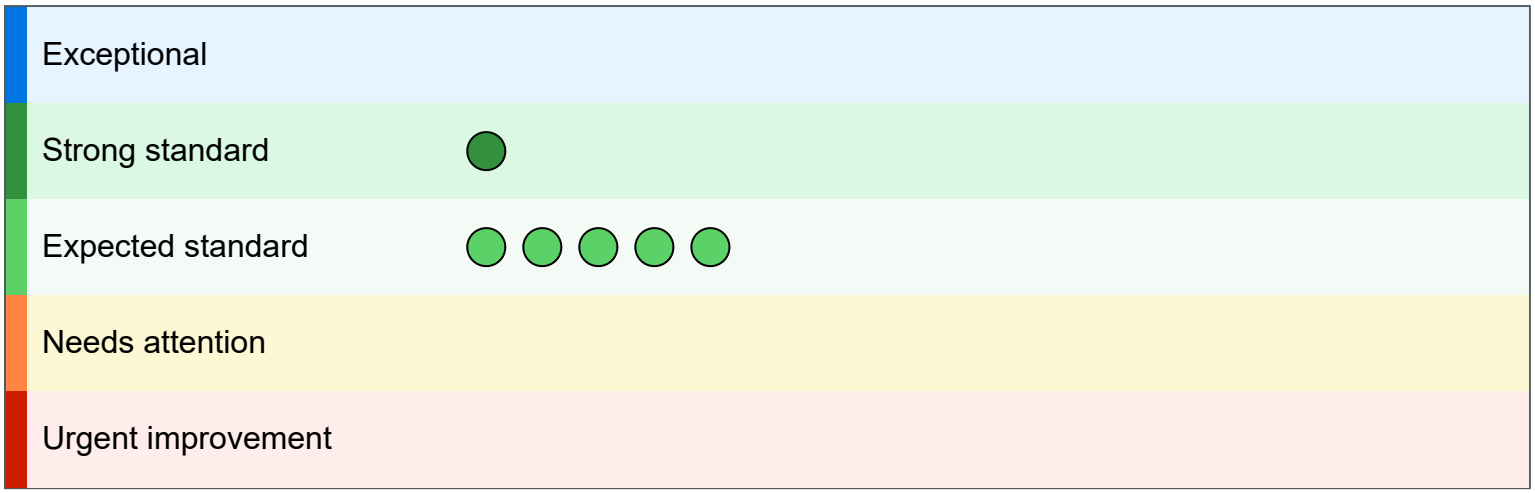
Wensleydale School

Address: Richmond Road, Leyburn, North Yorkshire, DL8 5HY

Unique reference number (URN): 121679

Inspection report: 12 May 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

Inclusion

Strong standard

Inclusion threads through all aspects of Wensleydale School and is a key strength of the school. Staff support leaders to identify pupils' barriers quickly and accurately. This includes information that comes to light from concerns about attendance or behaviour. Leaders share 'pupil passports', which accurately set out the targets that pupils are working towards and which outline how teachers can help them achieve these. Leaders regularly review the passports, together with teachers and parents. Support is expertly adjusted or refined over time to ensure pupils' needs are met.

Leaders seek advice from a wider range of professionals when needed. Support staff receive training to ensure that the help they provide makes a difference. As a result, pupils, including those who attend the school's targeted mainstream provision, build social confidence and emotional resilience.

Leaders use alternative provision sparingly. Careful consideration ensures that it is well matched to pupils' needs. Leaders foster a sense of belonging by providing consistency and familiarity for pupils, including those who are known (or previously known) to social care. Leaders use extra funding, such as the pupil premium, effectively. They consider pupils' circumstances and the barriers that they face to identify appropriate support. Staff receive professional learning that supports them in implementing approaches effectively. Leaders make adaptations to ensure that all pupils can access the wide range of opportunities and experiences the school offers.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Overall, pupils achieve well. Attainment in national tests is broadly in line with national averages, including for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils talk positively about their learning. They can link new knowledge to that secured previously. As a result, pupils know more and remember more over time. The quality of pupils' written work is more variable and often inconsistent across subjects, which impacts how well some pupils build knowledge.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make appropriate progress from their starting points. They make progress in their classroom subjects and in their wider skills. For example, pupils develop their speech and language skills, or their ability to manage their emotions. This enables pupils to engage effectively in learning.

