

Ackworth Mill Dam School

Address: Mill Gate, Ackworth, Pontefract, West Yorkshire, WF7 7PH

Unique reference number (URN): 144563

Inspection report: 6 May 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils generally achieve well. By the end of Year 6, they typically attain at or above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Most pupils meet the expected standard in the Year 2 phonics screening check.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged make secure progress from their starting points. For example, in the early years, children with SEND increase their confidence with using new vocabulary.

Pupils are proud of their work. Their books show that they progress well across the curriculum and develop their knowledge securely over time. For instance, pupils write sentences of increasing complexity and use more challenging calculation methods when they are ready.

In lessons, pupils build new learning on what they already know and can do. They develop secure subject knowledge and vocabulary across the curriculum, which they use to discuss their learning well.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Attendance is a high priority for the school. Leaders ensure they have a clear understanding of attendance trends. They closely check pupils' levels of attendance, both individually and for groups of pupils. Leaders work closely with families and external partners to support improvements in pupils' attendance. As a result, pupils attend school regularly. Their attendance is celebrated with parents and during whole-school assemblies.

Pupils typically behave well. Leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour, which pupils rise to. In most lessons, there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Most pupils follow routines successfully. Pupils conduct themselves well around the school. They are extremely well mannered and kind to each other. Recently, leaders have reviewed and strengthened their approach to provide consistency of behaviour expectations and rewards. This means that pupils are clear about what is expected of them. Leaders use suspensions appropriately. They respond to any incidents, including bullying, quickly and effectively. As a result, the number of behaviour incidents has reduced dramatically this year.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed a curriculum that is well-considered and established. They review and modify the curriculum to reflect the school's context and pupils' learning needs. Staff generally teach the curriculum well. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge and provide pupils with clear explanations of new learning. They design tasks to be interesting and relevant to pupils.

Reading is prioritised. Leaders provide high-quality texts that reflect pupils' interests. This helps to spark interest in less enthusiastic readers. Staff teach the phonics programme well.

They model sounds accurately and are quick to spot and address any errors that pupils make. Pupils read books that are well matched to their phonics knowledge.

Developing pupils' vocabulary is a priority across the school. Leaders have also prioritised oracy. Teachers encourage pupils to discuss their learning together using subject-specific vocabulary. They check pupils' learning regularly and provide opportunities for pupils to revisit prior learning. As a result, pupils build secure knowledge and skills over time.

Staff provide effective support for pupils who need additional help to catch up with their learning. This includes for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers ensure that pupils secure important knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have successfully focused on developing pupils' handwriting and spelling. Teachers model handwriting, spelling and sentence structure well.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise the early years. They have a clear vision for a high-quality early education. The early years curriculum identifies the important knowledge that children will learn, including vocabulary and skills. Children achieve well and are ready for their move on to key stage 1.

Leaders recognise the importance that communication and language have in supporting children's readiness for learning. Staff engage children in purposeful interactions. For example, they use positional language effectively. They teach children songs that support their understanding of mathematical concepts, such as counting backwards and forwards.

Children respond positively to clear expectations. In the Reception Year, children independently hang up their coats and put their lunches and water bottles in their allocated places.

Staff provide children with purposeful and engaging learning activities. Children develop high levels of independence in their learning. They sustain their concentration and increase their problem-solving skills. Nursery-age children persevere when learning to put their own coats on. Staff support children to manage risks and develop their large muscle skills, for example when balancing on climbing equipment outdoors.

Leaders quickly identify children who need additional practice to secure their learning. Staff provide appropriate support, including for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to help these children to learn well. Leaders have focused on ensuring that children have the pre-writing knowledge and skills that they need. Staff provide activities that build children's core muscle strength and their readiness to hold writing equipment. However, there is further work to develop the order in which children learn these important skills.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders identify pupils' additional needs quickly and accurately, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged.

Leaders involve parents and carers from the start. Leaders work with external agencies, such as speech and language therapy, to meet pupils' needs successfully.

Staff receive training relevant to the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. The trust has supported the school with its focus on supporting pupils to access learning, for example through the use of visual aids and ensuring staff's explanations are clear. Staff have also received training on supporting pupils with specific needs, such as neurodivergent conditions. This has led to thoughtful adaptations and activities that are tailored to pupils' needs and reflect their specific interests.

Leaders carefully check how well pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged progress through the curriculum. They make sure that additional funding is targeted and monitored to ensure that disadvantaged pupils benefit fully. Leaders adopt a range of strategies to reduce pupils' barriers to learning and widen their opportunities. However, leaders do not review the impact of the support and adaptations that staff provide for pupils with SEND as precisely as they could. This means that they are less well equipped to consistently respond well to changes in pupils' needs.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders are ambitious in providing a culture where pupils achieve success. They are determined that pupils are well equipped for their next stage. Leaders understand the school's context and carefully consider any challenges or barriers to learning or wellbeing that pupils may face.

The school benefits from a close working relationship with the trust. Expert support is on hand when needed. Leaders act in the best interests of pupils. Recent changes to the curriculum, policies and ways of working have been designed to have a positive impact on pupils' achievement.

