

Houghton CofE School

Address: Jackson Road, Houghton, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 0PA

Unique reference number (URN): 112250

Inspection report: 6 May 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.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise attendance. They closely track patterns and act quickly when concerns arise. This well-considered approach is reducing persistent absence, including for disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, attendance is now close to the national average. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities attend well. Leaders work closely with families to identify barriers to attendance and use support from external agencies where needed. This has helped improve attendance across the school, including for pupils with previously low attendance.

Pupils behave well across the school. Classrooms and corridors are calm. Pupils understand and follow rules and routines. Pupils are respectful, listen carefully and stay focused in lessons. Staff apply the school's behaviour policy with consistency, and pupils understand the language linked to it. Positive relationships are plentiful, and staff know and support pupils well. This includes teaching them ways to help manage their emotions and resolve conflict with others. As a result, incidents of bullying, discriminatory language and harassment are rare, but dealt with quickly. Restorative approaches help pupils learn from mistakes. Pupils feel safe, value the quiet spaces available to them and are very positive about their experiences in school.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate view of the curriculum and teaching. They check quality often through visits, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with pupils. This helps leaders take appropriate action where needed, such as strengthening handwriting provision or building vocabulary and communication skills in younger pupils. Some of these actions are at an early stage of implementation. The curriculum is broad, ambitious and well sequenced. It sets clear end points and builds knowledge in a logical order.

Teaching is typically clear and structured. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They explain new ideas well, model learning and revisit previous content to help pupils remember key knowledge. Staff check understanding and address misconceptions as they arise. Pupils receive additional support in areas they find tricky. However, at times, teaching moves on before some pupils are ready, which slows their progress. In a small number of classes, expectations for handwriting and grammar are not as high as elsewhere.

Staff generally know pupils' needs well. They adjust the curriculum so that disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the same content as their peers. Support plans for pupils with SEND are considered when delivering lessons. This enables pupils with SEND to make good progress. Staff teach phonics consistently well. They use assessment information wisely to plan next steps to support pupils' learning in early reading.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children settle quickly in the early years. Staff establish clear routines and build positive relationships with families. Leaders have identified appropriate areas to improve. This is now helping secure stronger foundations in communication and language, early reading and number. The curriculum is well sequenced and broad. Children benefit from purposeful opportunities to apply their new learning to different activities. This supports children to practise important skills. Staff make careful checks on learning. They use this information to provide individualised support that helps children make progress from their starting points.

Leaders prioritise reading. Staff teach phonics consistently well, and children apply their knowledge in their writing and reading. Adults model language well and use stories, play and conversation to strengthen vocabulary. Interactions are positive and often deliberate, helping children to develop confidence and understanding. Staff adapt activities so that all disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities can access the curriculum and achieve well.

Children behave well, share and take turns. They enjoy learning and engage confidently in activities. Leaders work closely with Year 1 staff to support transition, ensuring that any gaps are addressed. As a result, most children are ready for the next stage of their education.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders quickly and accurately identify pupils' needs. They use assessment information to build a clear picture of the barriers faced by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and those known to social care. Staff understand these needs well. They work with families and external professionals to shape support that fits each pupil.

Teachers make suitable adjustments so that most pupils follow the same curriculum as their peers. They use strategies such as providing visual prompts and giving examples for pupils to follow. These strategies, along with clear routines, help pupils learn well. Support staff help pupils well in lessons. They know pupils and use agreed strategies to support learning while building independence. Some pupils need more bespoke help, such as for pupils with emotional or communication needs. Staff provide calm and predictable routines that help these pupils take part in learning.

Leaders check pupils' progress often. They review the impact of additional support offered to groups or individuals. Leaders adjust support when pupils are not making the progress through the curriculum that is expected of them. Staff training helps them provide this extra support with growing consistency.

Leaders have strengthened their work to support disadvantaged pupils. They now identify barriers with greater precision and use assessment to provide well-targeted support. This is beginning to reduce gaps in knowledge for this group of pupils.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that need further improvement. They have created an open and collaborative culture where staff are able to share their views. Leaders draw on local clusters, research hubs and external partners to shape their priorities. This work is helping to strengthen the curriculum, including for pupils in the early years and those pupils who are disadvantaged. Leaders make decisions with pupils' best interests in mind, especially those who face barriers to learning or wellbeing.

Staff benefit from a coherent and sustained programme of professional learning. Training helps staff build their expertise. Support staff receive guidance that helps them support pupils who face barriers to learning effectively. Staff say leaders are approachable and visible. They value the steps taken to manage their workload and feel they have time to deliver on school leaders' directions. Their wellbeing is supported by offering practical help in the best ways to promote pupils' behaviour. This contributes to a positive and caring staff culture.

Governors meet their statutory duties and maintain oversight of school priorities. They use training to help ask appropriate questions that offer support and challenge. Generally, they understand school strengths and priorities. However, their understanding of the impact of work to support disadvantaged pupils is not yet as precise as it could be. Governors use their link roles to visit the school regularly. This helps them understand the staff, pupils and community the school serves. They share leaders' commitment to providing a caring and inclusive school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have built a clear and coherent personal development programme. It reflects the needs of the school and helps pupils feel safe, valued and ready to learn. Pupils understand the school's Christian values of compassion, respect and responsibility and can explain how they guide their lives. Pupils work well with one another and show growing confidence when sharing their ideas.

