

Polam Hall School

Address: Grange Road, DL1 5PA

Unique reference number (URN): 142174

Inspection report: 25 November 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 ●

Personal development and well-being

Strong standard ●

The school's personal development programme has a considerable positive impact on pupils. Leaders have amended the school day to ensure that all pupils, but especially those who are disadvantaged, have routine access to the rich and diverse offer.

Pupils are excited about 'activities' lessons, which cover strands from 'performance' to 'volunteering and membership' as well as sports, creative options and the world of work. Leaders have designed this programme so that there is something for everyone. Pupils benefit enormously in the way that this broadens their horizons and allows them to try new activities.

The school's impressive personal, social and health education programme, known as 'Nosce Te Ipsum' (know thyself), exposes pupils to beliefs and cultures from around the world. Pupils show maturity when reflecting on world events and the experiences of others. When speaking to adults about their learning and experiences, pupils are confident and articulate.

The school values of confidence, curiosity, creativity and community form the central pillars of the enrichment offer. Pupils embody these values in their conduct.

In the primary phase, pupils become outdoor play and learning leaders. As pupils move into the secondary phase, they begin to organise activities for members of the local community. The school has been recognised nationally for the quality of the tennis activities it offers to pupils. In addition, pupils' work with local politicians is focused on online safety and is developing knowledge for pupils across the school to help them stay safe online. Pupils are excited to be involved in school drama productions.

The school's comprehensive careers programme develops pupils' ambition and aspiration. Leaders begin this work in primary school. It has a demonstrable positive impact on the courses and qualifications that pupils go on to access when they leave Polam Hall.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Outcomes for phonics have significantly improved in recent years. At the end of the primary phase many pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, develop secure knowledge across English, mathematics and the wider curriculum. They are well prepared to begin the secondary phase.

In the secondary phase, pupils learn important knowledge across the range of subjects they study. This is reflected in their achievement at the end of key stage 4. Outcomes at GCSE are broadly in line with national averages for most subjects and groups of pupils. Leaders have identified the need for improvement in a few GCSE examination subjects for some

cohorts of pupils. In these areas, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Pupils' success in being able to move on to academic and vocational courses when they leave Polam Hall helps show that pupils are fully equipped for life after secondary education.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Pupils generally attend well. Leaders ensure that attendance is part of everyone's routine day-to-day focus. Frequent celebration of pupils' successes builds positive attitudes to school. This has led to a consistently improving picture of attendance. Leaders keep a watchful eye on each pupil's attendance. This means that leaders are able to step in and offer specific support, for example, through access to external agencies or the on-site school counsellor. Form tutors and pastoral staff have a precise lens on attendance. Pupils are given regular reminders of the importance of coming to school.

Polam Hall School is a calm, positive place to learn. Pupils enjoy warm relationships with each other and with staff. Where behaviour does not meet expectations, leaders are quick to act and support pupils to bring about changes. Being kind and respectful is woven into the ethos of the school. Pupils are accepting of the differences and diversity they see and are proud to be part of a supportive school community. In lessons, many pupils are active participants in learning. Effective routines are consistently applied by all teachers, both in lessons and at social times. This creates a safe environment where pupils of all ages happily mix with each other.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The school's broad curriculum builds from the early years and gives pupils opportunities to develop deep subject knowledge. Staff receive training that clarifies the school's expectations. This includes guidance on using targeted questions to promote independent thinking and strengthen pupils' understanding of the content being taught. Leaders recognise the need to strengthen consistency across the school so that all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, achieve as well as possible. This includes developing strategies to ensure that teachers check learning effectively during lessons.

Teachers develop detailed subject knowledge through working within departments and trust subject networks. Leaders ensure that those teachers who work outside their subject specialism receive tailored training and support.

In this all-through school, leaders ensure that there is a seamless transition in the curriculum between primary and secondary. Teachers share subject knowledge and expertise across primary and secondary phases. Secondary-age pupils who need help to develop core reading and mathematical skills receive regular support from expert teachers. In the primary phase, calculation strategies and subject-specific vocabulary in mathematics are used regularly. This helps pupils to develop a clear and precise understanding of the language that they should use when talking about mathematics.

