

Charles Darwin Community Primary School

Address: Darwin Street, Castle, Northwich, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 1BN

Unique reference number (URN): 111053

Inspection report: 13 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	● ●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders are highly skilled in ensuring that pupils' needs are understood and met. Staff identify these needs quickly and accurately. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils known or previously known to children's social care. Barriers to learning and wellbeing are removed through expert adaptations in lessons. This support enables pupils to take part in lessons alongside their peers and to enjoy the wider offer of clubs, trips and residential visits. Staff have high expectations and aspirations for all pupils. Disadvantaged pupils make good use of all that the school has to offer.

Staff follow a clear approach to meeting pupils' needs. In turn, pupils benefit from the skills and knowledge of well-trained staff. Teachers check pupils' progress carefully and review the impact of additional help. They work closely with families and other professionals to make sure pupils get the help they need.

Additional funding is used well to support disadvantaged pupils. They benefit from extra teaching and opportunities to join enrichment activities. Pupils in care or previously in care receive tailored support. Leaders work with a range of agencies to make sure these pupils' needs are met. Pupils feel included and valued.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders provide an extensive and well-structured personal development and wellbeing offer that is embedded in everyday learning. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is highly developed. They reflect thoughtfully on their own beliefs and values and show respect for the views of others. Pupils engage confidently with issues that affect real life, including topics such as ageism. They demonstrate a secure understanding of fundamental British values, including how democratic processes help ensure fairness. Staff and pupils treat everyone with fairness and respect. Staff challenge discrimination consistently, including unfair ideas linked to gender or other differences.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of enrichment opportunities that broaden their knowledge and skills. Pupils learn to play musical instruments, attend theatre and orchestral performances and represent the school in sport or drama. Local visits develop pupils' understanding of their community. Pupils build the independence and confidence needed to participate fully in residential experiences. Leaders ensure that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, engage fully in activities. They monitor participation carefully and remove barriers so that every pupil can participate.

Pupils make effective use of pastoral support and mindfulness activities, which help them thrive. Leadership roles, including as school council members, happiness heroes, safety officers and members of the pupil parliament, develop pupils' confidence and self-belief. Purposely chosen visitors challenge stereotypes and help pupils recognise the wide range of opportunities and future pathways available to them. Pupils understand how to keep

themselves and others safe, both online and offline, and use this knowledge in their daily lives.

Pupils' views shape provision. Leaders listen and act on what pupils say to improve the experience for everyone. The most vulnerable pupils speak highly of the substantial, positive difference the school makes to their lives. Pupils are confident, resilient and well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils progress well through the curriculum across year groups and key stages. Leaders identify gaps in learning accurately and take effective action to close these over time. Achievement in national tests is consistently secure and is reflected in the school's published outcomes. Pupils achieve particularly well in mathematics, writing and English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Outcomes in these subjects have been significantly above national averages for the last 3 years. Disadvantaged pupils achieve equally well. Across the wider curriculum, pupils generally achieve well and meet the ambitious expectations set out in subject plans. Leaders recognise that recall of multiplication facts is less secure for some pupils in lower key stage 2. They have begun to address this, although it is too early to see the full impact. Overall, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and leave the school ready for the demands of secondary school.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Attendance is close to national averages. Leaders maintain a clear focus on ensuring that pupils attend regularly and are ready to learn. They have introduced targeted support for pupils who need additional help and this is beginning to make a difference. Attendance for disadvantaged pupils is improving. Some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those eligible for free school meals continue to have weaker attendance. Leaders have implemented strategies to improve the attendance rates of these groups of pupils. Early signs indicate that these actions are having a positive impact, although it is too early to see the full effect. Leaders monitor pupils who need additional help closely and respond promptly when concerns arise.

Pupils behave well across the school. Leaders have created a calm, orderly and respectful environment that supports learning effectively. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour have reduced over time. Pupils who need extra help benefit from clear support plans. Pupils show positive attitudes to learning and engage well in lessons. Staff apply behaviour policies consistently so that pupils understand the expectations. Leaders act quickly to address any unkind behaviour. Sensible adjustments for pupils with additional needs enable all pupils to take part fully in lessons. Staff know pupils well and provide the care and support they need. Leaders' work ensures that the school is a positive, welcoming environment where all pupils are well supported.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. They make decisions that improve pupils' learning. The curriculum is ambitious, broad and balanced. It gives pupils the knowledge that they need for their next steps. It is well planned and sequenced in phonics, English and mathematics. Pupils develop their knowledge of important basic skills, which helps them to read fluently and work confidently with numbers. Starting in the Reception classes, staff encourage pupils' spoken and written vocabulary through reading and discussion. Teachers present learning clearly and check pupils' understanding so that gaps are addressed quickly. Staff know pupils well and skilfully adapt the curriculum and teaching for those who need extra help, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These adaptations mean pupils can learn successfully alongside their peers.

The curriculum is taught well. In a small minority of subjects, learning is less secure because leaders have not yet completed the curriculum design. Leaders have identified this. Staff value the professional learning opportunities they have. These enhance their expertise and strengthen their subject knowledge. Assessment is used well to check progress and plan next steps. As a result, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 6 and are prepared for the next stage of their education.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise the early years and have a clear understanding of the quality of provision. Staff interact with children in ways that develop their language and vocabulary effectively. Children are encouraged to talk about their ideas. Staff model new words to extend children's vocabulary further. They use their training well to support children's personal, social and emotional development, including for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, children develop increasing independence.

