

Hartside Primary Academy

Address: Hartside, Crook, County Durham, DL15 9NN

Unique reference number (URN): 145429

Inspection report: 9 September 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

Early years

Strong standard 

Leaders prioritise the early years, ensuring that children get off to a very positive start. They invest in coaching and training for staff, which ensures that there is consistently high-quality teaching across the early years classes. The school recognises parents and carers as important partners from the outset. It provides regular updates, reading initiatives and workshops to help parents to understand and support their child's early learning journey.

Leaders have created an ambitious and flexible curriculum that builds children's knowledge, skills and confidence carefully over time. A bespoke programme, shaped by feedback from parents, enriches the curriculum further. Practical experiences, such as visiting local shops, build children's confidence, independence and an understanding of the world.

Children from age 2 upwards flourish in the stimulating and purposeful environment. Staff design engaging activities that develop children's language and basic skills across all areas of learning. Staff skilfully develop vocabulary through high-quality conversations, stories, songs and rhymes.

Staff know children well and thoughtfully adapt activities to meet their needs and starting points. Disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully included and receive effective support.

Staff actively promote children's welfare. All statutory welfare requirements are met, including safe sleeping arrangements for 2-year-olds. Children leave the early years confident, capable and well prepared for Year 1.

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Leaders place high importance on ensuring that pupils are welcomed and supported in school. They have a secure understanding of pupils' individual needs and act swiftly, when these needs change. Leaders use effective systems to identify, check and review pupils' needs. Staff benefit from appropriate training, expertise from the trust and specialist professionals. This enables them to meet the wide range of needs across the school.

The school's approach to teaching enables pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to access learning alongside their peers. Staff consistently use adaptations and carefully chosen resources to effectively remove barriers to learning. Where pupils need extra support beyond the classroom, this is precisely targeted, purposeful and time limited. Staff help pupils to develop and master the skills they need to access the curriculum successfully. Mental health provision is a strength and forms an important part of the school's universal offer.

The pupil premium strategy is well designed and thoroughly evaluated. Leaders understand the range of barriers that disadvantaged pupils face. They use funding thoughtfully to support learning, wellbeing and build aspirations. As a result, academic outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are in line with those of their peers.

The school's provision for pupils known to social care is highly effective. Leaders' proactive multi-agency working and responsive pastoral support helps pupils to feel safe and engage positively with school life.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

Leaders have developed a personal development programme that is an entitlement for all pupils. Built around the school's character-building values, the programme is responsive to local and national issues. Pupils learn about racism and the importance of showing tolerance and respect in their community.

The school's offer is highly inclusive. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities access targeted experiences and benefit from additional teaching.

The personal social and health education curriculum teaches the essential knowledge and skills that pupils need to be successful citizens. The curriculum is organised carefully so that pupils develop a detailed understanding of different topics as they move through the school. Pupils articulate their learning confidently and apply it in real-life situations. For example, they know how to seek support, challenge peers respectfully and demonstrate maturity when discussing sensitive issues, such as puberty and consent. Pupils speak with confidence about stereotypes and equality. They have a detailed understanding of fundamental British values and can explain why they are important in school and wider society. The school's impactful careers programme is raising aspirations and relates the importance of education to the world of work.

The school provides pastoral support that meets pupils' needs well. For example, therapy and counselling are readily available. Leaders take a proactive approach, identifying pupils who need support quickly. Pupils trust staff and are confident to ask for help for themselves and their friends.

Pupils embrace the variety of opportunities that are available to them. A broad range of clubs, including crochet, cooking, choir and litter picking in the community are tailored to pupils' interests. All pupils benefit from lessons that help them to play an instrument and appropriate financial support ensures that all pupils have access to musical tuition. Leaders closely check participation to ensure that pupils fully benefit from their offer.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Generally, pupils achieve well and are effectively prepared for the next stage of their education. By the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment in national tests in reading, writing and mathematics is in line with national averages. Disadvantaged pupils receive the support they need to help them make effective progress through the curriculum. They attain outcomes that are typically in line with, or above, those of disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Pupils generally develop the important skills needed in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics has been below the national average in recent years. Leaders have responded appropriately by making changes to the curriculum and improving daily teaching. As a result, pupils are increasingly able to remember and apply new sounds and are developing the knowledge and skills they need to become fluent readers.

Pupils develop their knowledge and skills across the wider curriculum. Leaders place a clear focus on building vocabulary and remembering more. This is supporting pupils to use precise language when explaining their learning in subjects, such as history, geography and science.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Attendance is broadly in line with national averages. Leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of attendance patterns for different groups of pupils. They use this information to identify concerns early and take appropriate action. This has resulted in improvements in attendance rates for individuals and some identified pupil groups. Leaders work closely with families to communicate expectations, promote regular high attendance and identify potential barriers that may prevent pupils from attending.

Staff manage behaviour well across the school. They have high expectations and establish clear routines, which pupils understand and follow. Pupils generally have positive attitudes to their learning and enjoy their lessons. They demonstrate the school's values of integrity, respect, kindness and empathy in their interactions with others. These values help pupils to develop as confident and responsible individuals. Staff use inclusive approaches, such as movement breaks, visual timetables and sensory resources, to support pupils to manage their behaviour. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that adults support them if they have any concerns. They feel safe in school and know which adults they can talk to if they have worries. Leaders act promptly when incidents of discrimination, violence or abuse are identified.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The school's curriculum is ambitious and well designed from the early years onwards. It provides pupils with a consistent approach to learning. Staff carefully sequence important knowledge and subject-specific vocabulary into small steps, helping pupils to build their understanding over time.