Leaders provide support that closes gaps in pupils' foundational knowledge and skills, such as reading and numeracy. As a result, pupils can progress to the next stage of their learning. Almost all pupils progress to the appropriate next steps in education, employment or training. These next steps are in line with their ambitions.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Leaders have an informed and accurate understanding of attendance. Overall, pupils attend well, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing, including those who are disadvantaged. Leaders provide thoughtful support to pupils who experience barriers to their attendance. Leaders use their knowledge of pupils' individual circumstances to identify the best way to help. This encourages pupils to attend school more regularly. Leaders make reasonable adjustments for pupils who need them.

Leaders have established clear and consistent routines, which pupils understand. Staff and pupils follow these, contributing to a safe and calm environment. In lessons, pupils routinely behave well. They focus on their learning. There is little low-level disruption. Pupils benefit from positive, respectful relationships with staff and with their peers. Leaders set clear behaviour expectations. Incidents of poor behaviour happen occasionally. Staff help pupils manage these through talk and restorative practice. Staff diligently record any instances of derogatory language or bullying. Leaders respond to these concerns quickly and effectively. Leaders carefully consider pupils' needs when exploring their response to behaviour concerns. Leaders explicitly teach techniques to help pupils meet expectations. Suspensions and permanent exclusions are used appropriately.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders are reflective. They make informed decisions about how the curriculum and teaching should adapt and evolve. The curriculum is broad and well designed. This enables pupils' knowledge and skills to build on what they already know. The curriculum is generally taught well. Leaders identify that high-quality teaching is not yet consistent across the school and are addressing this through targeted training.

Teachers use information from 'pupil passports' to inform their teaching. Leaders ensure that teachers have secure subject knowledge in the subjects they teach. Staff who teach outside of their specialism speak highly of the support they receive to ensure that this is the case.

Leaders carefully consider the curriculum for pupils with an education, health and care plan. They provide an alternative curriculum for a small number of pupils in the 'nurture group', reflective of their starting points. For some other pupils, leaders provide curriculum adaptations through the targeted mainstream provision. Here, pupils are well supported to develop their skills for adult life.

Leaders support pupils to secure their foundational skills in reading, writing and numeracy. Regular oracy lessons in key stage 3 improve pupils' communication skills. Pupils develop their interaction styles for different contexts and learn to argue respectfully through debate.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders are committed to providing an effective education for the wide and varied community that the school serves. Leaders and governors understand the school's strengths and areas for development. They take appropriate action to drive forward

improvements. Leaders are role models for others and have high expectations. They do not settle and are always striving for better.

Governors are knowledgeable, with a broad experience and skills base. This enables them to provide effective support and challenge, which school leaders welcome. Governors meet their statutory duties effectively.

Conscientious leaders take carefully considered actions during periods of change. As a result, staff feel valued and involved with decision-making in the school. Leaders are proactive in understanding the pressures on teachers. They hold termly one-to-one meetings with staff. Leaders' commitment to staff wellbeing has shaped school practices. Teachers welcome recent changes in feedback approaches, which they feel have reduced their workload.

The professional learning programme is evidence informed. This is well matched to the priorities for school improvement and individual needs. Staff value this personalised approach. Teachers in the early stages of their careers speak highly of the support that they receive. Leaders seek opportunities for staff to broaden their experiences. This is achieved through collaborative working with other schools and trusts. Leaders are outward facing and welcome challenge from external monitoring visits. They share good practice with nearby schools.

Leaders and governors develop positive relationships with parents and the local community. The school has links with the local church, the young farmers club and the armed forces services in the area. Pupils benefit from 'The Friends of Wensleydale School' and their collaboration with local businesses.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders have established a clear and appropriate programme for pupils' personal development. This is largely delivered by a small number of skilled staff, through dedicated 'Life and Society' lessons. Pupils learn about different faiths and religions, as well as topics such as healthy relationships and knife crime. Teaching in other subject lessons complements this. For example, pupils learn in computer science lessons how to identify misleading information and keep themselves safe online.

Pupils develop an understanding of protected characteristics and the importance of respecting others. This is woven through lesson content and wider enrichment opportunities. However, a small number of pupils do not consistently show their understanding of this. When this occurs, leaders work closely with pupils to support them to reflect on, and improve, the language they use in their daily interactions.

