

South Hylton Primary Academy

Address: Union Street, SR4 0LS

Unique reference number (URN): 144447

Inspection report: 2 December 2025

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 

Pupils progress well through the curriculum from the early years to the end of key stage 2. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, typically achieve in line with the national averages in examinations.

Recently, pupils' achievement in phonics and multiplication checks has improved. Writing remains an area for further improvement so that pupils achieve as well as they should. The focus on improving writing is particularly important for pupils with barriers to learning, such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Across the wider curriculum, most pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the subjects that they study, such as science and history. Pupils in need of support for their speech, language and personal development show increased readiness for future learning. Pupils are generally prepared well for their next stage of education.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have implemented robust systems to monitor and improve attendance. They track attendance rigorously and intervene swiftly when concerns arise. Attendance data shows an improving trend, particularly in reducing persistent absence among disadvantaged pupils. Leaders work proactively to remove barriers through different interventions, including family engagement and targeted support. Collaboration with external professionals ensures that pupils with complex needs receive appropriate help. This has led to improving attendance for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders recognise the need to continue to raise attendance so that all pupils come to school as often as they can.

Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They understand expectations and link school rules to wider values such as respect and the rule of law. Bullying is rare. 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 apply behaviour policies consistently, responding sensitively to pupils who become overwhelmed. Leaders have created a culture where staff know, support and care for pupils, ensuring that any form of discrimination or harassment is not tolerated.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching. They take decisive action to improve practice when needed. They have constructed an ambitious, broad and balanced curriculum. The curriculum is well sequenced from the early years to the end of Year 6. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. They check pupils' understanding and address misconceptions, including, for example, through the use of technology. Pupils with barriers to learning, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive appropriate support to learn the

curriculum well. For instance, teachers typically make effective use of retrieval tasks and paired work in lessons to develop pupils' understanding. Leaders' work to develop and extend pupils' vocabulary is effective. Pupils benefit from the wide range of texts that they study in English and the curriculum's focus on developing sentence structure and punctuation.

Leaders prioritise developing pupils' key knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. Phonics and early reading are taught well. If pupils fall behind, they receive the teaching they need to help them catch up in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the school's work to ensure that pupils write clearly and legibly is not currently embedded across the school. The support that pupils receive when they struggle with writing does not sufficiently address gaps in understanding. Pupils continue to make errors that persist into key stage 2. Leaders are aware of this and have introduced adjustments to their approach and interventions to support and improve this further.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders have made considered and impactful improvements to the education in the early years. High-quality staff interactions with children ensure purposeful language development. Skilled practitioners use effective modelling in their interactions with children. Targeted interventions for key children extend vocabulary and sustain engagement, particularly for 2- and 3-year-olds. The curriculum is carefully sequenced, prioritising communication and language alongside personal, social, emotional and physical development. Stories, rhymes and structured conversations are embedded into teaching daily, ensuring that children develop confidence in speaking and listening.

Reading is a clear priority. Reception Year children access a systematic synthetic phonics programme as soon as they join the school. Children build secure knowledge of early reading and writing. The teaching of phonics is a strength. Leaders have considered physical readiness for writing by embedding activities that develop children's gross and fine motor control.

Children are generally well prepared for their transition to Year 1, supported by effective liaison between the early years and key stage 1 staff. Provision for 2-year-olds is appropriate and impactful, offering a nurturing environment that meets children's developmental needs. Partnerships with parents and carers are positive, with staff providing guidance and referrals to external services, such as speech and language therapy, where needed. Staff provide effective support for children who need additional help in their personal, social and emotional development.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have established an inclusive culture that prioritises early identification of pupils' needs. They ensure that staff are trained well to support pupils with barriers to their learning. For example, the early years staff are alert to emerging needs and implement interventions in phonics, communication and motor skills as required. Individual needs are assessed accurately, meaning vulnerable pupils benefit from structured approaches to ensure their learning is scaffolded effectively.

