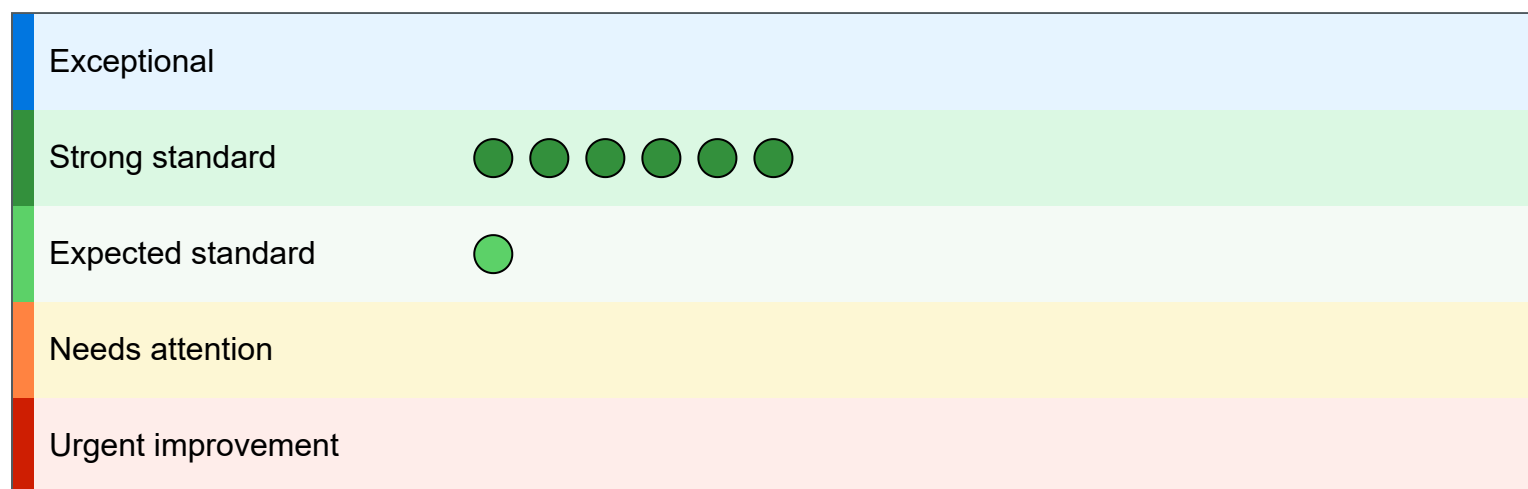


Whale Hill Primary School

Address: Sandsend Road, Eston, Whale Hill Primary School, Middlesbrough, TS6 8AD

Unique reference number (URN): 147393

Inspection report: 20 January 2026



✔ **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 ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils achieve consistently well over time. Leaders work tirelessly to overcome any barriers to learning. By the end of Year 6, published data shows that disadvantaged pupils outperform their non-disadvantaged peers nationally. Most pupils leave the school with the essential knowledge and skills they need to communicate effectively and to read, write and calculate confidently. This means that they are well prepared for the next steps in their education.

Pupils make secure progress across the curriculum and throughout their time at the school. In key stage 1, pupils demonstrate secure phonics knowledge, recognising letters, knowing the sounds they represent and blending these together to read and spell words accurately. Pupils, throughout the school, confidently recall prior learning well and can make links to what they already know. As a result of carefully tailored support, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils achieve well across the curriculum.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Pupils' attendance is consistently above national figures. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities have high attendance rates. Despite this, leaders are not complacent. Their rigorous approach to reducing barriers to attendance contributes to improving trends. This includes reaching out to support pupils' families where needed.

Leaders and staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. These are promoted consistently across the school environment. Pupils enjoy the recognition that they receive for rising to these expectations.

From early years onwards, routines are quickly established. Children develop positive attitudes to learning. They listen well and follow instructions closely. They cooperate with each other and are polite and respectful. Throughout the school, classrooms are calm and purposeful spaces. Pupils behave in a considerate manner and engage enthusiastically in learning.

Pupils enjoy lively but harmonious playtimes. These are greatly enhanced by the wide range of interesting activities set out on the playground. This has reduced the number of behaviour incidents and broadened activity options. Pupils are positive about behaviour. They feel they are part of the Whale Hill team. Bullying is rare. Pupils know that staff address any concerns they may have immediately. Suspensions are used appropriately and always as a last resort.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have designed a broad and ambitious curriculum with a clear focus on developing pupils' vocabulary. Leaders keep the quality and relevance of the curriculum under review.

