

Hummersknott Academy

Address: Edinburgh Drive, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 8AR

Unique reference number (URN): 136838

Inspection report: 3 February 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.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders analyse information about pupils' attendance meticulously. They use this information very effectively to develop robust, responsive systems to identify and address barriers to good attendance. Attendance over time has been in line with or above national averages. More recently, leaders have developed and embedded systems that have led to notable improvements, both for all pupils and for groups of pupils. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders engage proactively with parents and carers to promote the importance of good attendance. Pupils have a clear sense of belonging, and they value being in school.

Leaders have established a calm, orderly atmosphere across the school, which is highly conducive to learning. Disruption to learning is rare. If it does occur, it is addressed quickly and effectively. Pupils speak positively about the improvements in behaviour over time. Staff apply the school's behaviour system consistently and fairly. The number of suspensions and removals from lessons has reduced dramatically over recent years. Pupils show self-discipline and there is a clear culture of respect and tolerance across the school. Discrimination and bullying are not tolerated. Pupils value the rewards system across the school. When pupils occasionally need help because they are upset or angry, they know where to go to find effective support.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders have developed a broad, coherently planned and highly effective personal development programme across the school. This enables pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to develop confidence, resilience and strong social and moral understanding.

Pupils articulate the school's values of responsibility, respect and care with pride. They embody these values in their behaviour. Through life skills lessons, assemblies and the wider curriculum, pupils develop a deep understanding of equality, protected characteristics, cultural diversity and British values. Through relationships and sex education teaching, pupils develop a strong awareness of online and offline risks, substance misuse and local safeguarding risks.

Pupils benefit from a wide and inclusive enrichment offer. There are lots of leadership opportunities for pupils, and many take advantage of these. Leadership roles include college captains, sports leaders, head students and membership of the student council. Pupil leaders describe several improvements within the school that they have driven, including the introduction of halal food to the canteen and changes to physical education activities and routines.

There is a rich, ambitious wider offer of extra-curricular activities, including sports, creative and cultural opportunities in art and music, and bespoke clubs. Participation in these activities is high and increasing for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and pupils with SEND.

The school's careers programme is comprehensive, and leaders have established deeply rooted links to the local employment market. Pupils experience a wide range of opportunities to learn about their options for education, training and employment after school. They visit universities, experience visits from apprenticeship providers and meet with local employers. This helps pupils to be able to make balanced, appropriate choices about their next steps.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils generally secure the knowledge that they need to build their learning effectively across the curriculum and across year groups. Where there are gaps in pupils' basic knowledge and skills, these are usually identified and addressed quickly. Most pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.

Pupils' achievement in national tests and examinations has improved after a period of decline. This reflects leaders' improvements to the implementation of the curriculum. By the end of key stage 4, pupils achieve very well, particularly in English and mathematics GCSEs. Most other achievement measures are close to average.

Leaders have established appropriate systems to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, pupils who are disadvantaged and those who face other barriers to their learning to make suitable progress through the curriculum. These pupils generally achieve in line with national averages.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have established an ambitious, well-sequenced curriculum that supports pupils to develop their knowledge and skills across subjects over time. Leaders have introduced a clear and logical structure to lessons. This has improved the quality of pupils' learning.

The curriculum is generally taught well. The 'do now' activities that start each lesson ensure that pupils are able to make connections with previous learning. There is a clear focus upon developing pupils' literacy and vocabulary. Teachers use questioning skilfully to check pupils' understanding. They also develop opportunities for pupils to practise their fluency through independent activities. Leaders know the areas where learning is less effective, and they have established appropriate strategies to address this. There is a well-structured programme of professional development in place to ensure that teachers have the necessary subject knowledge and skills to implement the curriculum in line with leaders' high expectations.

Where pupils face barriers to their learning, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, teachers usually adapt activities well to support these pupils. Where pupils have gaps in their basic knowledge, such as reading, spelling, handwriting and mathematics, there are appropriate interventions in place to address these gaps.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Through the 'belonging strategy', leaders have established an effective culture of inclusion at the school. This starts before pupils join the school in Year 7. Leaders have established clear systems that enable them to identify pupils' needs quickly and effectively. This means that staff are able to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils who face barriers to their learning, including pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The school's pupil premium strategy identifies relevant strategies to support disadvantaged pupils to access the curriculum. Staff generally understand and implement this strategy effectively. Leaders work closely with the virtual school to ensure that personal education plans for looked-after children are well constructed and reviewed regularly.