Leaders are committed to building pupils' awareness of modern Britain and widening their experiences. Leaders incorporate enrichment activities into the school day. These are an entitlement for all pupils. There is a wide range of activities available for pupils to choose from. This includes sport, music, chess and the Combined Cadet Force. This enrichment programme enables pupils to experience new things and develop their confidence. A wide range of trips supports pupils to explore beyond their local community, including to places such as London and France.

The well-thought-out careers programme raises pupils' awareness of the possibilities for their future. Pupils benefit from the annual careers fair, which is attended by a range of employers and apprenticeship providers, as well as colleges and universities. Strong links with local employers enable pupils to explore potential employment routes. Year 10 pupils value their work experience opportunities.

Staff know pupils well. This enables them to anticipate when pupils may need extra help. Pupils benefit from effective pastoral support. Leaders ensure that sensitive work takes place to support pupils' wellbeing when needed.

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

There is a strong sense of community at Wensleydale School, where everyone is welcome. Positive relationships between staff and pupils ensure that pupils feel seen and included. Pupils enjoy coming to school and look forward to their afternoon enrichment activities. They attend well.

Pupils feel safe in school. If they are worried about something, they know there is an adult they can speak to. Pupils' behaviour around school is generally calm. During social time, pupils enjoy talking with friends and playing basketball or football. Instances of bullying are uncommon. These are dealt with quickly when reported. Occasionally, a small number of pupils do not show the respect they should. Pupils are clear that this is not tolerated in school.

In lessons, pupils typically focus and work hard. There is minimal disruption to learning. Pupils appreciate the feedback they receive from their teachers. This helps them to improve their work. Pupils appreciate the wide and varied support that they receive. This includes those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, pupils generally achieve well. They make progress from their starting points. Pupils secure appropriate next steps upon leaving the school.

Enrichment is an entitlement for all pupils. They develop their social skills and reinforce classroom learning through a range of activities. Enrichment includes a gardening club, a craft club and sports clubs. Some pupils develop their leadership skills through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Combined Cadet Force. Pupils broaden their experiences through a range of trips. This includes ecologically focused trips across the Dales, in addition to opportunities for international travel.

Next steps

- Leaders should strengthen the personal development curriculum so that all pupils consistently understand the importance of using respectful language.
- Leaders should ensure that highly effective teaching is embedded across subjects and year groups.

- Leaders should ensure that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, consistently achieve well, develop detailed knowledge and skills and produce high-quality work across all subjects.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Reverend Stephen Hanscombe.

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, other members of the senior leadership team and the special educational needs coordinator during the inspection. The lead inspector also spoke with a local authority representative and governors.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school runs a specially resourced provision for a small number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.

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

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The school's sixth-form provision has closed. The age range of pupils at the school is now 11 to 16 years.

Headteacher: Julia Polley

Lead inspector:
Lyndsey Reed, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Richard Wakefield, His Majesty's Inspector
Helen Lane, Ofsted Inspector
Malcolm Kirtley, 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 12 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

388
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: 1,067

School capacity

440
Well 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: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

18.30%
Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 28.9%

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

6.44%
Well above 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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

24.74%
Well above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

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)

Resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	34.7%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	25.4%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	31.6%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	41.5	46.1	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	41.4	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	41.7	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.08	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.48	-0.03	Below

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	11.1%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	0.0%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	28.6%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	34.0	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	35.4	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	38.6	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.38	-0.57	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23 (final)	-0.36	-0.57	Close to average

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	11.1%	53.1%	-42.0 pp
2023/24 (final)	0.0%	53.1%	-53.1 pp
2022/23 (final)	28.6%	52.4%	-23.9 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	34.0	50.4	-16.4
2023/24 (final)	35.4	50.0	-14.6
2022/23 (final)	38.6	50.3	-11.7

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.38	0.16	-0.55
2022/23 (final)	-0.36	0.17	-0.52

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (revised)	96%	92%	Not available
2022 leavers (revised)	92%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers (revised)	89%	94%	Not available

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)	7.9%	8.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	9.3%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	9.5%	9.0%	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)	24.3%	23.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	32.5%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	29.7%	26.5%	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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