

Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy

Address: Birtley Lane, DH3 2LP

Unique reference number (URN): 137942

Inspection report: 2 December 2025

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 ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Attendance is a strength. Leaders have implemented a strategic approach that has sustained improvement. This has led to significant year-on-year gains in attendance and reductions in persistent and severe absence. Overall attendance is now above the national averages. Staff and pupils recognise the high priority given to attendance.

Behaviour across the school is calm, orderly and respectful. Pupils are well presented, courteous and eager to learn. There is a harmonious culture across the school where pupils of all ages prosper. Pupils feel safe and secure in this positive environment. They have excellent relationships with teachers and their peers. Pupils report that any form of discrimination or bullying is rare and dealt with immediately should it occur. Staff and pupils report that behaviour has significantly improved over time. Leaders have ensured that consistent systems and effective staff training have supported this improvement.

Leaders provide highly effective, tailored support for vulnerable pupils. For example, the school provides extra help for pupils to help manage their emotions and anxiety. This has had a significant impact in reducing suspensions. The school only excludes pupils in the most serious cases. Decisions are made carefully, often with the support from outside services and agencies.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Pupils are progressing suitably through the curriculum in key stage 3 and key stage 4. Achievement over time in published data is broadly in line with national averages. Recent outcomes at the end of key stage 4 show notable improvement across several subjects, such as languages. Pupils continue to build knowledge and develop their skills in English and mathematics more securely than in previous years.

Disadvantaged pupils' attainment has improved in the last year and is now above the national average. Staff recognise that although gaps between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils have closed significantly, more work remains. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress well from their starting points.

Pupils are articulate about their learning. They recall prior knowledge successfully and apply it to new contexts. The school prepares pupils well for the next steps in their education, employment or training.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard ●

Leaders have constructed a broad and balanced curriculum. This provides pupils with appropriate opportunities for their next steps in education, employment or training. Subject

leaders understand the curriculum well and know what needs to improve. They check how well subjects are working and make improvements when needed.

Teachers are well trained and demonstrate secure subject knowledge. They teach well-planned lessons with clearly sequenced topics. This helps pupils to develop their understanding. For example, pupils build knowledge progressively in geography by using prior map-reading skills to explore human and physical features. Staff generally adapt teaching to meet pupils' needs, although on rare occasions this is variable. This means that some pupils do not learn the curriculum as securely as they could.

Leaders provide effective support to help pupils develop secure knowledge in reading, mathematics and writing. The school quickly identifies pupils who find reading a challenge and provides them with suitable help. This has a positive impact and therefore many pupils progress well with their reading. The school also supports pupils to develop handwriting skills effectively.

Teaching routines are consistent across the school, which helps pupils to focus on their learning. Teachers design activities that help most pupils to learn the curriculum well. However, sometimes, teachers do not always check pupils' understanding precisely. As a result, opportunities to deepen knowledge are sometimes missed.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

The school has an inclusive culture that makes a clear difference for disadvantaged pupils, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and children known to social care. Leaders identify pupils' needs effectively and ensure they receive timely support. This support is checked to make sure it meets pupils' needs. However, this support is not always consistently applied. In some cases, staff do not precisely meet the needs of pupils, lessening the progress that some pupils make.

Pupils with more complex needs receive appropriate care. For example, pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs receive carefully crafted interventions through in-school and alternative provision. This support helps to reduce barriers to learning and supports pupils' wellbeing.

The school works closely with families and external agencies. Leaders routinely engage with the virtual school. Personal education plans, which set out the support for looked-after children, are reviewed to ensure timely and coordinated support.

Leaders implement an evidence-based pupil premium strategy. This leads to improvements in attainment and attendance for disadvantaged pupils, narrowing gaps significantly. Pupils benefit from extra literacy help and targeted phonics groups. Library lessons, small-group reading and structured support in lessons help pupils to develop secure reading, language and communication skills.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and governors demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Leaders have embedded consistent routines and high expectations. Staff report that this has improved pupils' behaviour and created a calmer climate for learning. Staff welcome the support that they receive for their workload and wellbeing. For example, staff value initiatives such as flexi-hours and wellbeing forums. They feel supported by leaders and able to develop professionally.

Leaders provide evidence-based training, which is valued by staff and has a positive impact on their teaching. For example, staff have benefited from training about questioning techniques and adaptive teaching methods.

The school places educational research at the heart of all its professional learning programmes and development strategies. Middle leaders engage with this well and are increasingly empowered to drive further improvement in their respective areas. Leaders recognise that establishing consistency across some aspects of the curriculum, teaching and support for pupils is the next challenge.

Governors provide highly effective oversight, meeting all statutory duties and holding leaders robustly to account. They articulate a clear vision with a long-term plan, effectively supporting and challenging leaders to ensure that improvement priorities are successfully tackled.

Leaders have strengthened engagement with parents. Staff and parents report positively about the communication and support that they receive from the school.

Leadership and governance are ambitious, responsive and supportive. Leaders ensure that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are able to progress well.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is evident in lessons, assemblies and wider opportunities. Pupils reflect on ethical issues. They engage respectfully with different faiths and contribute to commemorations such as the Remembrance service.

The school provides a wide and expanding range of enrichment opportunities. Pupils talk enthusiastically about drama productions such as 'Singing in the Snow', creative writing, chess and outward-bound trips. The school ensures that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are encouraged and able to participate in these opportunities.

Pupils experience various leadership opportunities. For example, they act as peer mentors, sports leaders and anti-bullying ambassadors. They value the impact of these roles and how they benefit their own development. Sixth-form students act as role models to younger pupils. They lead assemblies, support younger pupils and work with school leaders to further improve aspects of the school's provision.

