

Butterknowle Primary School

Address: Pinfold Lane, Butterknowle, Bishop Auckland, County Durham, DL13 5PB

Unique reference number (URN): 114102

Inspection report: 10 February 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 promote a sense of community. Pupils enjoy coming to school. This can be seen in the overall attendance figures. The school has formed positive relationships with families. Any barriers to pupils attending school are well understood and appropriate support is put in place. Leaders are working to further reduce limited elements of absence that are linked to holidays taken during the school term.

Relationships between adults and pupils are warm and caring. Pupils show kindness and respect for everyone. They learn and play together with enthusiasm and consideration. Bullying or unkind behaviour are seldom seen and would not be tolerated if they did occur. Pupils are encouraged to discuss their emotions. They know that there is always someone who will listen to them.

In lessons, pupils generally focus well. When learning tasks are less clear, some pupils find it more difficult to concentrate. Behaviour across the school and at playtimes is typically positive. This begins in the early years, where children are taught the importance of sharing and taking turns. Leaders have introduced systems that allow them to track and monitor any incidents of poor behaviour with increased accuracy.

Early years

Expected standard 

Early Years provision provides children with a secure and happy start to their school life. Leaders prioritise high-quality early education and demonstrate expertise in designing learning that creates opportunities for children to develop curiosity and resilience. Learning is carefully sequenced to develop knowledge and skills across all areas. Children with barriers to learning are quickly identified and staff ensure that adjustments are made to enable them to learn successfully. This results in children being well prepared for key stage 1.

Staff understand child development, particularly the differing needs of Nursery and Reception children. They work effectively with parents and carers. Provision is well matched to children's different stages of development. Staff are effective in combining different types of learning opportunities to promote children's understanding of number and writing skills. There is an immediate focus on reading when children start school. Staff are skilled in teaching phonics, and, because of this, children quickly develop the ability to decode words.

Language development is at the heart of the curriculum. Staff use every opportunity to model talk, engage children with conversation and promote the use of a wide range of vocabulary. Children are attentive, motivated and resilient learners who collaborate well, demonstrating kindness and respect for each other.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

This school welcomes everyone. Staff are committed to ensuring that all pupils can achieve, belong and thrive. Leaders have introduced new systems which support staff to identify

barriers to learning swiftly. This has been further supported through the training that staff have received. They carefully monitor pupils' needs and put in timely additional support if this is needed. Links to a range of agencies and professionals are used well to ensure that pupils receive the support they need. Leaders have further improved the precision of individual targets set for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This ensures that pupils' steps in learning are clear and well understood.

Leaders have started to utilise pupil premium funding effectively to ensure that pupils, regardless of any barriers they may face, can access all aspects of school life.

Families are well informed about the systems and processes the school follows to gain support for individual pupils. The school works positively with parents and carers to identify the best ways to overcome pupils' individual barriers to learning. They are welcomed to work with the school to support pupils to succeed.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

There have been significant changes in leadership at the school since September 2025. The school has joined a federation of 5 other schools, and 2 co-headteachers now lead this federation. As well as this, a new governing body has been formed to have oversight of all the federation schools.

The newly formed governing body understands its duties well. Governors provide appropriate challenge and they support the school effectively. There is a shared understanding of the importance of improving the curriculum and raising achievement swiftly. The best interests of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are at the heart of all decisions made.

The co-headteachers' clear vision and understanding of the school's strengths and of the areas that need to improve are well understood by all. Where improvements are needed, leaders have made rapid decisions and implemented change quickly. These changes have had a swift and positive impact on the effectiveness of the school. Networking and training opportunities through other federation schools further support and develop staff knowledge. Staff value this. They say they feel energised and positive about the changes that have been made. Staff recognise that this has, at times, added to their workload. However, they feel that leaders appreciate this and make provision to ensure all improvements are manageable. Staff state that they are looking forward to making further improvements in the future.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders place great emphasis on developing a sense of belonging to their community. They provide opportunities for pupils to learn about their local area and the wider world. Pupils learn about values such as respect, tolerance and relationships. Most pupils demonstrate positive behaviour, independence and resilience. This is supported by the mixed-age groupings, as pupils learn to support others as they learn together. Effective pastoral systems ensure pupils feel safe, valued and supported. Staff know pupils well and provide timely emotional support at times of personal challenge.

The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum ensures that children in the early years, and throughout the school, learn about important topics such as democracy. Pupils deepen their understanding through being a member of the school council and identifying ways to improve the school for everyone.

Pupils have opportunities to engage in debates about local, national and international news stories. Pupils discuss these topics and reflect on how significant individuals behave, both in the past and present. For example, how the actions of Rosa Parks changed the way people are treated. Pupils are taught about safety, both online and in the wider world.