For example, they recently refreshed some curriculum content to better support pupils to remember important knowledge over time. Pupils now recall their learning in great detail. For instance, younger pupils are eager to explain what they know about a local First World War hero who was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery.

Teaching is clearly delivered and underpinned by strong subject knowledge. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can learn. They ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have the support that they need to enable them to access the curriculum successfully. Teachers check pupils' progress thoroughly. Appropriate support is put in place to help accelerate learning in the rare cases where it has slowed.

The teaching of phonics is sharp and focused. Pupils use their newly acquired phonics knowledge confidently in their reading and writing. They become increasingly proficient writers as they move through the school. Pupils also become fluent in number. They complete operations effortlessly when solving more-complex problems. A focus on handwriting, grammar, punctuation and spelling is evident in pupils' work.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Whale Hill is an inclusive school where pupils thrive. Staff and leaders have consistently high expectations of all pupils. Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are identified quickly. They put in place appropriate and timely support so that barriers to learning are reduced. The school draws effectively on external professionals when needed. It makes sure that pupil and family voice help to shape and review provision. Leaders closely monitor the ongoing impact of support to ensure it remains appropriate and effective.

Staff benefit from comprehensive training to develop the expertise they need to support pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. This results in pupils being able to access learning successfully alongside their peers for much of the day. On entry to early years, children who need additional support with their speaking are identified quickly. Prompt support is provided to help these children to develop their language skills. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have a thoughtfully planned-out programme to enable them to successfully transition to secondary school.

Leaders allocate additional funding purposefully. They ensure a careful and appropriate balance between pupils' academic and pastoral needs. As a result, disadvantaged pupils' attainment is strong by the end of key stage 2.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders, governors and trust leaders are inspirational. They have a strong oversight of the school and an in-depth knowledge of and commitment to the local area. Leaders at all levels are ambitious for all pupils who attend Whale Hill Primary School. They refuse to allow pupils' starting points to limit outcomes. Leaders do all they can to equip pupils with the knowledge they need to achieve and thrive in adult life. Leaders consistently act in the best interests of pupils. They frequently go above and beyond to support pupils and families both in and beyond school. This unswerving commitment is reflected across the staff team.

Leaders operate with a meticulous focus on improvement. They leave no stone unturned in addressing barriers to pupils' wellbeing and academic success. For example, leaders support parents and carers to gain qualifications in English and mathematics, strengthening the learning environment at home alongside the provision in school.

Leaders know their school well. They have identified clear priorities to further improve the consistency of teaching across the school. They constantly review and develop the curriculum in response to the evolving context of society. The strategies put in place evidence sustained improvements in curriculum quality and academic outcomes.

Staff are highly committed to the school and feel valued. They are united by a shared sense of purpose to improve pupils' life chances. Staff benefit from high-quality training opportunities. They appreciate that leaders remain mindful of their workload and wellbeing.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders carefully consider pupils' wider development. They have designed an aspirational programme that prepares pupils exceptionally well for life beyond school. This programme is informed by leaders' deep understanding of the local context and potential risks that pupils may face. It includes a broad and well-taught approach to personal, social and health education.

Pupils actively live out the fundamental British values. For example, they learn about democracy through taking part in different types of elections. This practical understanding is strengthened by visitors, including a local MP. In this way, pupils learn about the different ways that they can make a positive contribution to their community.

Pupils understand why discrimination is wrong. They show compassion for others while valuing diversity and difference. Pupils learn how to keep safe online and offline. They are made aware of the potential risks they may face as they gain independence. Sessions delivered by the police equip pupils to make informed and responsible choices.

The school's extended offer includes a range of clubs, visitors and educational trips that provide rich experiences for all pupils. Pupils learn to play instruments, such as the clarinet, flute, cornet and trombone. They are inspired by the school's successful alumni, who provide them with role models and challenge career stereotypes. They also return to support events such as the Year 6 end-of-year musical. In turn, pupils contribute to the local community by singing for the elderly, participating in litter picks and working in the eco-shop. Pupils develop their financial literacy through practical projects, the school bank and budgeting activities.

Pupils understand what contributes to a healthy body and mind, including the importance of diet, exercise and sleep. They learn what it means to have a healthy relationship. Leaders continue to refine aspects of relationships education, including what is meant by consent, to ensure pupils understand why this is relevant to them.

