

Inspection of Prudhoe Castle First School

Castle Road, Prudhoe, Northumberland NE42 6PN

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 March 2025

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The acting executive headteacher of this school is Jill Dodds. This school is part of the Cheviot 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), Alice Witherow, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Carvin.

What is it like to attend this school?

This school calls itself the 'little school with a big heart and big ambition'. Pupils enjoy attending. They learn and play happily together. They try hard to meet the school's high expectations. There has been a lot of staffing changes, but pupils are settled. They achieve well in most subjects and enjoy helping each other.

The two-year-olds make a great start to their learning in 'Little Castle'. They quickly gain confidence and learn routines. Older pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities as school councillors and play leaders. Pupils strive to 'be more CASTLE' by demonstrating attributes such as ambition and empathy.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well. They play a full part in the life of the school. This includes participation in the school's many clubs and activities, such as yoga, music and sports.

Pupils feel safe at school. They know when and how to seek help. Staff are quick to sort out any problems if they arise. Pupils behave well and treat each other with respect. They love having their efforts recognised by earning gold awards at the end of each week.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The trust, together with governors and school leaders, is determined that every pupil will succeed. It has brought in experienced leaders from other trust schools. This has enabled the school to implement a curriculum and make rapid improvements to standards.

The school's curriculum is broad and well sequenced. It identifies key learning and vocabulary. Because the curriculum is used across the trust, staff are familiar with it and know exactly what to teach. Staff feel well supported. They work closely with their colleagues at Wylam First School. They receive effective training and have strong subject knowledge. As a result, pupils learn well across a wide range of subjects. However, their standards of handwriting and presentation are inconsistent. The school is focused on improving this.

Provision for pupils with SEND is strong. Staff identify pupils' needs early on. The school makes good use of external expertise and advice. Pupils benefit from effective support and reassurance from adults, as well as focused teaching in quiet spaces. This support allows pupils with SEND to learn well. Most keep up with their peers.

The school has transformed its teaching of reading. Pupils throughout the school enjoy a rich range of stories, songs and rhymes. The youngest children learn most of their letter sounds. They are ready to begin formal phonics lessons in Reception class. Provision of phonics is strong. Pupils have regular opportunities to practise the sounds they know through reading and writing. The school is quick to identify pupils at risk of falling behind. These pupils receive extra phonics and reading sessions with adults, which helps them catch up.

The mathematics curriculum is strong. Pupils develop a strong understanding of mathematical concepts and vocabulary. They have regular opportunities to apply their knowledge through solving problems. In some lessons, pupils do not get the immediate support they need when they misunderstand something. This is because of how the school organises lessons, so the school is reviewing its approach.

The school has a clear vision for pupils' personal development. The personal, social and health education programme is thorough. Pupils develop a strong understanding of relationships, equalities and fundamental British values. They learn about local dangers, such as the railway and the river, as well as how to stay safe online. Pupils enjoy fundraising events, such as the cancer run. They enjoy opportunities to push themselves on residential and weekly team-building activities. They learn about different world views through visits to places of worship and through strong links with the local church. Pupils learn how to talk about and manage their feelings. The personal development programme has a positive impact on behaviour and the way pupils treat each other. Lessons and breaktimes are calm and purposeful. Pupils who are new to the school quickly settle and make friends.

Early years is a strength of the school. The curriculum has been redesigned and supports a strong start for key stage 1. Well-planned activities promote strong communication and vocabulary development. Children talk to each other and to adults as they learn. They demonstrate considerable focus on their learning. Communication with parents and carers is very effective. Children are quick to settle and learn routines. As a result, children are well prepared for the next stage of their learning.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The presentation of work in pupils' books and the quality of pupils' handwriting are inconsistent. Many pupils do not use a fluent handwriting style. This is because until recently, the school has not focused sufficiently on teaching handwriting and insisting on high standards of presentation. The school should continue to prioritise these skills, so that standards of handwriting and presentation match the improvements made in the rest of the curriculum.
- In some mathematics lessons, pupils' misconceptions are not addressed quickly enough when teaching is focused on a different year group. This is because systems for teaching mathematics to the school's mixed-age classes are not yet embedded. The school should continue its review of the organisation of mathematics lessons, so that pupils can receive rapid, accurate feedback on their learning.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	146924
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10346723
Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Carvin
CEO of the trust	Alice Witherow
Headteacher	Jill Dodds
Website	pcfs.cheviotlt.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 February 2024, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Cheviot Learning Trust.
- The school shares a local governing board with Wylam First School.
- The acting executive headteacher and acting deputy executive headteacher took up their posts in September 2024. They lead this school and Wylam First School. Some staff also work across both schools.
- The school uses one registered alternative provision.
- The school offers provision for two-year-olds.
- The school offers before- and after-school childcare.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and

management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the acting executive headteacher and representatives of the local governing board. The lead inspector also held conversations with the CEO of the trust, the chair of the board of trustees and the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders about provision for pupils with SEND and considered relevant documentation and practice.
- Inspectors spoke with teaching and support staff and considered responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors met with pupils throughout the inspection, both formally and informally, during breaktimes and in lessons.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited lessons, talked with pupils and looked at pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke with pupils about their learning in other subjects.
- Inspectors considered reports to the local governing board, minutes of meetings and other documentation.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses, and spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.
- Inspectors considered pupils' behaviour in and outside lessons. Inspectors also considered school behaviour records and spoke with pupils about behaviour.

Inspection team

Ian Dawson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Dawn Foster

Ofsted Inspector

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