Leaders have established a structured approach, which means that the impact of strategies to support pupils who face barriers to their learning is reviewed regularly. This is underpinned by a programme of staff training, which is supporting the effectiveness of this provision to develop further. Leaders work closely with families and external agencies to ensure that there is a wide network of support for pupils who need it. A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. This is carefully considered and generally supports pupils to be successful.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have raised expectations and driven significant improvements across the school in recent years. This has been underpinned by the support of the trust. Leaders understand the school's strengths and they have identified the priorities for further improvement accurately.

Leaders are role models of professionalism. They have established a collective sense of moral purpose across all stakeholders in striving to achieve their high ambitions for all pupils. Central to this is a determination to raise achievement further and to provide highly effective support for pupils who face barriers to their learning, including pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Trustees and local academy council members have a clear vision for the school. They meet all of their statutory duties. They rightly describe the school as being 'on a journey' with an upward trajectory. They recognise the need to ensure that improvement strategies are more sharply focused upon impact to support them to provide robust challenge and support to leaders.

Leaders have established a well-considered, evidence-based professional development programme, which is aligned to the school's improvement priorities. Staff value this. Early career teachers are supported well to grow professionally from the moment they join the school.

Leaders have implemented strategies to support the workload and wellbeing of staff. Staff appreciate this. Leaders have also been proactive in supporting parents and carers to be more widely involved in their children's education. For example, they have run buses to

allow parents without transport to attend information evenings. Most parents are very positive about the school.

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

Hummersknott Academy is a friendly, happy place. Pupils are safe and they feel safe. They enjoy learning and they are proud of their school. There are warm, positive relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils recognise and appreciate the improvements that leaders have made in recent years. Pupils live out the school's values of 'responsibility, respect and care'. They behave towards others with respect and kindness. The school is calm and purposeful. Bullying happens rarely. If it does, pupils know that it will be dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils attend well, and this reflects their clear sense of belonging at the school.

Pupils enjoy the structured way that teachers deliver lessons. Established routines mean that pupils generally learn well. Teachers adapt learning to meet the needs of pupils who face barriers to their learning, including pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils who have gaps in their basic knowledge receive appropriate support, which helps them to access and learn the curriculum. Pupils' achievement in national tests and examinations has improved in recent years, and they are well prepared for their next steps.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of broader extra-curricular experiences at the school. Many pupils hold leadership roles where they have a genuine influence in the way that the school is run. They also lead several fundraising events, developing the confidence, responsibility and social awareness needed to contribute positively to modern British society. There is an extensive offer of clubs and activities. These include several sports and music clubs. Additionally, the school has provided clubs in response to pupils' interests and requests. These include gardening, baking, politics and card games clubs. Pupils appreciate the way that staff go the extra mile to run clubs for them, and most pupils take advantage of these opportunities.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the school's approach to the implementation of the curriculum is embedded consistently and effectively across the school.
 - Leaders should ensure that strategies to monitor priority areas for improvement are sharply focused upon impact and that this is reflected in further improvements in pupils' experiences and achievement.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Advance Learning Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Kelvin Simpson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alan Boddy.

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 members of the senior leadership team during the inspection. Inspectors also met with teaching and support staff. The lead inspector held meetings with members of both the trust board and local academy council, and with the CEO.

Inspectors spoke with several groups of pupils, as well as having discussions with pupils in lessons and at break and lunchtimes.

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

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of 4 alternative provisions, including 1 that is unregistered.

The headteacher began in post in January 2025.

Headteacher: Grant Sowerby

Lead inspector:

Tim Johnson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Julian Appleyard, Ofsted Inspector

Marc Doyle, Ofsted Inspector

Martin Featherstone, Ofsted Inspector

Vicky Callaghan, 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 3 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,230

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: 1,067

School capacity

1,200

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: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

23.01%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 28.9%

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

1.79%

Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

17.48%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	57.3%	45.2%	Above
2023/24 (final)	46.2%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	59.3%	45.3%	Above

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 (provisional)	47.6	45.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	45.7	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	50.5	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 (final)	-0.48	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.26	-0.03	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	23.1%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	21.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	30.6%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	33.2	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	31.9	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	37.8	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 (final)	-1.28	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.71	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference

between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

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

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	23.1%	52.8%	-29.8 pp
2023/24 (final)	21.7%	53.1%	-31.4 pp
2022/23 (final)	30.6%	52.4%	-21.8 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 (provisional)	33.2	50.3	-17.1
2023/24 (final)	31.9	50.0	-18.2
2022/23 (final)	37.8	50.3	-12.5

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 (final)	-1.28	0.16	-1.44
2022/23 (final)	-0.71	0.17	-0.88

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 (provisional)	95%	91%	Above
2022 leavers (revised)	95%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	97%	94%	Average

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)	7.2%	8.1%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	7.7%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	7.2%	9.0%	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 (2 term)	20.2%	21.9%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	22.1%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	21.7%	26.5%	Below

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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