

Northern Saints Church of England Academy

Address: Rotherham Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR5 5QL

Unique reference number (URN): 149524

Inspection report: 27 January 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 ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Inclusion is the heartbeat of the school. Leaders have high aspirations for every pupil, regardless of their starting point. Leaders respond swiftly to identify individual needs. They design a comprehensive programme of tailored support for the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. This is delivered by skilled, well-trained staff.

Within the school's specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND, a calm and nurturing environment enables pupils with communication and language needs to make steady progress. Staff deliver highly effective, personalised support. A recently introduced support room effectively meets the needs of the youngest pupils with SEND, enabling them to develop similar knowledge and skills to their peers in a supportive setting.

Leaders are clear about the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils, and they carefully balance the use of additional funding to provide academic and wider support for pupils and families. Opportunities such as holiday clubs, before- and after-school provision, and residential visits enable pupils with SEND, disadvantaged pupils and those known to social care to access enriching experiences they might otherwise miss.

Leaders rigorously monitor pupils' progress and the impact of support for pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged. They use this information to make well-informed decisions about the allocation of resources and staff.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Pupils benefit from a well-planned and coherent personal development programme. The school's context and the needs of pupils are woven throughout. The curriculum equips pupils with the knowledge they need to keep them safe in the wider community and online. In lessons, pupils interact with various open-ended scenarios to explore the impact of making wise and unwise decisions. Leaders engage with external agencies to further enhance this aspect of the curriculum.

Pupils' experiences are enriched by a wealth of ambitious activities that bring the curriculum to life and broaden their horizons. Leaders have mapped out an entitlement for pupils as they progress through the school, including visits to the theatre and Hylton Castle.

Pupils recognise that no one is the same, but everyone is equal. This is lived out in their experiences at school and by leaders, who promote tolerance and respect. Pupils are knowledgeable about healthy relationships and understand the importance of seeking permission or giving consent. Pupils' knowledge of different faiths and cultures is developed through visits to places of worship, including a mosque and a gurdwara. They have an in-depth understanding of the importance of fundamental British values, such as democracy and individual freedom, for a safe and harmonious society. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to become young leaders in school. They make a difference in their community through their work with local charities and litter picking. Pupils support the local care home, where they read to the elderly, perform songs and celebrate key festivals.

Pupils' mental health and wellbeing are prioritised. The school steps in quickly if pupils need extra pastoral support. Leaders track and actively promote participation in enrichment activities for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils, so that everyone benefits fully from the high-quality offer.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

By the end of key stage 2, pupils' outcomes in reading and writing are typically close to the national average. In mathematics, pupils' outcomes are significantly higher than the national average. Pupils historically achieve well in the Year 4 multiplication tables check. In the last 2 years, disadvantaged pupils have achieved in line with their peers in national tests. These outcomes reflect leaders' work to improve fluency in mathematics and to remove barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils.

Last year, too many pupils did not achieve the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check. Leaders have strengthened the teaching of phonics. As a result, current pupils make suitable progress in early reading, and pupils with gaps in their phonics knowledge receive support to catch up.

In other subjects, overall, pupils progress well through the curriculum.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Leaders have implemented robust systems to monitor and improve attendance. They do all they can to identify barriers to pupils coming to school, providing timely support to address poor attendance. As a result, there is an improving trend for all groups of pupils, with a marked reduction in the number of pupils who are frequently absent. Leaders collaborate with external professionals to ensure that pupils with additional needs receive appropriate help to attend well. This has led to improved attendance for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders are committed to continuing to drive up attendance for all pupils.

Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They increasingly take pride in their work. The school promotes the importance of tolerance, and pupils understand that 'everyone is different, but everyone is equal'. They live this out daily. As a result, bullying and discrimination very rarely occur. Pupils are confident that staff act quickly and effectively when concerns arise. Leaders have established a calm, orderly and respectful environment where pupils behave well in lessons and during unstructured times. Routines are embedded from the early years. Staff know, support and care for pupils. They make appropriate adaptations to the behaviour policy and provide support for pupils who struggle to manage their emotions effectively and therefore access learning.

Following a significant dip in pupils' outcomes, leaders have strengthened the teaching of phonics through the introduction of a new, systematic approach. Staff have secure subject knowledge. They teach phonics sessions with fidelity to the chosen approach. Pupils who cannot read fluently receive appropriate support. In lessons, pupils who cannot read words or sounds occasionally go unnoticed. As a result of leaders' actions to improve handwriting, pupils take more pride in their work. Letter and number formation is improving.

Leaders have enhanced the curriculum to ensure that it is broad and balanced. Pupils build their knowledge and skills over time. Leaders have reviewed and adapted the curriculum to ensure that it is relevant to the pupils in the school.

Mathematics is a strength across the school. Pupils become proficient in calculations through being given time to practise. This develops mathematical fluency. Typically, pupils are provided with opportunities to apply their knowledge to reasoning and problem-solving. In English, pupils develop their writing through immersion in a range of high-quality texts. They systematically build skills and knowledge, including vocabulary, before applying these in their writing.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported effectively so that they can learn well across the curriculum. In all subjects, staff check how well the curriculum is working. However, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge that are not identified quickly enough. This includes how effectively some teachers check pupils' understanding in lessons.

Early years

Expected standard

Children in Reception make a steady and secure start to school life. Leaders recognise the importance of early detection of barriers to learning, for example, speech, language and communication delay. They have recently introduced a more comprehensive programme of support to address issues as early as possible. An extensive transition process into school ensures that staff know children well before they arrive. This means that children's needs are identified and appropriate support is provided right from the start.

