

Firthmoor Primary School

Address: Ingleby Moor Crescent, Darlington, County Durham, DL1 4RW

Unique reference number (URN): 138129

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 

Most pupils make secure progress through the curriculum from their different starting points. Leaders make sure that pupils acquire the important knowledge and skills that they need to access the next stages of learning. For example, through the school's phonics programme, pupils typically have the knowledge that they need to develop their reading and writing well.

Pupils' attainment in national tests has remained close to average across subjects over time. Leaders have ensured that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are disadvantaged and pupils known to social care, have carefully targeted support. This helps pupils to make steady progress and achieve in line with their peers. Most pupils are ready for the next stages of their education.

Pupils typically achieve well across the curriculum. Most staff check pupils' recall of prior learning, which has ensured that pupils know more and remember more. However, in more recently developed curriculum subjects, such as religious education and personal, social and health education, some pupils struggle to recall key knowledge over time.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Pupils typically attend school regularly. This has been sustained over time. Leaders have worked with families to reduce the number of term-time holidays, which has resulted in a reduction in pupils' persistent absence. Pupils, parents and carers know the importance of attending school. Leaders have introduced new systems that allow them to spot patterns or trends that can be quickly addressed. The pastoral team provides a range of support for families to help reduce barriers to attendance.

Pupils are clear about what is expected of them. Pupils follow well-established routines, which means that the school is calm and orderly. Leaders ensure that pupils know what it means to behave well. Most pupils follow this consistently well. They are polite and respectful to staff and generally to each other. In class, pupils focus and complete their work without disruption. Pupils say that there is some bullying. Leaders ensure that, through the curriculum and assembly programme, pupils recognise the different types of discrimination. They are empowered not to be bystanders and to report incidents immediately. Leaders take all forms of bullying seriously and are doing all they can to reduce episodes.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Since the previous inspection, leaders have redeveloped the curriculum. It is now more ambitious and has improved pupils' enjoyment and interest. Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching across the school. They are taking appropriate action to address some occasional inconsistencies in its delivery. Leaders have designed a well-considered programme of educational visits to further enhance pupils' knowledge and engagement.

The structure of lessons has also been strengthened. Staff typically provide clear examples and step-by-step guidance to help pupils develop important knowledge and skills. Pupils are given time to practise new learning before successfully applying it independently in a range of tasks. Staff generally make use of opportunities to check for gaps in pupils' knowledge during lessons. When this happens, they address these gaps swiftly to ensure that pupils make steady progress. In some subjects, staff do not rehearse prior knowledge or teach with sufficient precision for pupils to complete work independently.

Leaders have started to address gaps in pupils' basic skills, such as in handwriting, punctuation and spelling. Pupils generally write letters more accurately and have improved the presentation of their work. Further effort is needed to secure a more efficient pencil grip.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive a range of additional support to help them make progress from their starting points.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children get off to a positive start in the Nursery Year. Leaders have made deliberate choices about the environment and adult-led activities. Children quickly develop independence and are safe and happy.

Across the early years, leaders have rightly prioritised developing children's communication, language and vocabulary. Staff's interactions with children are a notable strength. They model language well, using repetition of new words to broaden children's knowledge and their accurate use of vocabulary. Children respond well to adults and show excitement about their learning.

Children typically acquire the knowledge that they need to read and write through the school's phonics programme. Staff teach this well and with fidelity. Reading is further prioritised through stories and nursery rhymes. Leaders have equipped the early years with a wide range of carefully selected books that inspire children's love of reading. Rhymes and stories shape daily practice and guide how staff work with children. The newly introduced curriculum sets out the important knowledge that children need to learn. Leaders continue to refine it so that children build the knowledge and vocabulary in a clear and progressive way over time.

Leaders and staff have built strong, trusting relationships with children and their families. They prioritise early identification of need and achieve this through visits to children at home and to local nurseries before children start at the school.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have ensured that inclusion is a priority for all. Staff identify pupils' additional needs promptly. Leaders take well-thought-out actions to address pupils' learning needs and barriers, using specialist advice where required. Parents, carers and pupils contribute to the programme of support for pupils who need additional help. Leaders regularly review pupils' individual programmes and make appropriate adjustments to ensure they remain effective and continue to support pupils' progress.

Staff have recently received training in how to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They now use a range of resources and adaptations to meet these pupils' needs, as well as pupils with other barriers to their learning. Parents of children with SEND are typically positive about this support. Pupils with social, emotional and mental needs are also supported through carefully designed sessions and resources. Leaders create clear and effective personal education plans for children in care.

Leaders use additional funding effectively to strengthen teaching, provide targeted academic support and enrich pupils' experiences. Leaders regularly check that pupils who are disadvantaged are making steady academic progress. They have recently started to track their participation in after-school clubs. Alternative provision is commissioned appropriately and leaders use it in the best interest of pupils.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and those responsible for governance know the school's strengths and areas for development well. They have accurately identified the priorities for improving the school and have developed precise plans to outline how these will be addressed. Leaders have made significant improvements to the school in recent years. This includes strengthening the teaching of phonics, making the curriculum more ambitious and improving the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. While these improvements are in their early stages, there are signs of impact. For example, in pupils' improved attainment in the Year 4 multiplication check and the increase in pupils' levels of attendance.

Trustees ensure that they meet statutory duties. They provide leaders with appropriate challenge and support. Trustees and leaders know the school's context well. Together, they have a clear moral purpose to ensure that all pupils thrive and have the attributes, skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the next stages of their education. Leaders and trustees ensure that the additional resources the school receives for pupils who are disadvantaged and those known to social care are used effectively.