Barriers to learning and wellbeing are reduced through strategic support and reasonable adjustments. Leaders' careful adaptations enable pupils, including children in early years, to learn and play alongside their peers. Staff demonstrate a secure understanding of pupils' needs, including social, emotional and mental health needs. Staff use a variety of strategies well, such as overlays, dim lighting and pencil grips as required.

Disadvantaged pupils benefit from the effective support they receive, and this is reflected in their improved outcomes. When behaviour does not meet the school's high expectations, leaders deploy a range of resources and, when necessary, make appropriate use of registered alternative provision.

Leaders work proactively with parents and external agencies to support pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils have the right level of support to help them develop academically and more widely. Pupils' progress is tracked through regular reviews and pupil progress meetings. Leaders ensure that support plans use well-structured goals to promote pupils' learning.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have a secure and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Their strategic priorities are sharply focused on improving attendance and provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), alongside developing high-quality teaching. Ambition for pupils is evident in the well-considered learning environment, including, for example, through the investment in digital technology, which has had a positive impact on learning. Early years leadership has brought about effective and coherent improvements to provision and staff practice.

Governance is robust. Trustees and governors fulfil their statutory duties diligently, particularly in safeguarding. They provide appropriate support and challenge. The trust maintains clear oversight of performance and resources and supports the school effectively. Leaders' focus on staff wellbeing reflects a clear commitment to sustainable improvement. The trust reinforces this approach, ensuring that decisions and changes are designed with a consideration of staff workload and always in the best interests of children.

Leaders have prioritised the right actions. They are open and reflective about when this has and has not worked. Leaders' decisions prioritise inclusion and achievement for disadvantaged pupils. Professional learning for staff supports school priorities well. Leaders have designed a coherent programme of staff training that continues to build expertise across the workforce, for example through bespoke SEND training and support for early career teachers.

Personal development and well-being

Expected standard 

The school delivers a comprehensive personal development programme that promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their beliefs and experiences while respecting others' values. Ethical issues, equality and diversity are explored in age-appropriate ways. This helps pupils to recognise the importance of fairness and tolerance. Pupils' understanding is supported through regular

assemblies that reflect on British values and encourage debate and discussion among pupils.

Pupils' social skills are nurtured through the school's character curriculum and well-structured routines that promote cooperation and conflict resolution. They actively participate in a wide range of enrichment opportunities. These residential trips, cultural visits and creative experiences are brought together in the 'South Hylton Academy Passport'. These activities help to broaden pupils' horizons and deepen appreciation of cultural diversity and heritage. This is particularly important given the school's context. Pupils also encounter a wide range of texts from different cultural backgrounds through the planned 'Mirrors and Windows' reading scheme.

The personal, social, health and economic curriculum is age appropriate and well designed. It prioritises teaching pupils about safety, such as about online and offline risks, healthy living and mental wellbeing. Pupils also learn about different kinds of relationships, which prepares them well for their futures. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported to access all aspects of the personal development offer. Leaders track this carefully to ensure that they benefit from the activities and experiences fully.

Pupils enjoy their leadership roles greatly, such as being digital, sport and play leaders. School leaders have deliberately designed these to support pupils' development. Beyond the school gates, pupils support the village remembrance event and visit other local schools. This helps to develop their self-confidence.

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

Pupils feel welcome and safe in this inclusive school from the moment they arrive each morning. Pupils benefit from positive relationships with staff. This helps pupils to communicate their feelings and get help when they need it. Children in the early years are encouraged to reflect in increasing depth on how they feel each day, which helps them to settle very well.

Pupils enjoy learning and speak confidently about their work. Classrooms are calm, and staff are supportive. Pupils benefit from tailored resources, such as visual timetables, to help them understand what activities they need to do. Leaders have ensured that pupils who struggle with their speech, language and communication are helped effectively. Pupils are supported by clear routines for learning and adjustments in their lessons. They achieve well across the curriculum and develop a secure understanding of key vocabulary and knowledge. This helps pupils to be ready for their next steps at the end of key stage 2.

