

Harrowgate Hill Primary School

Address: Thompson Street West, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 0HZ

Unique reference number (URN): 135088

Inspection report: 17 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

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise the early years and have a clear vision for providing high-quality education and care. They know their strengths and what needs to improve. The curriculum is ambitious, well sequenced and tailored to children's age and stage of learning. Communication, language, phonics and early mathematics are central to the provision. Phonics is taught well, with most children successful in their learning. Recent curriculum changes have helped children to develop solid foundations in handwriting, supported by targeted physical development work for those who need it.

In wider topics, such as understanding the world, staff help children build a sense of time and place. Resources and activities usually help children get the most from their learning. Children in both Nursery and Reception are keen to try new things. Staff support them with high-quality talk that helps develop language and vocabulary. Staff promote children's wellbeing, building secure relationships that support emotional development and independence. Routines and expectations are clear and children typically meet these. Staff ensure swift support for children who need extra help. As a result, children, including those who are disadvantaged, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who face other barriers, achieve well from their starting points and are ready for Year 1.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have created an inclusive culture, where pupils' individual needs are identified early and addressed with care. Staff know pupils well, including those who are disadvantaged, have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or are known to children's social care. This knowledge helps adults understand pupils' starting points and put the right support in place. In the early years and beyond, many pupils make progress academically and socially. This is because adjustments and strategies used to help those who need extra help are chosen with purpose, helping remove barriers to learning and wellbeing.

Leaders take a strategic approach to support. They use clear review cycles to check whether help is working. Leaders also change help when necessary. This ensures pupils receive increasingly precise support. Staff benefit from regular training that strengthens inclusive practice across the school. Parents describe being involved in planning for their children. Leaders work closely with external professionals, including the virtual school, to shape pupils' provision and aspirations.

Recently, the school's strategies to support disadvantaged pupils have been thoughtfully reshaped. Leaders now use a clear plan rooted in evidence-based approaches. Current work is focused on closing gaps for older pupils. Although leaders know there is more to do to embed this work fully, inclusive systems are securely in place and pupils typically experience well-matched, effective support.

Leaders ensure that pupils grow as confident, respectful and responsible young people. They place pupils' personal development at the heart of the school's work and provide many opportunities for pupils to take on meaningful roles. For example, pupils can be reading ambassadors, science leaders or members of the school council. Through these roles, pupils learn how to contribute to school life and understand ideas, such as democracy and shared responsibility. Pupils understand difference and show respect for others. They learn about a wide range of beliefs, backgrounds and cultures, and apply this understanding in their day-to-day interactions. Incidents of unkind behaviour, including discriminatory comments, are rare.

Leaders have established a well-planned programme of personal development that teaches pupils how to stay safe, both online and in the wider world. As a result, pupils can talk confidently about the risks they may encounter and how to manage them. This taught curriculum is enriched by well-chosen experiences. For example, pupils take part in pedestrian safety training and local visits that help them understand how to keep themselves safe in different environments. In the early years, children learn how to be resilient and show this as they tackle challenges with increasing independence. Leaders ensure that the programme remains responsive to pupils' needs, including through the use of pupil questionnaires to check what pupils know and what they need to revisit.

A broad range of enrichment activities help pupils discover and develop their interests and talents. Pupils enjoy sports clubs, drama and a variety of trips and residentials that broaden their horizons and build their confidence. Leaders remove any barriers to participation, including for disadvantaged pupils. Pastoral support is well matched to pupils' needs. Dedicated staff help pupils feel a sense of belonging. Leaders also work with external agencies to promote pupils' mental health and wellbeing, ensuring support is timely and appropriate.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Over time, pupils have not achieved as well as they should. This includes those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. Although there are early signs of curriculum improvement, this has not currently led to secure gains in pupils' achievement. Pupils make variable progress through the curriculum. Some build knowledge successfully, but others struggle to recall prior learning or explain the ideas they are taught. As a result, some cannot consistently apply their knowledge independently or in new situations.

Reading is an area of success. Pupils increasingly achieve better outcomes in this area. Many pupils enjoy reading and use these skills to access the wider curriculum with growing confidence. Pupils' writing, including handwriting, is less well developed. Leaders recognise this and have taken steps to address it. In the early years, children now achieve well in this

crucial skill. There is still work to do to ensure all pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Pupils' attendance has been below national averages over time. Too many pupils are regularly absent, and this negatively affects their learning and progress. Leaders understand the importance of regular attendance and have made it a priority. They have strengthened their systems, including more direct work with families and clearer expectations for pupils. For some pupils, this is beginning to make a positive difference, with improved attendance patterns emerging. However, this work is still at an early stage, and it is too soon to know whether these improvements will be sustained.

Across the school, pupils generally show positive attitudes to learning. During social times and when moving around the school, pupils are calm and orderly. Pupils and staff understand the behaviour systems well, including 'good to be green' and 'red cards'. While a minority of parents and pupils raise concerns about bullying, leaders monitor concerns closely and act promptly. Bullying is not tolerated, and pupils feel confident talking to a trusted adult, when they need help. For pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, staff make appropriate adjustments to behaviour support. Trained adults and well-designed spaces help these pupils regulate their emotions so they can usually re-engage with learning effectively.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

The effectiveness of some teaching is too variable. Where teaching is effective, staff use secure subject knowledge and present learning clearly. This is not consistently the case. In some lessons, staff do not spot or address gaps in pupils' learning quickly enough. Some teaching does not consistently help pupils to secure key knowledge over time. Where this is the case, pupils struggle to recall what they have learned before, or to move on confidently in their learning.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum is well sequenced and suitably ambitious across all years. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged usually get the help they need. Teachers generally adapt learning so that pupils with SEND access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers.

