

# The Pioneers Driving Excellence in Supported Learning



Part of a national network of academic institutions, Astrea Academy Dearne has developed a curriculum it hopes to eventually see being implemented worldwide.

The Astrea Academy Trust is a renowned network of learning institutes, and Astrea Academy Dearne is one of the latest additions. With over 1100 pupils from 11 to 16 years old, it is a secondary school that has seen an ever-increasing rise in popularity; being part of a prestigious group such as Astrea Trust has meant that it benefitted from a strong structure upon which to build. The Trust has a well-defined and dedicated ethos of 'inspiring beyond measure' about which it is passionate, with a commitment to 'educate, not just school' when it comes to its students. This allows its branches such as Astrea Academy Dearne to instil qualities of resilience, empathy, aspiration, contribution and happiness in its attendees, as well as pathing the way for Astrea Academies to be able to hold one of the highest expectations for pupil exam grade excellence in national assessments. Its logo, a tree with branches reaching for a starlit sky, seeks to symbolise its wholehearted belief in these tenants. Additionally, with its recent recognition by the Department for Education as being an Academic Institution that raises the standards on a national level due to its exam results, it faces a bright and exciting future, its past successes adding to its drive to grow and improve. The accreditation by the Department for Education has presented it with an invaluable opportunity to make a difference to the lives of children everywhere. This is something it intends to capitalise on.

With the backing of a £10 million Northern Sponsor fund committed to tackling inequality, it has been attracting and encouraging the best sponsors from which to glean patronage for schools across the north of England. Astrea Academy Trust has been one of the first to receive a share of this fund, and thus was trusted with setting up academy hubs in areas with some of the greatest need of highly performing educational facilities. Ultimately, Astrea Academy Trust's goal is to become established across England, reaching out to schools of various stages of development, and targeting both schools that require significant developmental help and those institutes that are already outstanding in nature. For Astrea Academy Dearne in particular, this dedication to developing excellence manifests in its cornerstone belief in the Dearne 'value words'. These words are respect, determination, courage, dignity, honesty, trust, inclusivity, kindness, enthusiasm, and ambition. With the impression of these traits, Dearne strives to ensure that every child leaves a 'good person', able to use and apply their experiences to lead happy and fulfilling lives as they grow into adulthood.

Astrea Academy Dearne has successfully secured further accreditation in a nationally recognised award for Excellence in Pupil Development, presented by Award Place. It also strives to build upon this accolade by working towards the Wellbeing Award for Schools. This is an award given for the quality of the overall wellbeing and mental health of staff and students at an institution, and with those two elements being big focuses for Dearne, it will be aiming to receive this achievement in the future. To do this, it will be continuing to build its whole-school approach to developing a good internal culture.

This devotion to seeing the whole school succeed, cultivating excellence in every aspect of its operation, permeates every level of the hierarchy. Dearne's Principle, Mrs Joanne Wilson, is also a steadfast believer in the support of neurodiverse pupils and those with special educational needs. It is pleased to be one of the leading voices in the UK in terms

of offering these services, spearheaded by its unique and bespoke Athena provision; a programme targeting young people who may not be 'secondary ready'. Athena was developed with the collaboration of primary and secondary school educators to ensure that all students who enrol with its guidance can achieve their individual goals. It carries with it a mantra of 'primary approach, secondary expectations', and in the initial stages of enrolling in this programme students are brought in during Year 7. The team liaise closely with Feeder Primary schools that send their students on to Dearne to identify students who are not quite ready yet for Key Stage 3, and then begin working with them in a seamlessly integrated strategy that fits around the rest of school life. There are 20 available places within Athena at present, and it is overseen by two colleagues at any one time.

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Astrea Academy Dearne's rigorously developed objectives for Athena are built upon what the National Curriculum would normally aim at students between years 5 and 8, as within these aims are the building blocks that will encourage growth into further key stages. Furthermore, Dearne considers it essential for this programme's students to integrate with their wider pool of peers. Athena's English, maths, science, humanities, prep for adult life and modern foreign languages classes are taught in a language-rich, immersive classroom environment by its SEND specialist teachers, but its students access social times, drama, art, music, food, computer studies and PE in the mainstream building alongside their peers. This programme is delivered by way of half-termly themes that thread through all subjects and if its students have not graduated into mainstream schooling by the end of year 9, they may remain with Athena and pursue qualifications that are most appropriate for their needs. The Academy prides itself on this initiative for allowing its students to leave education having been properly supported, and with the right qualifications to allow them to achieve what they wish to do next in life. Most go on to enrol in level 2 courses.

Dearne was honoured to have received an 'Area of Excellence' award for SEND by Challenge Partners in July of 2019 for its impressive efforts, going on to receive the 'Most Dedicated Mainstream SEN Learning Environment in South Yorkshire' by Corporate Vision. Going forward into the future, Astrea Academy Dearne is as committed as ever to championing accessible, inclusive, high standards of learning. It is looking forward to getting to share this attitude with schools locally and nationally. Lastly, it will be continually working to develop its rigorous curriculum into a model of education that can be used worldwide.

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