Leaders have designed the early years curriculum, including a newly introduced approach to phonics, to give children a wide vocabulary and the skills they need to develop their reading, writing and mathematical knowledge. Leaders and staff do all they can to support children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that they progress well in all areas of learning. Overall, children are well prepared for Year 1 by the end of Reception.

Children enjoy participating in exciting activities, such as birdwatching and role-play. Quality interactions between staff and children embed and extend children's vocabulary and communication skills. Children sustain concentration and interact well with each other as they learn through play. Occasionally, the activities staff design for children are not ambitious enough. This can limit children's learning.

Trust leaders, trustees and the local academy council know the school well. They have comprehensive oversight of the school. They hold leaders to account, seeking external support to provide further challenge to ensure improvements are sustained. Governors and trustees fulfil their statutory duties, for example, in relation to the school's safeguarding procedures.

Leaders at all levels are committed to improving the school, including pupils' outcomes, at pace. They have accurately identified the right priorities and taken appropriate actions, for example, to arrest the decline in phonics results and improve attendance for all pupils. The trust has provided significant resources to support the increasing number of pupils joining the school with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders know what they need to work on to continue to drive improvements. Leaders carefully weigh up the needs of all pupils to ensure they make astute decisions that will have the greatest impact on pupils' wellbeing, experiences and outcomes.

Leaders do all they can to reduce workload and support the wellbeing of staff. Teachers at the start of their careers value the support they receive and the opportunities provided to develop their practice. Leaders and staff receive appropriate professional development to develop their expertise. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school.

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

Northern Saints Church of England Academy is a school where all are welcome. The school's ethos is strongly shaped by the belief that 'everyone is different, but everyone is equal'. Leaders are sensitive to pupils' different needs from the moment they arrive at the beginning of each day. This includes the carefully chosen activities provided at the school's breakfast club.

Pupils' experiences are broadened by a deliberately planned curriculum and enriched by a curated programme of educational visits and visitors into school. The theme of the Northern Saints is woven throughout the curriculum and pupils enjoy visiting their birthplaces, including trips to Bamburgh and Lindisfarne. An extensive offer of after-school clubs has been adapted over time because of pupils' preferences. These include darts, science and drama.

By the end of Year 6, most pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. This is reflected in pupils' outcomes in national tests. However, further work is needed to improve outcomes in phonics to ensure that more pupils have the knowledge they need to be successful learners.

In Reception, children are immersed in a range of engaging books. They enjoy using drawing to develop their reading and writing. On entry to Reception, children's needs are identified with precision. Support is put in place to help them keep up.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged thrive because of a variety of tailored approaches. These include specialist rooms and

spaces created to help meet their varied needs.

Pupils' behaviour is consistently positive during lessons and at social times. They say that this is a kind school where bullying rarely happens. Pupils feel well supported by the caring staff. Leaders ensure that pupils' wellbeing is a priority and provide a range of support to promote positive mental health. Most pupils attend well, feel safe and understand the importance of tolerance, respect and equality.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure they support teachers to use assessment more effectively to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and strengthen their learning.
 - Leaders should further embed recently introduced strategies so that the gaps in pupils' foundational knowledge, for example in phonics and handwriting, are closed quickly.
 - Leaders should ensure that learning activities in the early years are sufficiently challenging, enabling children to accelerate their learning.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Durham and Newcastle Diocesan 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), Paul Rickeard, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Taylor.

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.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with senior leaders, the chair of the board of trustees, the CEO of the trust, members of the academy council, including the chair, and the director of education from the Diocese of Durham.

Inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school has an additionally resourced provision for 10 pupils with speech, language and communication needs.

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. The last section 48 inspection took place in 2018.

The school makes use of 3 alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection as it became part of Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust in January 2023. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2024.

Headteacher: Rachel Heaney

Lead inspector:

Nicky White, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

David Bailey, Ofsted Inspector

Katie Spurr, Ofsted Inspector

Nikkie Godbold, 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 27 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

455

Well above 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

630

Well above 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)

57.14%

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

2.42%

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

23.96%

Well above 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)

Resourced provision

What does this mean?

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

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SLCN - Speech, language and Communication

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (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		61%	
2024/25 (revised)	68%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	73%	61%	Above
2022/23		60%	

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		74%	
2024/25 (revised)	75%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	77%	74%	Close to average
2022/23		73%	

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%	
2024/25 (revised)	74%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	74%	72%	Close to average
2022/23		71%	

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		73%	
2024/25 (revised)	86%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	84%	73%	Above
2022/23		73%	

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		46%	
2024/25 (revised)	68%	47%	Above
2023/24 (final)	60%	46%	Above
2022/23		44%	

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		62%	
2024/25 (revised)	73%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	60%	62%	Close to average
2022/23		60%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		59%	
2024/25 (revised)	70%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	63%	58%	Close to average
2022/23		58%	

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		60%	
2024/25 (revised)	84%	61%	Above
2023/24 (final)	74%	59%	Above
2022/23		59%	

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		68%	
2024/25 (revised)	68%	69%	-1 pp
2023/24 (final)	60%	67%	-7 pp
2022/23		66%	

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		80%	
2024/25 (revised)	73%	81%	-8 pp
2023/24 (final)	60%	80%	-20 pp
2022/23		78%	

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		78%	
2024/25 (revised)	70%	78%	-8 pp
2023/24 (final)	63%	78%	-15 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23		77%	

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		80%	
2024/25 (revised)	84%	81%	4 pp
2023/24 (final)	74%	79%	-5 pp
2022/23		79%	

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)	6.3%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	7.2%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	8.0%	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)	19.4%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	23.2%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	28.9%	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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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