Teaching is generally well structured. Clear routines and expectations help pupils to be ready to learn. Teachers explain new content clearly and model tasks effectively. Pupils use strategies, such as jottings, to develop their ideas before applying their learning independently through written and practical activities. In some lessons, activities do not match the learning intention. This means that some pupils do not develop as secure an understanding as they could.

Leaders provide effective coaching to support staff to teach the curriculum well and meet pupils' needs. When pupils find aspects of reading, writing or mathematics difficult, they receive prompt support. This helps them to make appropriate progress through the

curriculum. When teachers identify gaps in learning, they make appropriate adjustments to the curriculum to fill these.

The school has changed its phonics programme, which is strengthening the quality and consistency of teaching in this area. Staff use regular checks to identify pupils, who need additional support. As a result, younger pupils generally develop the early reading skills that will help them to become confident, fluent readers.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas where further improvement is needed. They regularly check on the quality of learning and use this to help bring about improvement. They are ambitious for every pupil and use the school values of integrity, respect, grit, kindness, empathy and self-control to support decision-making. As a result, pupils develop their character, confidence and aspirations during their time at the school.

Governors and trustees provide effective support and challenge. They have an informed understanding of the work of leaders and maintain a clear focus on what is best for pupils. The professional expertise provided by the trust strengthens leadership capacity and supports the school to continually improve.

Leaders create a positive and supportive culture for staff. As a result, staff value the focus on wellbeing and appreciate the breadth of training, coaching and professional support that they receive. This enables them to develop their practice and respond effectively to pupils' learning and behaviour needs.

Leaders build trusting relationships with parents, carers and the wider community. Their commitment to open communication creates a welcoming culture of true partnership. Consequently, parents are highly supportive of the school. They report that their children are happy, safe and well cared for. Families of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities particularly value the school's responsive support and commitment to meeting individual needs.

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

Pupils enjoy coming to this friendly and caring school, where staff know them extremely well. Across the school community, adults and pupils live by the school values that foster an atmosphere of respect, kindness and support. In the early years, children engage enthusiastically with a wide range of experiences that help them to develop self-control and independence.

Assemblies and lessons help pupils develop a secure understanding of the world around them. They know how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet, and can talk confidently about different types of relationships. Pupils recognise the importance of exercise and a healthy diet in maintaining their physical and mental wellbeing. They take pride in their leadership responsibilities. Class and school councils and opportunities to

debate ensure that pupils' views are sought, heard and valued. This gives them a voice in the life of the school.

Leaders establish clear routines and high expectations for behaviour. These start in the early years. Pupils respond positively to these expectations and demonstrate a commitment to their learning. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are inclusive. Pupils of all ages support and care for one another. They enjoy the wide range of activities on offer and play well together. Pupils report that bullying is rare. They know how to seek support from a range of trusted adults should they need it.

Pupils enjoy their learning. A focus on ensuring that younger pupils have the foundations to be effective readers supports pupils to develop the knowledge they need to succeed. Staff quickly identify barriers to learning and provide appropriate support so that every pupil can flourish. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve well. They leave school with the skills, knowledge and confidence needed for the next stage of their education.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to prioritise the consistently effective teaching of phonics to ensure that pupils develop the skills needed to help them become fluent confident readers.
 - Leaders should continue to ensure that staff teach the curriculum consistently well across all classes, so that pupils make effective progress across all curriculum subjects.
 - Leaders should embed their attendance strategy so that it has the intended impact, particularly for those who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
 - Leaders should use the detailed information from their checks on pupils' learning to inform their actions so that standards are consistently high quality across the school.
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About this inspection

The school is part of the 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 inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The inspection took place on Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 September 2026.

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, the deputy headteacher and a range of other staff. An inspector met with the CEO, a trustee and members of the local governing board.

The inspector confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

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

Headteacher: Dawn Simpson

Lead inspector:

Steven Holmes, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Sharon Ballinger, 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 9 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

241

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: 268

School capacity

242

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)

29.61%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 26.5%

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

2.90%

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: 4.1%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

16.18%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational needs support 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 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	70%	61%	Above
2024/25 (final)	63%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	75%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	71%	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	86%	74%	Above
2024/25 (final)	77%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	93%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	89%	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	83%	72%	Above
2024/25 (final)	77%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	89%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	82%	71%	Above

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	81%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	73%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	79%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	93%	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 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	56%	46%	Above
2024/25 (final)	54%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	55%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	58%	44%	Above

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	81%	62%	Above
2024/25 (final)	69%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	82%	62%	Above
2022/23 (final)	92%	60%	Above

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	75%	59%	Above
2024/25 (final)	69%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	82%	58%	Above
2022/23 (final)	75%	58%	Above

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	69%	60%	Above
2024/25 (final)	69%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	55%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	83%	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 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	56%	68%	-12 pp
2024/25 (final)	54%	69%	-15 pp
2023/24 (final)	55%	67%	-13 pp
2022/23 (final)	58%	66%	-8 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	81%	80%	1 pp
2024/25 (final)	69%	81%	-12 pp
2023/24 (final)	82%	80%	2 pp
2022/23 (final)	92%	78%	13 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	75%	78%	-3 pp
2024/25 (final)	69%	78%	-9 pp
2023/24 (final)	82%	78%	4 pp
2022/23 (final)	75%	77%	-2 pp

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	69%	80%	-10 pp
2024/25 (final)	69%	81%	-11 pp
2023/24 (final)	55%	79%	-25 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	83%	79%	4 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 (3 term)	5.7%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	4.8%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	5.6%	5.9%	Close to average

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)	16.9%	13.0%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	9.6%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	15.5%	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.

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