Expected standard

Early years

Expected standard

Children make a positive start to early years. Nursery-age children benefit from ambitious and nurturing provision. Staff focus intently on developing children's spoken language and broadening their vocabulary. Children enjoy adding actions to familiar stories such as 'The Little Red Hen' using real wheat and story characters. This helps children attach meaning to the new words they encounter.

Across early years, the curriculum is carefully mapped to ensure children develop their knowledge well in all areas of learning. This, alongside staff's high ambitions for all children, ensures that most children are able to read, write and work confidently with numbers by the end of their time in early years. Staff check carefully what children know and can do. They identify any children who need help to catch up and put in place appropriate support.

All staff receive training in the teaching of phonics. They deliver sessions with consistency and skill. The strong focus on letter and number formation is evident in children's work. However, there is some inconsistency in how well staff interact with children to move their language and learning on.

The school forges positive relationships with parents and carers. An effective transition programme ensures children settle quickly when they join the school.

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

Whale Hill Primary School is a school built on love. It is a place where everyone is welcome and feels safe. Leaders ensure that staff, pupils and their families are exceptionally well cared for. All those involved in the school are aspirational for the pupils and the community. Leaders, teachers, parents, carers and pupils all value and celebrate each other. Pupils are known by all staff, who focus on helping them thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

Despite low starting points, pupils achieve significantly above the national averages by the end of Year 6. Leaders are determined that pupils learn to read, write and use number fluently. The quality of pupils' work in books has improved as a result of higher expectations from staff.

Leaders do their utmost to reduce barriers for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Where needed, this includes additional support to ensure that they attend school regularly. Pupils' experiences are broadened through a wide variety of trips and after-school clubs. Pupils embrace the opportunities to take part in a range of sports, such as basketball, golf, dance and yoga. Pupils also learn to play a variety of instruments, including the guitar, brass instruments and the clarinet.

Children in early years get off to a positive start. Staff quickly identify their different needs. They make sure that children have the support they need to settle quickly. As a result, most

children are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to progress smoothly into Year 1.

Pupils' behaviour is consistently positive. Bullying is rare, and pupils are confident that staff would address this should it occur. They are respectful of each other and of the adults who support them. Pupils consistently model the values of courtesy, respect, tolerance and kindness. They value the opportunities to support charities, for example helping in the eco-club.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the quality of staff's interactions with children is consistently high across the early years, so that children's vocabulary is extended and their learning is maximised and embedded.
-

About this inspection

This school is part of Steel River Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officers (CEOs), Patsy Petrie and Jason Murgatroyd, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jane Powell.

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 and other senior leaders, the CEO and representatives of the governing body, including the chair of governors, during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Headteacher : Mrs Sandra Marsden

Lead inspector:

Nicky White, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Mark Dent, Ofsted Inspector

Mark Hassack, Ofsted Inspector

Gary Scott Scott-Cummings, 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 20 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

465

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

530

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)

55.09%

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

1.29%

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

15.91%

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 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	78%	61%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	85%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	74%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	76%	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	88%	74%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	93%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	86%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	86%	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	85%	72%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	87%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	86%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	83%	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	92%	73%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	94%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	90%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	92%	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	72%	46%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	72%	47%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	68%	46%	Above
2022/23 (final)	76%	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	84%	62%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	86%	63%	Above
2023/24 (final)	80%	62%	Above
2022/23 (final)	87%	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	81%	59%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	76%	59%	Above
2023/24 (final)	80%	58%	Above
2022/23 (final)	84%	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	90%	60%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	90%	61%	Above
2023/24 (final)	88%	59%	Above
2022/23 (final)	92%	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	72%	68%	5 pp
2024/25 (revised)	72%	69%	3 pp
2023/24 (final)	68%	67%	1 pp
2022/23 (final)	76%	66%	10 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	84%	80%	5 pp
2024/25 (revised)	86%	81%	5 pp
2023/24 (final)	80%	80%	1 pp
2022/23 (final)	87%	78%	9 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	81%	78%	3 pp
2024/25 (revised)	76%	78%	-2 pp
2023/24 (final)	80%	78%	3 pp
2022/23 (final)	84%	77%	7 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	90%	80%	10 pp
2024/25 (revised)	90%	81%	9 pp
2023/24 (final)	88%	79%	8 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	92%	79%	13 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 (2 term)	4.5%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.4%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	5.3%	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 (2 term)	11.1%	13.3%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	12.6%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	13.9%	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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