoor learning award and the green flag award – Darlington is the only school in the whole borough to receive this award!

As you heard from Max we have some fantastic facilities in our school such as the Anchor room. The Anchor room is a place we can go to, to talk about worries and get help, comfort and support. The staff there also help us focus on positive thoughts.

Max has already mentioned our values and I want to talk about belonging further. We always work together at Darlington. Our house HMS Vincent, Rayleigh, Ganges and Dolphin bring us all together as we earn points for exceptional work, showing our school values, kindness and sports day. Sport day is a great day earning lots of points for your house.

I really hope that you see how amazing our classrooms and grounds are and why we love this school so much. Don't forget to ask lots of questions and have a great time on your tour. Thank you for coming.

Thank you, I am sure you will agree that not only did they demonstrate our value of 'confidence' but also achieved, 'Excellence together'.

We know that success is not measured by academic outcomes alone. We celebrate achievements big and small, the triumphs that our children have and those moments that build character and personal success. I am sure you will agree that Max and Jemima's speech was one of these moments.

However, our results reflect the quality of education that we provide, with our children making positive progress from their starting points across the curriculum

with progress in reading, writing and maths, above national averages. This shows the support and challenge given to our children, to reach their potential. Here at Darlington we value the importance of reading and phonics, with phonic outcomes that surpass national with published results at 96%. By the time our children leave the academy, they are fully prepared for their next stage. This is reflected in their knowledge and skills across the wider curriculum but in their outcomes in reading, writing and maths – which are above national.

I would like to now like to welcome to the stage two students who we have witnessed thrive during their time at Darlington. Both examples of children who embraced academy life and fully engaged in the wider curriculum, preparing them for secondary school. Thank you for taking the time to come back and share your reflections with us.

Thank you both again for coming along this evening and for your contributions past and present. I wish you continued success and happiness at secondary school and beyond.

Our staff, from the moment our children join us, support them to become resilient, capable and confident children. They focus on building relationships, which allows our children to happily settle. Our Early Years provision within 'the Rockpool' is an engaging and purposeful place to explore, discover and create.

We provide a careful balance of adult-led and child initiated learning. The Early Years team are skilled in observing and interacting in purposeful play, maximising every learning opportunity. The staff are full of energy and encourage playful spirits, curiosity and a sense of adventure, inside and outside the classroom. The Rockpool is a treasure trove, full of wonder and life. Our Nursery children in 'Tiddlers' and our Reception 'Jellyfish' and 'Starfish', love their time there.

I could go on indefinitely about Darlington and the wonderful things that go on here - It's my favourite topic! I am proud of our school but you must judge it for yourselves, as I said at the beginning - I recognise the importance of choosing the right school for you. I know many of you will be visiting other schools and we all have a slightly different feel. But I'd like to emphasise that what is special about Darlington is the things you can't always see, but you can feel in the classrooms and around the school - The buzz, the energy, the sense of adventure and those memorable moments, when the magic happens!

I hope you have experienced a sense of this as you have toured the school tonight and take a little bit of Darlington Academy away with you.

I hope this evening is the start of a journey together and bright futures for us all, today, tomorrow and for generations to come.