

Hexham First School

Address: Beaufront Avenue, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 1JD

Unique reference number (URN): 122203

Inspection report: 30 June 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

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear oversight of attendance. They know their pupils and their families well. The majority of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), attend school regularly. Leaders provide tailored support for pupils who find attending school difficult. They work effectively with wider professionals and families to reduce any barriers to attendance. Leaders consistently promote the importance of high attendance and this is having an impact on those who attend less often.

Pupils benefit from clear routines and expectations. They understand and follow the school rules. Pupils respond well to the caring and supportive relationships they have with staff. They are keen to impress them. Leaders have created a calm, nurturing environment. As a result, behaviour has improved and suspensions are reducing. Pupils learn to understand and manage their emotions and do so well. Pupils with SEND benefit from effective reasonable adjustments and targeted support to help them to regulate their emotions. Bullying is very rare and dealt with effectively. Pupils interact well with each other during play times. They treat each other with kindness and respect. Pupils learn how to share play equipment and resolve any minor conflicts.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders have implemented an effective curriculum in the early years which helps children to get off to a positive start. Leaders accurately identify children's starting points and tailor their approach to meet the needs of all children, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Children benefit from exploratory play to develop their understanding of the world around them. They quickly develop their gross motor skills through rope climbing, balancing, jumping and ribbon dancing. This enables children to move on to develop their fine motor skills so that they can start writing. Children learn to read with increasing fluency as they move through the early years. They thoroughly enjoy their 'mystery reader' time, where they are read a story by a special guest, often a parent. Most children reach a good level of development by the end of Reception. They are well prepared for their transition into key stage 1.

Leaders and staff make sure children are safe and happy. Staff interact positively with children, showing care and encouraging their curiosity. Children develop a sense of belonging and grow in confidence throughout their time in early years.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders and staff know their pupils well. They quickly and accurately identify their learning and pastoral needs at the earliest stage. Leaders work in close partnership with parents and wider professionals to make sure their pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and

those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, have the support that they need in school.

Leaders and staff respond quickly to changing needs and adapt their approach when needed. Some pupils benefit from short spells outside the classroom to complete sensory circuits or spend time in 'the snug'. This helps them to regulate themselves so that they can concentrate on their learning. A minority of pupils access targeted interventions, such as play therapy, to help them understand their emotions. Leaders have created calm and productive learning environments. Older pupils benefit from therapeutic classrooms, with flexible seating and calm spaces.

Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or known to social care, are well looked after. Leaders and staff use additional funding effectively to help vulnerable pupils be successful in school. However, they don't always check that their actions are having the desired impact on pupils. Leaders use alternative provision in the best interests of pupils. It is carefully considered and selected to match pupils' needs and interests.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

The school has recently experienced a period of uncertainty which has impacted on the effectiveness of some aspects of the school's work. There has been a significant change to leadership. The new headteacher has recently started in her role. Leaders have quickly established a clear understanding of the school's strengths and identified clear priority actions for improvement. Some of this work has already started and is having a positive impact. For example, the introduction of the 'Hexham First Charter' to set out behaviour expectations. Leaders know what they need to do next. They are committed to making decisions in the best interests of their pupils.

Governors know the school well. They have supported leaders through a challenging period. Governors are very much part of the school community and visit the school regularly. They have an accurate understanding of leaders' priorities for improvement. Governors hold leaders to account and ensure their statutory duties are met.

Staff are proud to work in this school. They value the support they receive from leaders. Leaders are considerate of their workload and wellbeing. Staff have access to regular training which is research informed. Their training is aligned with leaders' priorities for school improvement to help them to further develop their knowledge and skills.

Leaders communicate well with parents. Parents value their approach and appreciate the support that their children receive in school. Leaders, staff and pupils regularly engage with the local community and are frequent visitors to the arts centre, elderly care home and church.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils access a suitable personal development programme. They regularly engage with external agencies, such as the local railway network, to learn how to keep themselves safe in their community. Pupils know right from wrong. They know how to report any worries or concerns that they have. Pupils learn about relationships at an age-appropriate level. They

know how to be a good friend. Pupils learn about other beliefs and cultures and value diversity. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Pupils learn how to work as part of a team. They develop resilience by taking part in outdoor education and assault courses with their peers. Pupils celebrate the achievements of others. They learn how to access local leisure facilities, such as the library and swimming pool. Pupils enjoy exploring at the seaside or by visiting the local farm. All pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, take part in the school's Christmas show. They try a range of sports and exercise such as cricket, tennis and yoga. Older pupils learn how to ride a bicycle safely. These experiences prepare pupils well for their next steps.