The newly established leadership team is working well to strengthen identified areas for development. Leaders have begun to address aspects that needed additional rigour and oversight, for example behaviour expectations and arrangements for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Leaders are positive role models. They regularly teach in classrooms. Staff describe leaders as leading from the front. They value the way that leaders model what is expected and collaborate with the wider staff team. Staff feel part of the improvement journey of the school. The trust prioritises staff workload and wellbeing. Leaders check in with staff regularly. Time for professional learning is protected.

Trustees and local governors understand their statutory duties and carry them out effectively. They use high-quality evidence to support and challenge leaders. Trustees and local governors hold leaders to account effectively. They scrutinise the impact of additional funding and the support for pupils with SEND.

Most parents and carers are positive about the school.

The school has developed a personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme that meets statutory requirements. Leaders prepare pupils well for life in wider British society. Pupils know the importance of respect and tolerance of those who have differing views. Pupils have a secure understanding of protected characteristics. They know that it is illegal to discriminate based on a protected characteristic.

Pupils learn about fundamental British values. For example, pupils are selected for different responsibilities through a democratic process. Pupils refer to assemblies where they watch current affairs programmes and discuss national and global events.

Pupils learn to keep themselves safe, including online. In lessons, they discuss their learning across the PSHE curriculum. This includes learning about puberty, healthy relationships, different types of families and consent. Pupils confidently describe the importance of a healthy diet.

A range of extra-curricular clubs and activities help extend pupils' interests. The clubs on offer span a range of interests such as creativity and sport. Leaders track attendance at these clubs. This ensures they can maximise participation, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils are proud of the opportunities they have in school. They refer to memorable learning experiences such as using virtual reality headsets to explore the planets and history trips. Pupils are exposed to different notable musicians through the 'Musician of the month'. Pupils gain a great deal from their annual residential visits.

Pupils have regular opportunities to reflect on their feelings and develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. Daily journaling at the start of the school day allows pupils important moments of reflection and the chance to undertake a mindful activity. This has had a positive impact on pupils' resilience and attitude to learning. Pupils value having access to pastoral support on occasions when they may feel troubled or upset.

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

Pupils arrive at school each morning to a warm and personal welcome. They enjoy coming to school and speak positively about their learning and their teachers. Pupils write down their thoughts and complete mindful activities before their lessons begin. This helps them to prepare for the day ahead and settle quickly into their learning.

The school's environment is calm, orderly and welcoming. Pupils respond positively to leaders' clear expectations. They are polite and extremely well mannered to their peers, staff and visitors. At lunchtime, pupils socialise kindly with others, following well-established routines. Pupils feel safe in school. They know that staff care for them and will help them if they struggle with their learning or have any worries. Pupils feel listened to and valued. Bullying is rare and staff deal with any issues promptly. Pupils attend school well. They enjoy all the benefits that being in school regularly brings.

Pupils engage well in lessons and take pride in their work. Teachers check their understanding regularly. Pupils generally build their knowledge well over time. Staff provide

effective support for pupils with any barriers to their learning. Pupils achieve well and are ready for their next stages of education.

Pupils take on meaningful leadership roles in school, such as being members of the eco-council. They have access to a range of clubs and activities that develop their talents and interests. Pupils talk positively about memorable learning experiences, including using virtual-reality headsets and history trips. They learn about different musicians through 'musician of the month'. Pupils relish opportunities to go on residential visits.

Pupils understand diversity and the importance of having respectful relationships. They know that it is important to treat everyone fairly. Pupils can talk about staying safe, including when accessing the internet.

Next steps

- Leaders should refine the order of important knowledge and skills in the early years curriculum, to ensure that children's learning builds on what they already know and can do.
 - Leaders should further refine systems to monitor the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, ensuring that any adaptations and support that staff provide are fully effective.
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About this inspection

This school is part of The Waterton Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, David Dickinson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Stephen Johnson.

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 HMI.

Inspectors spoke with the executive headteacher, head of school, other school leaders, staff and pupils. They also spoke with representatives of the trust and the academy standards committee.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

The executive headteacher and the head of school have been appointed since the last inspection.

Lead inspector:

Dughall McCormick, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Andy Taylor, Ofsted Inspector

Georgina Chinaka, 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 6 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

219

Close to 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

236

Close to 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)

16.92%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 26.3%

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

4.57%

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: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

8.22%

Well below 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	66%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	68%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	69%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	56%	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	70%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	76%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	69%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	63%	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	85%	72%	Above
2024/25 (final)	84%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	88%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	81%	71%	Above

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	81%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	72%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	85%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	88%	73%	Above

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	50%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	57%	47%	Close to average

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

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	56%	62%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	71%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	75%	59%	Above
2024/25 (final)	86%	59%	Above
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	58%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

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

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

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

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

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

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

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	50%	68%	-18 pp
2024/25 (final)	57%	69%	-12 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	66%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

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

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	56%	80%	-23 pp
2024/25 (final)	71%	81%	-9 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	78%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	75%	78%	-3 pp
2024/25 (final)	86%	78%	7 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	77%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

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

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	63%	80%	-17 pp
2024/25 (final)	57%	81%	-23 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	S	79%	S

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

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	4.6%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.0%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	5.1%	5.9%	Below

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	8.5%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	12.7%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	12.3%	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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