Leaders prioritise reading, writing, mathematics and communication. Phonics is taught well by expert staff. If pupils fall behind, teaching helps them catch up promptly. Leaders review the impact of the curriculum. They have made changes to mathematics that have improved how staff sequence learning and structure lessons. Teachers follow agreed expectations and ensure that pupils keep up. The teaching of handwriting has not been impactful over time. While support in the early years has improved and wider plans are in place, changes for older pupils are not fully embedded and the teaching of writing is not consistently established across the school.

Leaders' work has not currently secured the improvements needed in key areas of the school. Although leaders and governors understand the school's broad strengths and weaknesses, they do not evaluate the impact of their decisions with enough precision, including work to engage and include parents. Leaders have taken appropriate action, and some recent work shows promise. Much of this work is new and it is too early to demonstrate sustained impact. Leaders and governors do not routinely consider the views of parents and staff well enough. This limits their understanding of the school's effectiveness and reduces their ability to shape priorities to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Leaders act in pupils' best interests, including those who are disadvantaged, have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are known to children's social care or face other barriers to learning. They promote a culture where all pupils can belong. Staff value leaders' consideration of workload and wellbeing but not all feel equally included. Some staff report variation in how behaviour systems are applied and in the support they receive. Many parents value the school's work, although some say communication could be clearer and more consistent. Leaders ensure that professional development is evidence-informed and linked to school priorities. Teaching staff speak positively about recent training, including opportunities to develop practice with their peers. However, leaders do not check effectively enough that these training approaches are fully embedded in teachers' classroom practice. Leaders and governors engage well with external support, which has helped to strengthen aspects of their work.

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

Pupils are safe and well cared for in this happy, nurturing school. They enjoy warm relationships with staff, who know them well and make sure they feel valued. Pupils are polite, kind and welcoming and they treat one another with respect. They typically behave well in lessons and around school and most say they feel confident talking to a member of staff if something worries them. When disruption or bullying does occur, it is usually dealt with quickly.

Many pupils enjoy lessons where well-chosen books support their learning. This begins in the early years, where children experience a structured, language-rich day. Stories, rhymes and carefully designed activities help children develop early reading, mathematics and communication skills. Children in Nursery and Reception get off to a positive start in school. Work to develop pupils' writing throughout the school is at a very early stage.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive support that helps them take part in lessons. Staff use routines and strategies that help to remove barriers to pupils' learning, for example visual timetables that help pupils to know what is coming up next.

Pupils at Harrowgate Hill Primary School have not achieved as well as they should have, over time. Despite recent improvements, their progress through the curriculum varies too much. In some lessons, teaching helps pupils build knowledge securely and understand how new ideas link together. In others, gaps in pupils' learning are not noticed or addressed

swiftly enough. Some pupils struggle to remember important content or use their previous learning confidently in new situations. These pupils cannot consistently work independently and are not fully ready for the next stage in their education. For some pupils, low attendance makes learning harder because they miss important lessons.

Pupils value the clubs, activities and wider opportunities the school provides that help them grow in confidence and experience new things. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders and governors should evaluate the impact of their actions more precisely, so that improvement accelerates across the school, including in the engagement of parents and the wider community.
 - Leaders should ensure teaching across the curriculum, including writing, builds pupils' knowledge and skills securely so that they develop greater independence, apply learning confidently in different contexts and achieve well over time.
 - Leaders should make sure that staff quickly identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge, this includes ensuring that staff consistently provide high-quality support for older pupils who face barriers to their learning, thus enabling all pupils to be well prepared for their next steps.
 - Leaders should more accurately identify and address barriers to pupils' attendance and continue to strengthen their work with families, so that attendance improves over time for all pupil groups, including those that are disadvantaged.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Robert Bell.

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, deputy headteacher, school improvement advisor, local authority representative, chair of governors and other school leaders during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Headteacher: Amanda Abbott

Lead inspector:

Hannah Millett, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Emily Stevens, His Majesty's Inspector

Sonia Fraser, Ofsted Inspector

Andrew Yeomans, 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 17 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

440

Well 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

708

Well above 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)

31.14%

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

0.91%

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

13.41%

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

Close to 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	39%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	48%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	44%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	26%	60%	Below

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	65%	74%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	67%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	67%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	60%	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	59%	72%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	67%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	55%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	55%	71%	Below

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	56%	73%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	66%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	56%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	46%	73%	Below

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	21%	46%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	27%	47%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	14%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	19%	44%	Below

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	54%	62%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	58%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	48%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	56%	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	36%	59%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	42%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	24%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	38%	58%	Below

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	39%	60%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	42%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	33%	59%	Below
2022/23 (final)	41%	59%	Below

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	21%	68%	-47 pp
2024/25 (revised)	27%	69%	-42 pp
2023/24 (final)	14%	67%	-53 pp
2022/23 (final)	19%	66%	-47 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	54%	80%	-26 pp
2024/25 (revised)	58%	81%	-23 pp
2023/24 (final)	48%	80%	-32 pp
2022/23 (final)	56%	78%	-23 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	36%	78%	-42 pp
2024/25 (revised)	42%	78%	-36 pp
2023/24 (final)	24%	78%	-54 pp
2022/23 (final)	38%	77%	-39 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	39%	80%	-41 pp
2024/25 (revised)	42%	81%	-38 pp
2023/24 (final)	33%	79%	-46 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	41%	79%	-38 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)	6.4%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	7.0%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	6.1%	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)	19.0%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	22.6%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	17.9%	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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