The school prepares pupils well for their next steps. Pupils are exposed to a variety of encounters with employers, universities and apprenticeship providers. The school ensures that all pupils participate in work experience. Pupils speak with confidence about their next steps and the support they receive from the school. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities develop the skills they need for adult life.

Pupils experience well-structured and inclusive pastoral care. Year group leaders and specialist staff build trusting relationships and provide tailored support. Pupils consistently report feeling known, cared for and safe. Interventions such as counselling help pupils regulate their behaviours and emotions.

Leaders' actions have created a culture where personal development is prioritised. Pupils are confident, respectful and ambitious. They understand diversity, value difference and contribute positively to the school community. They are well prepared for their future education, employment and life beyond school.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

The school has strengthened leadership capacity following a period of low A-level outcomes. Leaders have appointed pastoral managers and careers advisers to widen the team. This has created greater stability and ensured that teaching and support are checked carefully. Student outcomes have improved and are now broadly in line with national averages. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged students, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those facing other barriers to their learning, receive tailored academic and pastoral support. This helps them to progress well from their starting points.

Leaders have revised the curriculum and continue to embed it across subjects. They have ensured that it is coherent and supports academic and personal development. Leaders train teachers effectively, ensuring that the curriculum is taught well. Students work with confidence and independence.

Students value the pastoral care that they receive, support in lessons and a wide range of enrichment opportunities. They mentor younger pupils, lead assemblies and participate in international trips.

The school provides an age-appropriate personal development programme. Students learn about driving and road safety, how to care for their mental health and about health and sex education. External speakers from universities, employers and public services enrich this provision.

The school provides comprehensive careers guidance. Students undertake work experience, visit universities and receive one-to-one advice. Students practise interviews and prepare applications. Many students progress to higher education, employment or further training.

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

Pupils achieve well, enjoy their learning and blossom at this welcoming school.

Pupils behave very well. They are unfailingly polite, greet visitors cheerfully and hold doors open with a smile. They show maturity beyond their years. Pupils arrive calmly and respond positively to the high expectations of staff. They follow routines consistently and look after each other, creating a well-established sense of harmony and community.

Pupils say that bullying is rare. They are confident that staff deal with issues quickly and fairly. Pupils value their relationships with staff and appreciate the respectful way adults interact with them. The school celebrates difference and diversity. One pupil said, 'Difference is a good thing – we like people for who they are not what they are.'

Pupils enjoy their lessons. They recall prior knowledge and apply it to new contexts. However, at times, teachers do not check understanding precisely and opportunities to deepen knowledge are sometimes missed.

Sixth-form students benefit from a curriculum that is being refined and outcomes are improving. They are well prepared for university and appropriate apprenticeships. Sixth-form students act as strong role models. For example, they mentor younger pupils and support their reading.

Pupils benefit from targeted interventions that help them to secure foundational knowledge in areas such as reading, handwriting and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils, and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, receive adaptations that help them to access learning alongside their peers. However, teaching is not always adapted consistently well, and some pupils do not benefit fully from the support available.

Pupils enjoy clubs such as chess and drama. They recall trips fondly, including pantomimes, sports tours and outward bound adventures. Pupils take leadership roles as peer mentors and anti-bullying ambassadors. These opportunities help pupils to build confidence, resilience and respect for difference.

Pupils feel safe. They are proud of their school and well prepared for their next steps.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teaching is consistently adapted so that disadvantaged pupils, including those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, can access learning fully and progress very well through the curriculum.
 - Leaders should strengthen the quality of the checks that staff make on pupils' understanding and ensure this information is used consistently to deepen pupils' knowledge.
 - Leaders should continue to embed the revised post-16 curriculum so that it is implemented effectively across subjects, further raising outcomes and readiness for students' next steps.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mr Chris Smith.

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

Following our updated 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 principal, other school leaders, trustees, staff and pupils.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of 7 alternative provisions, including 6 that are unregistered.

Principal: Dr. Andrew Fowler

Lead inspector:

Chris Carr, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

John Linkins, His Majesty's Inspector

Jessica McKay, His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Sergeant, His Majesty's Inspector

Tim Johnson, His Majesty's Inspector

Nikki Heron, His Majesty's 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 2 December 2025

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,293

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: 1,067

School capacity

1,496

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: 1,152

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

32.11%

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: 28.9%

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

1.55%

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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

14.23%
Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.
National average: 13.4%

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

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25	48.9%	45.2%	Close to average
2023/24	50.8%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23	48.7%	45.3%	Close to average

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25	46.6	45.9	Close to average
2023/24	45.1	45.9	Close to average
2022/23	47.3	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	-0.28	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23	-0.09	-0.03	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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25	32.5%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24	20.0%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23	22.5%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25	38.5	34.9	Close to average
2023/24	28.9	34.6	Below
2022/23	36.0	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	-1.26	-0.57	Below
2022/23	-0.70	-0.57	Close to average

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25	32.5%	52.8%	-20.4 pp
2023/24	20.0%	53.1%	-33.1 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23	22.5%	52.4%	-29.9 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25	38.5	50.3	-11.8
2023/24	28.9	50.0	-21.1
2022/23	36.0	50.3	-14.3

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24	-1.26	0.16	-1.42
2022/23	-0.70	0.17	-0.86

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers	90%	91%	Average
2022 leavers	92%	93%	Average
2021 leavers	92%	94%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	32.99	34.38	Close to average
2022/23	33.62	34.16	Close to average
2021/22	36.20	37.86	Close to average

A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	-0.34	0.00	Below

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 (1 term)	7.5%	7.7%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	9.6%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23	9.8%	9.0%	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 (1 term)	20.9%	21.1%	Close to average
2023/24	25.9%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23	27.0%	26.5%	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.

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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