The programme supports pupils' understanding of the wider world well. Pupils talk in detail about different religions and recall visits to a mosque in Newcastle. This helps them appreciate the views of others and prepares them well for life in modern Britain. Pupils follow shared language about spirituality. This helps them reflect on their own beliefs, understand others and think about fairness and injustice. Pupils understand important values. They understand how, for example, democracy, respect and individual liberty are shown in school.

The personal development curriculum is age appropriate. Pupils learn about healthy relationships, physical changes and consent. They talk confidently about staying safe online and within their wider community. Pupils know about risks linked to gangs, grooming and county lines. They understand how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy. In addition, pupils understand the importance of exercise, balanced diets and spending time enjoying activities in nature.

Leaders make sure that disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities can access the full offer. They track participation in clubs and wider opportunities and make adjustments so all pupils can take part. Pupils enjoy a broad range of enrichment activities. These include music tuition and judo, gymnastics and gardening clubs. Residential visits and school trips are closely linked to the curriculum and help make learning memorable. Pupils have varied opportunities to take roles of responsibility. These opportunities include being wellbeing champions, worship leaders, sports leaders and 'eco reds'. Experiences like these help pupils build confidence, compassion and awareness of environmental issues. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Over time, some pupils have not achieved well enough. Weaknesses in forming letters, punctuating sentences and writing fluently have limited some pupils' progress across the curriculum. Disadvantaged pupils have achieved less well than other disadvantaged pupils nationally. Pupils with gaps in their learning find it harder to access more complex learning as they move through school.

Leaders now keep a closer eye on pupils' progress. They use this information to provide timely support. As a result, many pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, read and write well and catch up towards age-related expectations. Changes to the curriculum now mean staff provide opportunities for pupils to revisit previous learning. This is helping pupils to remember learning and make connections to previous topics. Staff also address basic errors quickly to help pupils identify and address gaps. However, this work is not yet embedded, so some pupils are not as well prepared for their next stage as they should be.

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

Pupils enjoy coming to Houghton Church of England school. They receive a warm welcome each morning and trust that adults know them well. Pupils feel safe because staff listen carefully and help them sort out any worries. They trust adults to deal with issues fairly and appreciate the calm spaces available when they need time to think or reset. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including online and when out in the community. They know who to turn to if they need help.

Pupils enjoy their learning and are positive about the range of experiences the school provides. They value trips to farms, museums and places of worship. Pupils say these experiences help lessons feel interesting and memorable. They enjoy reading and talk confidently about the books they are exploring. Pupils understand the school's Christian values of compassion, respect and responsibility. They know how these guide their behaviours and relationships with others.

Behaviour is calm, and pupils work well together. Bullying is rare. Staff help pupils resolve disagreements quickly. Older pupils enjoy helping the wellbeing of younger ones and take pride in contributing to school life. Pupils know their views matter. Pupils and staff work together to improve recycling, grow crops and improve play equipment outdoors, for example. Pupils value these experiences and are closely connected to the school.

Most pupils achieve well and make good progress from their starting points. They enjoy improving their work and value the support they receive. However, some pupils have gaps in important knowledge, particularly in writing. This limits how well prepared they are for the next stage of their education. Nevertheless, pupils talk with pride about the responsibilities they hold and the way the school helps them grow in confidence. Learning together in a caring community encourages them to be curious, compassionate and ready to take on new challenges.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to evaluate the progress of disadvantaged pupils closely so that additional support is timely, focused on the right aspects and helps them achieve well across the curriculum.
 - Leaders should ensure that the curriculum, and the way it is taught, enables pupils to address gaps in foundational knowledge, particularly in writing, so that more pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
 - Leaders should ensure that those responsible for governance receive precise information about the impact of the pupil premium strategy so they can support and challenge leaders effectively to further improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors for this school is David Mutter.

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 with the headteacher and other senior leaders during the inspection. They also met with members of the local governing body, as well as representatives from the local authority and Diocese of Carlisle.

Inspectors spoke with several pupils, staff and parents and carers. They considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys.

The school is registered as having a Christian religious character. It is in the Diocese of Carlisle. Its last section 48 inspection was in June 2018.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not use alternative provision.

Headteacher: Stephen Johnston

Lead inspector:

Andy Beattie, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Liz Kelly, Ofsted Inspector

Keith Wright, 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 6 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

183

Below 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

210

Below 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)

6.56%

Well below 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

8.20%

Well above 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

8.74%

Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Below 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	65%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	68%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	62%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	65%	60%	Close to average

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	71%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	75%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	72%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	65%	73%	Below

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	76%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	79%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	72%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	78%	71%	Close to average

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	71%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	71%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	72%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	70%	73%	Close to average

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	33%	46%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	47%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	46%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	44%	S

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	33%	62%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	63%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

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	33%	59%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	59%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	58%	S

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	33%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	61%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	59%	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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	33%	68%	-34 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	69%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	66%	S

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	33%	80%	-46 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	78%	S

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	33%	78%	-44 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	78%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	77%	S

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	33%	80%	-46 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	79%	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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 (3 term)	5.7%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	7.8%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	7.5%	5.9%	Above

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 (3 term)	13.6%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	18.8%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	21.8%	16.2%	Above

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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