Leaders are aware of staff wellbeing and ensure that staff have a reasonable workload. They have provided a carefully considered programme of professional development for staff, including those who are early in their careers. Leaders are developing positive relationships with families. They have strengthened the wellbeing support that they provide for pupils.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have recently introduced a highly ambitious and comprehensive approach to pupils' personal development and wellbeing. This is carefully tailored to meet the needs of pupils and the school's context.

Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have to contribute to school life. They report that the roles they hold, for example being members of pupil parliamentary committees, make them proud to be making changes for the better. For example, they helped choose and organise new equipment for playtimes. They also help to arrange a charity sponsored walk. Pupils who visited the Houses of Parliament proudly led an assembly, sharing their inspiring experiences with the whole school.

Pupils are prepared for life beyond school. Leaders have prioritised teaching the importance of respecting differences and treating everyone fairly. Most pupils understand the value of difference and see how their own lives can be enhanced by learning about other cultures and religions. Most pupils have a good knowledge of fundamental British values. They typically demonstrate tolerance and acceptance of others' views and beliefs. Pupils speak knowledgeably about keeping themselves safe online and within the community. They can recognise the features of a healthy relationship and understand how to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing. Pupils also talk positively about the strategies they have learned to manage their emotions. They support their friends by encouraging them to use calming techniques when they become frustrated during break times.

Leaders are ambitious in developing wider opportunities and have started to build a programme of educational visits, which includes a Year 5 and 6 residential, a whole-school trip to the beach and theatre. The breadth of after-school offer is rich. One of these clubs, the chess club, is led by pupils, who encourage peers with additional needs to attend.

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

Firthmoor Primary is an improving school. Pupils are happy, friendly and welcoming. Staff build warm and positive relationships with them. Pupils generally show respect for one another and feel safe. Bullying happens occasionally. When it does, staff deal with it swiftly and effectively.

Pupils have access to a wide variety of books that foster their love of reading. Recent changes to the curriculum have enhanced pupils' experiences and made learning more interesting. As a result, pupils, including those in the early years, are excited about their learning. They are becoming more confident in speaking and communication through a focus on oracy. Pupils generally achieve well. Those with barriers to learning are effectively supported so that they access the full curriculum.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and most pupils attend regularly. They understand why it is important to be in school. Pupils generally behave well. Classrooms are calm and orderly. Routines for different transitions are embedded. Pupils engage well with a range of activities that staff provide at dinner and playtime. Pupils rarely need reminding of the 'Firthmoor consistencies'. They value the school's reward systems and thrive on the positive feedback that staff provide.

Pupils are typically well prepared for life in modern Britain. Most understand the importance of being respectful and tolerant. However, occasionally, some pupils do not model this as well as others. Pupils are enthusiastic about visits to the beach and the theatre. The school's pupil parliament gives pupils opportunities to take on leadership roles. Pupils from the school's eco-committee presented an assembly and also wrote to parents about the importance of not parking on the zig-zags outside the school. Pupils' varied achievements both outside and in school are publicly celebrated and acknowledged.

Next steps

- Leaders should support staff to further embed the implementation of recent curriculum changes so that pupils' knowledge builds more securely over time.
 - Leaders should ensure that rigorous checks on pupils' understanding are consistently carried out throughout lessons and over time, enabling misconceptions to be addressed promptly and helping pupils to apply and retain key knowledge more accurately.
 - Leaders should further embed the personal development programme so that pupils consistently demonstrate mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths, backgrounds and beliefs.
 - Leaders need to continue to actively address incidents of bullying so that all pupils feel that they belong and are welcome.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Northern Lights Learning 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), Jo Heaton, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Katie Hammond.

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

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, staff, pupils and parents. They also spoke with leaders from the trust, including the CEO and representatives from the trust and local governing boards.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Helen Ashton

Lead inspector:

Nicky White, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Victoria James, Ofsted Inspector

Claire Williams, 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 6 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

283

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

365

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)

54.37%

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

2.47%

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

14.49%

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

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	64%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	62%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	64%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	67%	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	76%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	73%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	76%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	79%	73%	Close to average

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	72%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	73%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	71%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	71%	71%	Close to average

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	83%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	76%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	87%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	86%	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	54%	46%	Above
2024/25 (final)	46%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	56%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	60%	44%	Above

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	68%	62%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	61%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	72%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	72%	60%	Above

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	66%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	64%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	66%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	68%	58%	Close to average

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	76%	60%	Above
2024/25 (final)	64%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	84%	59%	Above
2022/23 (final)	80%	59%	Above

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	54%	68%	-14 pp
2024/25 (final)	46%	69%	-23 pp
2023/24 (final)	56%	67%	-11 pp
2022/23 (final)	60%	66%	-6 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	68%	80%	-11 pp
2024/25 (final)	61%	81%	-20 pp
2023/24 (final)	72%	80%	-8 pp
2022/23 (final)	72%	78%	-6 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	66%	78%	-12 pp
2024/25 (final)	64%	78%	-14 pp
2023/24 (final)	66%	78%	-12 pp
2022/23 (final)	68%	77%	-9 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	76%	80%	-3 pp
2024/25 (final)	64%	81%	-16 pp
2023/24 (final)	84%	79%	5 pp
2022/23 (final)	80%	79%	1 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 (3 term)	5.7%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	6.0%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.2%	5.9%	Close to average

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	13.7%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	20.0%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	16.3%	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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