Early years

Expected standard 

The school's early years provision provides a positive start to life at Polam Hall School. Children are warmly welcomed to school each day. Well-understood routines mean that learning starts promptly with activities to build social and language skills. For example, on 'check-in Tuesday', children might think about how they show their appreciation for others.

Children quickly learn important knowledge of literacy and numeracy. Teachers model mathematical language in all areas of the early years provision. This helps to reinforce what children learn. Adults place considerable emphasis on developing children's communication. When children start to form letters, teachers encourage this through rhymes and songs. Staff teach daily phonics provision expertly. Children swiftly develop the ability to read. Well-informed staff provide appropriate extra help for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Activities such as mini-beast hunts enhance learning. The work children create shows that staff promote independence from the start. This builds the confidence and knowledge that children need to be ready for Year 1.

The spacious outdoor area has a wide range of activities to help children's physical development and to encourage them to take appropriate risks. Children play well together and show empathy for each other, for example, by sharing toys and games. Leaders develop positive partnerships with parents to ensure that they understand and have confidence in the school's routines.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders' vision that all pupils will flourish at Polam Hall is well understood by staff. They have an accurate understanding of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff use this knowledge to provide these pupils with tailored support, for example, around reading.

Leaders keep a close eye on how well the most vulnerable achieve. Where leaders judge that a strategy is not working as well as it should, they make suitable changes. The school's in-house provisions, such as 'Portunus', 'Hercules', 'Ancora' and 'Salus', provide long- and short-term support for pupils' needs ranging from anxiety to literacy and numeracy. Leaders identify pupils who need support, so they can get help and return to mainstream classrooms.

Leaders have sharpened staff training programmes to focus on developing inclusive practices. They have also set up working parties. This allows staff to coordinate support for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have developed a pupil premium strategy that outlines clear approaches to support pupils in lessons. The focus on positive relationships means that pupils are confident that they can ask for help from their teachers.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and use this knowledge to maintain and improve the quality of provision. Leaders' communication with staff is clear. For example, recent work to develop staff training around inclusion and to support the most disadvantaged pupils is clearly linked to development priorities and is well understood by staff. For those staff new to the school, leaders ensure that the vision, ethos and expectations are clearly shared.

Governors and trustees have a thorough overview of the school. Recent governance restructuring has further developed the extent and precision of their knowledge

The trust plays its full part in supporting the school. Trust-wide networking groups focus on specific aspects of provision, such as teaching and learning and provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This helps to develop staff expertise and confidence to carry out their jobs effectively.

The induction of new staff, the commitment to ongoing training and the openness of leaders in the school develop a strong sense of togetherness and community across the school. Staff feel able to raise and share concerns and suggestions, and leaders act on this to constantly improve the experiences of pupils and children who attend the school.

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

From the start of early years, pupils develop a positive view of their school. They forge warm, respectful relationships with teachers and support staff. Pupils feel safe and know who to turn to for advice and support should they need it.

Across the whole school, pupils understand what is expected of their conduct. They behave well and follow school routines. Their good-natured conduct at social times and in lessons contributes to the school's vibrant and cheerful atmosphere. Children in the early years play and learn happily with the friends they make at the school.

Pupils are enthusiastic and proud members of their school houses, Swale, Skerne, Kent and Tees. These houses provide healthy competition and high-quality pastoral care to enable pupils of all ages feel a part of one community. They enjoy working together across age groups. Older pupils take on leadership responsibility for their younger peers. Pupils' positive feelings about school reflect in their attendance.

In the primary phase, pupils learn to read with confidence and fluency. Many enjoy doing so. They have plenty of opportunities to practise using this knowledge across the curriculum. Pupils like learning and generally achieve well.

Pupils enjoy and gain a great deal from the school's 'Concordia Crescimus' curriculum. They particularly enjoy being part of the school's cadet force and completing activities that allow them to 'graduate' from key stage 3.

