

Darwen Aldridge Sudell Primary

Address: Ellison Fold Terrace, Darwen, Lancashire, BB3 3EB

Unique reference number (URN): 141838

Inspection report: 17 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

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

How we evaluate safeguarding

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

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

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

The action that leaders have taken to improve the poor attendance of pupils in previous years is working. Most pupils arrive at school on time. Rates of attendance overall are now in line with national averages. Leaders provide effective support for pupils who struggle to attend regularly. The rates of persistent absence for some groups of pupils remain high when compared to other schools nationally. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils who face additional challenges in their lives. However, the attendance of these groups of pupils is improving over time.

Pupils typically behave well. They socialise and cooperate with staff and each other throughout the school day. Leaders have effective systems in place to promote positive behaviour and attitudes to school. Pupils respond willingly to these. They are polite, respectful and well mannered. Pupils move around the school with care and awareness of others. Most remain focused on their learning during lessons. Staff use consistent strategies to manage pupils' behaviour. They adapt their practice suitably to meet pupils' differing needs. Staff provide effective support if pupils struggle to manage their emotions. Incidents of bullying and name calling are rare. Leaders deal with these incidents thoroughly.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders make sure that all pupils feel welcome at the school. They consider carefully the differing needs of pupils who face additional challenges in their lives. Leaders liaise effectively with parents and carers. They also consult with professionals who provide specialist support for pupils. This includes those who oversee children in care or work in alternative provision. Leaders provide well-thought-out plans for pupils who need additional support. They check that all pupils receive their full educational entitlement. Leaders also ensure that pupils make progress from their differing starting points. They ensure that additional funding is used effectively.

Leaders keep a close eye on how all pupils achieve and thrive at school. They take appropriate action when this is not the case. On the whole, disadvantaged pupils access the curriculum successfully alongside their peers. They also take an active role in the wider life of the school. This is equally true for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders enable teachers to accurately identify and understand the needs of pupils with SEND. Leaders work closely with teachers to decide how to support pupils best. The information that leaders provide helps teachers to understand how to adapt their classroom practices to meet pupils' needs.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders provide an effective and carefully crafted personal development programme for pupils. They ensure that pupils access high-quality experiences. Pupils enjoy the trips and clubs that leaders provide. These activities broaden pupils' understanding of the wider world. They also enrich and support pupils' learning across the curriculum.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn how to stay fit and well. Pupils take part in regular physical activity. They learn how to maintain their own physical and mental wellbeing. Pupils use the school's 'worry monster' or speak to a trusted adult to let staff know when they feel anxious.

Pupils understand the importance of rules. They learn about the fundamental British values. Pupils understand how these reflect their own school's ethos. They recognise how activities such as voting captures everyone's points of view. Pupils are respectful of others and their differing opinions and experiences. They understand what equality means. Pupils learn about other faiths and cultures represented in modern Britain. Their learning prepares them for living in a diverse society when they are older.

Pupils embrace the leadership roles on offer. These include acting as a play or reading leader. Leaders make sure that disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities carry out these roles whenever possible. They make sure that these pupils receive the support that they need to experience success. Through activities such as these, pupils develop character and resilience. They also learn how to help others. Pupils develop their confidence in making a positive contribution to their school and wider community.

Leaders provide an effective relationship and sex education programme. Pupils understand the changes that occur during puberty. They learn how to keep themselves and others safe, including when online. They have an age-appropriate understanding of consent.

Needs attention ●

Achievement

Needs attention ●

Pupils' achievement is variable. Pupils are not prepared as well as they could be for their next stages of education. Until recently, pupils' attainment evident in the school's published results has been very low compared to other schools. Pupils currently on roll are learning the new curriculum. However, some have unaddressed gaps in their knowledge. This means that, at times, their understanding is superficial and is not fully embedded. Some pupils struggle to produce neat and legible written work. This is especially true for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who face other challenges in their lives.

Pupils' development of early reading knowledge is more secure than the school's published results of the Year 1 phonics check might suggest. However, due to weaknesses in the previous curriculum, there are pupils in different year groups who do not have the fluency and accuracy in reading that they need to access the curriculum successfully.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention ●

Leaders have redesigned the curriculum in recent years to successfully address weaknesses that they identified. The revised curriculum meets pupils' differing needs at the school. It is ambitious and well organised. This helps teachers to acquire the subject knowledge that they need.

There are inconsistencies in how well teachers deliver the intended curriculum. This includes, at times, the phonics programme. Sometimes, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to embed and consolidate their learning. There is variation in how well they identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge. For example, teachers do not ensure that all pupils learn how to produce accurately formed letters and numbers. At times, teachers do not adapt their classroom practices sufficiently well. Even though teachers provide support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, this does not fully make up for the variable quality of teaching that pupils receive on the whole.

Leaders have established an effective phonics programme. This supports most pupils at the early stages of learning to read to be successful. These pupils learn how to work out what words say, including those that are unfamiliar to them. As a result, pupils develop their understanding of an increasingly wide range of vocabulary.

Early years

Needs attention ●

Leaders do not make sure that children in the early years are as well prepared as they could be for their transition into Year 1. Teachers do not ensure that children practise and consolidate their learning equally well across the curriculum. In particular, they do not ensure that children master accurate letter and number formation by the end of the Reception Year. This impacts on children's later learning as they progress through the school.