Pupils are well cared for in school. They know where to go if they need some extra help. Staff intervene quickly, when needed, to provide additional support to pupils. Pupils learn how to play well with others. They can choose from a range of activities at play times, such as hula hoop or the bat and ball. Pupils share equipment and make sure everybody has a turn. Older pupils become role models for their younger peers. Lunchtime 'table leaders' make sure everybody has a cup of water and help staff to clean up. The student council have introduced an anti-bullying charter to make sure everybody feels safe.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Inconsistencies in teaching mean that a minority of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make variable progress across the curriculum. These pupils have gaps in their foundational knowledge across reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have taken action to improve how well pupils achieve in their Year 4 multiplication tables check and outcomes are starting to improve.

Children in their early years achieve well. Most reach a good level of development by the end of Reception. Pupils typically achieve in line with national averages in their phonics check at the end of Year 1. They develop secure knowledge of speech sounds. Pupils who need some extra help with their phonics receive this support. However, variability in the quality of this support means that some pupils do not catch up quickly enough. A minority of pupils are not well prepared for their next steps. Leaders are taking action to address this but this work is in its early stages.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

There is variability in the quality of teaching across subjects and year groups. The curriculum is not consistently taught well. In some lessons, teachers do not regularly check what pupils know in order to adapt their teaching if necessary. This means that a minority of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, develop gaps in their understanding. Teachers make suitable adaptations for pupils with special educational needs and/or

disabilities. However, staff occasionally provide too much support, which limits how well these pupils develop their independence.

Pupils are taught to read using an appropriate phonics programme which is typically taught well. When pupils move into key stage 1, the books that they read are not always well matched to their ability. This is because a minority of pupils have gaps in their knowledge which are not addressed quickly enough. Pupils are taught how to correctly grip their pencil and form letters. Occasionally, teachers do not make sure pupils apply their knowledge well across the wider curriculum. Pupils are taught a wide range of vocabulary and learn how to apply it in their writing.

The curriculum design is clear and well structured so that pupils can learn more over time. Leaders are ambitious about the curriculum and teaching. They know what needs to improve and are taking action to address variability in teaching. However, this work is in its infancy.

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

Pupils are happy and cared for well at the school. Each morning, they receive a warm welcome by staff who care about them. Pupils value the school's clear routines and expectations. They interact and play positively with their peers. Pupils behave well and are keen to please staff. Bullying is very rare and is dealt with quickly and effectively. Children in the early years quickly develop their confidence and curiosity. Most pupils attend school regularly.

Pupils enjoy learning. They access a broad and balanced curriculum across a range of subject areas. However, the quality of teaching they receive is variable. Pupils occasionally make mistakes that are not identified quickly enough. This means that a minority of pupils develop gaps in their knowledge and skills across reading, writing and mathematics. These gaps limit the progress that they can make across the wider curriculum. Pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported effectively to access and do well in their learning. However, a significant minority find it difficult to develop their independence. Children in the early years benefit from high-quality interactions and structured play. They learn how to play alongside their peers and explore the world around them. Children in the early years begin to read with fluency. Most children reach a good level of development by the end of Reception. They are well prepared for their next steps.

All pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with SEND, are fully included in all aspects of school life. They enjoy learning musical instruments, entering sports competitions and exploring outdoor spaces. Pupils regularly visit elderly residents in the local care home. They participate in local arts and cultural events, such as the Hexham lantern parade. Pupils become valued members of the local community.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), quickly secure their foundational knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics so that they can make secure progress across the wider curriculum.
 - Leaders should ensure that they embed highly effective teaching across all subjects so that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with SEND, develop the knowledge and skills they need for their next steps.
 - Leaders should ensure the impact of the pupil premium strategy is closely monitored to make sure it is making a positive difference to the experiences of pupils who are disadvantaged.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Fiona Armstrong.

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, governors and the school improvement partner during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently makes use of 2 alternative provisions, including 2 that are unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The headteacher has recently been appointed, and started working at the school in April 2026.

Headteacher: Clare Crow

Lead inspector:

Nikki Heron, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Gemma Jeynes, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from [different sources](#). More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

 The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 30 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

82

Well below 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

150

Below 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)

35.21%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 26.3%

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

2.44%

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

28.05%

Well above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

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).

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)	5.1%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	3.7%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	4.8%	5.9%	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 (3 term)	10.7%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.4%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	13.3%	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.

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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