Pupils are very positive about the pastoral care and support that they receive. In the primary phase, pupils enjoy completing activities which help them to gain a 'passport' to secondary education. Pupils' independence and confidence are developed at all stages of their school life through these strategies. This helps to make sure that pupils are ready for life after secondary school.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to use their quality assurance systems to monitor and improve teaching across the school, so that the delivery of the curriculum across the school matches that of the most effective areas.
 - Leaders should continue their work to develop whole-school strategies that will enable pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to achieve consistently well.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Woodards Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Mike Pettifer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sally Pelham.

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 (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

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.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the principal, the CEO of Woodard Academies Trust, the chair of the trust, the chair of the local academy council and other members of the school's leadership team during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not use alternative provision.

The current chair of the trust has taken up post since the last inspection.

Principal: Mrs Kate Reid

Lead inspector:

Matthew Vellensworth, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Ian Rawstorne, His Majesty's Inspector

John Linkins, His Majesty's Inspector

Dughall McCormick, His Majesty's Inspector

Nicola Beaumont, 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 25 November 2025

School and pupil context

Total pupils

841

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: 1,067

School capacity

882

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: 1,152

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

29.61%

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

2.85%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) support

11.06%

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

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

Key stage 2

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	60%	61%	Close to average
2024/25	59%	62%	Close to average
2023/24	63%	61%	Close to average
2022/23	58%	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	72%	74%	Close to average
2024/25	69%	75%	Close to average
2023/24	81%	74%	Above
2022/23	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	74%	72%	Close to average
2024/25	71%	72%	Close to average
2023/24	79%	72%	Above
2022/23	71%	71%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in maths

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in maths.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	77%	73%	Close to average
2024/25	80%	74%	Close to average
2023/24	81%	73%	Above
2022/23	69%	73%	Close to average

Key stage 4

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	36.7%	45.2%	Close to average
2023/24	35.3%	45.9%	Below
2022/23	32.8%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

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	44.5	45.9	Close to average
2023/24	42.0	45.9	Close to average
2022/23	42.7	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	-0.05	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23	-0.34	-0.03	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.

Key stage 2

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

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	47%	46%	Close to average
2024/25	60%	47%	Above
2023/24	25%	46%	Below
2022/23	50%	44%	Close to average

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	59%	62%	Close to average
2024/25	70%	63%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	63%	62%	Close to average
2022/23	50%	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	59%	59%	Close to average
2024/25	60%	59%	Close to average
2023/24	50%	58%	Close to average
2022/23	64%	58%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in maths

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	63%	60%	Close to average
2024/25	70%	61%	Close to average
2023/24	63%	59%	Close to average
2022/23	57%	59%	Close to average

Key stage 4

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	14.3%	25.6%	Below
2023/24	23.8%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23	9.5%	25.2%	Below

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	29.8	34.9	Below
2023/24	31.2	34.6	Close to average
2022/23	33.8	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	-0.80	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23	-1.10	-0.57	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 maths

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

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	47%	68%	-21 pp
2024/25	60%	69%	-9 pp
2023/24	25%	67%	-42 pp
2022/23	50%	66%	-16 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	59%	80%	-20 pp
2024/25	70%	81%	-11 pp
2023/24	63%	80%	-17 pp
2022/23	50%	78%	-28 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	59%	78%	-18 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25	60%	78%	-18 pp
2023/24	50%	78%	-28 pp
2022/23	64%	77%	-13 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in maths

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

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	63%	80%	-17 pp
2024/25	70%	81%	-11 pp
2023/24	63%	79%	-17 pp
2022/23	57%	79%	-22 pp

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	14.3%	52.8%	-38.5 pp
2023/24	23.8%	53.1%	-29.3 pp
2022/23	9.5%	52.4%	-42.9 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	29.8	50.3	-20.5
2023/24	31.2	50.0	-18.8
2022/23	33.8	50.3	-16.5

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	-0.80	0.16	-0.96
2022/23	-1.10	0.17	-1.27

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	93%	91%	Average
2022 leavers	90%	93%	Average
2021 leavers	93%	94%	Not available

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)	7.3%	7.7%	Close to average
2023/24	8.7%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23	8.1%	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)	21.7%	21.1%	Close to average
2023/24	26.2%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23	23.4%	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 standards expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standards 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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