Children begin to learn how to use phonics to read words. They enjoy sharing books and rhymes with their teachers. This helps to reinforce their learning about reading. Children take part in high-quality interactions with adults while accessing the activities on offer. This helps to extend children's language and their understanding of vocabulary.

Leaders ensure that children are supported effectively in their personal, social and emotional development. Children form positive relationships with adults within the provision. This helps them to feel settled and ready to learn. Children learn how to share and take turns with others. They become increasingly independent. Children know how to make their needs known. They recognise when they need help to manage risks.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention ●

Action taken by those responsible for governance in recent years has not resulted in the impact that they expect. Members of the trust and local governing board are not as well informed as they need to be. They are unclear about how well pupils are achieving or attending compared to other pupils nationally. They do not provide sufficient challenge or support for leaders to uphold this aspect of their statutory duties.

Many leaders at the school are relatively new to their roles. Despite this, the trust does not ensure that middle and senior leaders receive the professional development that they need to carry out their respective roles effectively while maintaining a manageable workload. At times, the systems and processes required by the trust add unnecessarily to leaders' workload.

School leaders are clear about the strengths of the school and where further work is needed. They focus on the right priorities. Leaders make sure that pupils' best interests are central to their decisions. They have successfully brought about much-needed improvement at the school. This includes developing the curriculum and increasing rates of pupils' attendance. It is too early to see the full impact of the changes that they have made.

There has been turbulence in staffing in recent years. However, things are now more settled. Leaders have managed change well. Staff at the school feel well supported. Leaders forge positive relationships with members of the school and its community. This includes those with parents and carers.

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

Pupils are happy and proud to be part of this welcoming school community. Pupils behave well and try their best in lessons. The school is a calm place where routines are well established. This helps pupils to feel safe and settled. This is especially true if they join the school after attending another school or come from another country. Staff know pupils well. Leaders ensure that pupils who face challenges in their lives receive suitable support to overcome any difficulties that they experience.

Children develop positive attitudes to learning in the early years. However, they are not as well prepared as they could be for the curriculum in Year 1 and beyond. Leaders do not make sure that all pupils secure early reading and writing knowledge consistently well as they progress through the school. Some pupils are not fully prepared for their next stages of education as a result.

Pupils get along with each other well. They learn to value the differences that people have. Pupils celebrate each other's talents and successes. They value times to work or play together. Pupils develop firm friendships during their time at school. They willingly help new classmates who are at the early stages of learning to speak English.

Most pupils attend school regularly. They are keen to access the wide range of high-quality activities that leaders provide. These include sports and craft clubs, as well as careers days and opportunities to take part in residential trips. Pupils embrace leadership roles, such as acting as a school councillor or eco-council member. They carry out these roles diligently. Through activities such as these, pupils learn how to make a positive contribution to their school and wider community. They are well prepared to become an active member of modern British society when they are older.

Next steps

- Leaders at all levels should strengthen their understanding of how well pupils achieve across the curriculum. Those responsible for governance should take timely action to

ensure that suitable support is provided when pupils are not achieving or attending as well as they should.

- Leaders should ensure that teachers check and address gaps in pupils' knowledge consistently well so that pupils are better prepared for their next stages of education. This is particularly important for pupils' foundational knowledge in reading and writing.
 - Leaders should make sure that children in the early years develop accurate and correctly formed letters and numerals to prepare them more successfully for the curriculum in Year 1 and beyond.
 - Leaders should ensure that all pupils develop regular attendance habits, especially pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other disadvantaged pupils so that they achieve as well as they can.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Aldridge Education Multi-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 (CEO), Jane Fletcher, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Rupert Nichols.

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 and other leaders during the inspection. An inspector spoke with a group of governors, including the chair of the local governing board. They spoke with representatives from the trust, including the chair of the board of trustees. Inspectors spoke with the CEO and the executive principal. An inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school make use of one registered alternative provision for pupils.

Principal: Jenna Harty

Lead inspector:

Claire Cropper, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Tracy Beaty, Ofsted Inspector

Clare Lightbown, 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 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

160

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 272

School capacity

210

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

45.63%

Well above 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

3.13%

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

16.25%

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

Well 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

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	33%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	64%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	13%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	28%	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	43%	74%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	68%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	33%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	31%	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	39%	72%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	64%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	21%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	34%	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	61%	73%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	82%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	63%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	45%	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	28%	46%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	64%	47%	Above
2023/24 (final)	13%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	21%	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	35%	62%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	73%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	25%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	21%	60%	Below

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	33%	59%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	64%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	19%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	26%	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	46%	60%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	82%	61%	Above
2023/24 (final)	50%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	21%	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	28%	68%	-39 pp
2024/25 (revised)	64%	69%	-6 pp
2023/24 (final)	13%	67%	-55 pp
2022/23 (final)	21%	66%	-45 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	35%	80%	-45 pp
2024/25 (revised)	73%	81%	-8 pp
2023/24 (final)	25%	80%	-55 pp
2022/23 (final)	21%	78%	-57 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	33%	78%	-45 pp
2024/25 (revised)	64%	78%	-15 pp
2023/24 (final)	19%	78%	-59 pp
2022/23 (final)	26%	77%	-51 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	46%	80%	-34 pp
2024/25 (revised)	82%	81%	1 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	79%	-29 pp
2022/23 (final)	21%	79%	-58 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)	7.6%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	9.3%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	9.2%	5.9%	Above

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	30.6%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	31.6%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	29.4%	16.2%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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