Leaders and staff listen to the voice of the pupils carefully. Pupils use their class 'worry monsters' or have conversations with their trusted adults. Leaders also have a 'pupil advisory panel' to support them to understand and improve the experience of pupils, including those most disadvantaged. Beyond the classroom, pupils enjoy a wide range of clubs, curriculum trips and enrichment activities. They particularly enjoy snow tubing and visits to local landmarks and museums.

Pupils value the school's high expectations for behaviour. They show their understanding of the expected routines throughout the day. Pupils' attendance is improving. They feel safe and know that bullying and poor behaviour are dealt with promptly. Pupils focus well on their lessons. They enjoy spending time together at breaktimes. Pupils are respectful of each other, and they appreciate differences that they have. Older pupils demonstrate a clear knowledge of fundamental British values. They understand what it means to be a positive member of their school and local community.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that pupils receive effective and timely support to improve their writing, including in the early years.
 - Leaders should continue to develop their work to improve pupils' attendance, including for the most disadvantaged pupils.
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About this inspection

This school is part of The Laidlaw Schools 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), Sally Newton, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Susanna Kempe.

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 the headteacher, assistant headteachers, CEO, trustees, including the chair, governors from the local governing committee, including the chair, parents and pupils during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of one alternative provision, which is registered.

The school also, under the same registration, runs a nursery for 2-year-olds.

Headteacher: Chris Mitchinson

Lead inspector:

Richard Wakefield, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Emily Stevens, His Majesty's Inspector

Claire Brown, Ofsted Inspector

Nicky White, His Majesty's 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 2 December 2025

School and pupil context

Total pupils

266

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

300

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)

41.31%

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

1.13%

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: 3.5%

Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) support

17.67%

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 maths

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and maths measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	70%	61%	Above
2024/25	69%	62%	Close to average
2023/24	61%	61%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23	79%	60%	Above

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%	74%	Close to average
2024/25	69%	75%	Close to average
2023/24	65%	74%	Below
2022/23	88%	73%	Above

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	77%	72%	Above
2024/25	72%	72%	Close to average
2023/24	71%	72%	Close to average
2022/23	88%	71%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in maths

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in maths.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	77%	73%	Close to average
2024/25	79%	74%	Close to average
2023/24	61%	73%	Below
2022/23	91%	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 maths

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	50%	46%	Close to average
2024/25	46%	47%	Close to average
2023/24	56%	46%	Close to average
2022/23	50%	44%	Close to average

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	56%	62%	Close to average
2024/25	46%	63%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	56%	62%	Close to average
2022/23	70%	60%	Close to average

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%	59%	Close to average
2024/25	46%	59%	Below
2023/24	67%	58%	Close to average
2022/23	70%	58%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in maths

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in maths.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	63%	60%	Close to average
2024/25	54%	61%	Close to average
2023/24	56%	59%	Close to average
2022/23	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 maths

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	50%	68%	-18 pp
2024/25	46%	69%	-23 pp
2023/24	56%	67%	-12 pp
2022/23	50%	66%	-16 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	56%	80%	-23 pp
2024/25	46%	81%	-35 pp
2023/24	56%	80%	-24 pp
2022/23	70%	78%	-8 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	59%	78%	-18 pp
2024/25	46%	78%	-32 pp
2023/24	67%	78%	-11 pp
2022/23	70%	77%	-7 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in maths

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in maths and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	63%	80%	-17 pp
2024/25	54%	81%	-27 pp
2023/24	56%	79%	-24 pp
2022/23	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 (1 term)	7.6%	5.1%	Above
2023/24	7.0%	5.5%	Above
2022/23	7.4%	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 (1 term)	25.9%	14.3%	Above
2023/24	23.9%	14.6%	Above
2022/23	25.0%	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 standards expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standards 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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