The curriculum enables children to learn well across the Reception Year. Staff know children's starting points well and are attentive to the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Reading is a key focus. Children learn phonics from the start of Reception so they can begin to read and write with confidence. Indoor and outdoor activities promote children's knowledge and skills across all areas of learning and prepare them well for Year 1. Leaders have introduced a new early years curriculum that sets out key knowledge and sequences learning clearly. Some small refinements are still needed to complete this work.

Partnerships with parents and carers are effective. Families are well informed about their child's learning and receive guidance on how to support it at home. Children benefit from the positive links between home and school, which help them feel confident and ready for the next stage of their education.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have quickly developed a clear understanding of the school's context and priorities since taking up their posts. They have identified strengths and areas for development accurately. Leaders have prioritised improvement actions that have a positive impact. They

are strong role models who set high expectations, which are evident in classrooms. Subject leaders are well supported through focused guidance and protected time to fulfil their role. Leaders prioritise staff wellbeing and maintain effective relationships with parents, who are supportive of the school's work.

Governors are well trained, well informed and actively involved in the school. They hold leaders to account effectively, providing both support and challenge to ensure that resources are used wisely and that improvement priorities are achieved. Decisions are made in the best interests of all pupils.

Professional learning is high quality, carefully planned and sustained to continually build staff expertise. All staff access training that builds their confidence in delivering the curriculum. Leaders have ensured that essential knowledge in reading, phonics, handwriting, spelling and mathematics is securely embedded. Where curriculum thinking is fully established, pupils achieve well. Leaders are now focused on completing the curriculum plans for a small number of remaining subjects to ensure a consistent approach across the school.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils at this school achieve well and enjoy learning. They listen carefully in lessons, work hard and take pride in their work. Teaching enables pupils to build secure knowledge and skills so that by the end of Year 6 they are well prepared for secondary school. Pupils do well in reading and phonics and achieve particularly well in mathematics, writing and spelling. Pupils who need extra help, including those who are disadvantaged or pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, receive timely support. Staff know pupils well and adapt learning so that pupils progress well from their starting points. Pupils who join from other schools or other countries settle quickly because staff care for them and help them feel welcome and confident.

Pupils are happy and proud of their school and feel that they belong. The school ensures that all pupils are supported well and have many opportunities to grow and succeed. Pupils are included in all aspects of school life and form positive relationships with staff and with each other. They enjoy a wide range of clubs, including cricket, choir, girls' football and friendship club. These opportunities help pupils to discover new talents and encourage them to develop these further through clubs in the local community. Trips and visitors to school broaden pupils' horizons and help them build confidence beyond the classroom.

Pupils behave well, show respect and listen to one another. They feel safe and know that adults will help them if they have worries. Pupils say that bullying does not happen often and that staff deal with any incidents promptly and effectively. Most pupils attend regularly and value coming to school. They learn how to be kind and responsible. Through their experiences at Charles Darwin, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to prioritise their work on attendance to ensure that pupils who are in receipt of pupil premium or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities attend school more regularly.
 - Leaders should finalise their curriculum design in the early years, and in a small minority of subjects in key stages 1 and 2, to ensure that staff have all of the information that they need to know what to teach and when to teach it.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff prioritise pupils' learning of times tables with more urgency so that pupils increase their fluency and are well prepared to apply this in their future learning.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Mrs Alison Massey.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke to the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher/special educational needs coordinator and subject leaders. They also spoke with the vice-chair of governors, a co-opted governor and a representative of the local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not use any alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. Both the headteacher and deputy headteacher are newly appointed.

Headteacher: Mrs Marianne Bennett

Lead inspector:

Frith Murphy, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Kevin Simpson, Ofsted Inspector

Andrew Marlow, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 13 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

355

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 272

School capacity

342

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

27.04%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 26.3%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

3.66%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

13.52%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	71%	61%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	75%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	70%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	68%	60%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	79%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	89%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	76%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	70%	73%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	85%	72%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	82%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	83%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	91%	71%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	89%	73%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	89%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	89%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	89%	73%	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	64%	46%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	68%	47%	Above
2023/24 (final)	50%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	67%	44%	Above

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	74%	62%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	89%	63%	Above
2023/24 (final)	60%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	67%	60%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	85%	59%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	84%	59%	Above
2023/24 (final)	80%	58%	Above
2022/23 (final)	89%	58%	Above

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	81%	60%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	89%	61%	Above
2023/24 (final)	70%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	78%	59%	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference

between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	64%	68%	-4 pp
2024/25 (revised)	68%	69%	-1 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	67%	-17 pp
2022/23 (final)	67%	66%	0 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	74%	80%	-5 pp
2024/25 (revised)	89%	81%	9 pp
2023/24 (final)	60%	80%	-20 pp
2022/23 (final)	67%	78%	-12 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	85%	78%	7 pp
2024/25 (revised)	84%	78%	6 pp
2023/24 (final)	80%	78%	2 pp
2022/23 (final)	89%	77%	12 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	81%	80%	1 pp
2024/25 (revised)	89%	81%	9 pp
2023/24 (final)	70%	79%	-9 pp
2022/23 (final)	78%	79%	-1 pp

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	5.0%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	6.3%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	5.3%	5.9%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	14.8%	13.3%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	18.0%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	13.9%	16.2%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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