The school provides opportunities for pupils to learn about different religions through visits to different places of worship. Pupils meet others from different schools in the federation. Leaders are currently developing further opportunities for pupils to learn about and experience things beyond their local community. Leaders have started to introduce a range of enrichment opportunities. These include residential visits, trips to see theatre performances and opportunities to take part in sporting events. A range of clubs is also run in the school regularly. These clubs enable pupils to try new things, such as mindfulness. Attendance at clubs is not currently monitored as closely as it could be for leaders to assure themselves that disadvantaged pupils consistently benefit from these opportunities.

Needs attention ●

Achievement

Needs attention ●

Pupils' achievement remains a key priority for improvement. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has been significantly below national averages over time. This data is partly influenced by very small cohort sizes. That said, the fact remains that, over time, pupils have not been as well prepared for secondary school as they should be. Leaders' actions are beginning to address this for pupils currently at the school.

Pupils' achievement in phonics improved significantly in 2025. This reflects the secure levels of phonics knowledge that pupils typically have in key stage 1 and the early years.

In subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics, pupils' knowledge is variable in some areas. In some subjects, pupils build up a secure level of understanding. However, there remain some subjects in which pupils do not have the opportunities to apply or explore knowledge in sufficient depth. This limits their understanding of some key concepts.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention ●

Leaders have further improved the focus on ensuring pupils develop the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have recently revised systems to check pupils' learning of the important knowledge in the curriculum. However this is still in the early stages. Teachers are not consistently using information gained from these checks to inform future learning opportunities.

In the early years and key stage 1, reading is taught well and staff deliver the phonics programme with confidence. Staff benefit from regular coaching in phonics and support children well. Mathematics is also taught effectively. Important vocabulary is developed well and pupils use this with confidence during their learning activities.

In key stage 2, the picture is more variable. Previously, some pupils have not been supported as well as they should to build their reading and mathematical knowledge. Leaders are addressing this. Targeted intervention groups are beginning to support pupils who struggle to decode words or lack fluency in reading and daily opportunities enable all pupils to develop greater confidence with numbers.

The changes to the curriculum are beginning to have a positive impact. Teachers are implementing progressive sequences of learning to help pupils learn in wider curriculum areas. However, there is more to do to adapt these sequences, to ensure that they are better matched to the needs of some pupils.

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

This is a small, friendly school, where pupils and staff are happy, respected and valued. Pupils attend regularly and they enjoy learning here. They feel safe and cared for. Everyone shows kindness and respect for each other. This is especially evident as pupils of different ages learn together in the mixed-aged classes. Pupils report that behaviour is generally positive, which helps them to learn. However, at less structured times of the day it can become boisterous. Pupils say bullying doesn't happen here, but if it did the staff would deal with it swiftly.

The school has recently been through a period of change. It is now part of the Durham Dales Partnership. New leaders and governors have lost no time in identifying areas which need to be improved and in raising expectations for pupils' achievement. They are working well with staff to make these improvements at pace. A new curriculum has been introduced. It ensures that all pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or other barriers to learning, have access to a broad range of subjects. However, there remains more to do to ensure that all pupils secure the essential basic knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. Currently, a number of pupils in key stage 2 have gaps in what they know and remember. This prevents them from achieving as well as they should.

Pupils develop a sense of belonging to the community. Parents and carers are regularly welcomed into the school for specific events, such as to learn about online safety. Pupils are also encouraged to learn about the world beyond the school. This is an area which leaders are keen to develop further.

Next steps

- Leaders should further develop the expertise of staff so that they consistently enhance the opportunities and experiences of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational

needs and/or disabilities.

- Leaders should develop staff confidence in using the newly introduced curriculum to design learning activities which deepen pupils' knowledge and enable teachers to check learning effectively.
 - Leaders should ensure that pupils in key stage 2 are given swift support to gain the foundational knowledge they need to achieve well at the end of Year 6.
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About this inspection

The joint chairs of the board of governors in this school are Mr Mark den Hollander and Mrs Hilary Currie.

This school is part of The Durham Dales Partnership.

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 both co-headteachers and other leaders in the school, as well as representatives from the school's governing board. They also spoke with other staff, parents and carers.

They considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspectors spoke with a representative of the local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not currently use alternative provision.

Co-headteachers: Mrs Sarah Hodgkinson and Mr Richard Sains

Lead inspector:

Andrea Batley, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Malcolm Kirtley, 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 10 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

50

Well 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

84

Well 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)

26.00%

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

2.00%

Below 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

20.00%

Above 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	29%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	29%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	22%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

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	38%	74%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	29%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	44%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	73%	S

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	48%	72%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	43%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	56%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	71%	S

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	33%	73%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	43%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	22%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	73%	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

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		46%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	47%	S
2023/24		46%	
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		62%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	63%	S
2023/24		62%	
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		59%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	59%	S
2023/24		58%	
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		60%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	61%	S
2023/24		59%	
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		68%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	69%	S
2023/24		67%	
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		80%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	81%	S
2023/24		80%	

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
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		78%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	78%	S
2023/24		78%	
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		80%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	81%	S
2023/24		79%	
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 (2 term)	4.4%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	7.1%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	7.0%	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 (2 term)	4.8%	13.3%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	20.8%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	22.2%	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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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