

Trimdon Hill School

Address: Salters Lane, Trimdon Grange, County Durham, TS29 6EY

Unique reference number (URN): 151708

Inspection report: 7 July 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.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils make swift progress through the curriculum. Leaders accurately identify the gaps in skills and knowledge that pupils have when they join the school so that they can act on these effectively. Many pupils are learning at a much lower stage than their chronological age. Staff ensure that pupils experience success and build upon what they have previously learned. Gaps in knowledge and skills are closing quickly through targeted, effective classroom support and intervention.

Some pupils transition across key stages within the year to support them in achieving their learning goals quickly. The school's carefully tailored curriculum builds on prior knowledge and equips pupils with the skills and knowledge to succeed at the next stage of their learning. For example, leaders ensure that pupils have mastered basic letter formation and simple phonics sounds before attempting to write at greater length. Pupils with different, and often complex, barriers to their learning are supported to achieve and thrive.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders' work to improve attendance has led to sustained and marked improvements for almost all pupils. In a minority of cases, where needs are the most complex, improvements have been more difficult to secure. However, the vast majority of pupils, including groups or individuals that leaders have focused upon, have improved their attendance in a short time period. Many of these improvements are significant. Pupils who have previously been out of education for a considerable amount of time are now attending regularly. Pupils are in school, engaged and enjoying their education. Leaders' processes for following up on pupil absences are robust and effectively improving attendance rates over time.

Pupils' behaviour often requires skilled management from staff. High-quality interactions and positive relationships underpin this work. Staff help pupils to regulate their emotions and behaviours. Specific strategies such as the use of visual resources or movement breaks help pupils to remain focused in lessons. Staff are adept at intervening to support pupils when they need it but also stepping back when their presence would not be beneficial. Staff have become highly skilled at de-escalating difficult situations. This ensures pupils are calm so that learning can continue, uninterrupted. Mutual respect and trust are strengths of the school.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have created a curriculum, which meets the needs of pupils at the school extremely well. Pupils learn at a stage and pace appropriate to them through different 'pathways'. Leaders have carefully sequenced the curriculum so that each of the pathways supports progression to the next. The curriculum is designed specifically for pupils with an autism spectrum diagnosis. It also takes account of other barriers to, and gaps in, learning. The curriculum enables pupils to experience success at each stage of their learning and develop the skills and knowledge that they need for the future.

Staff are skilled and knowledgeable. They understand both pupil's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) but also the intended curriculum well. Staff use what they know about pupils and their SEND needs to adapt current and future learning task skilfully. Assessment is used very effectively to monitor pupils' progress through the curriculum and adapt learning tasks set. Staff accurately identify gaps in knowledge and skills that need to be tackled. Pupils who need help with learning to read, writing legibly or counting accurately, receive excellent support. Staff have the expertise required to implement the curriculum very effectively. Staff optimise learning opportunities in lessons to enhance and consolidate the knowledge that pupils gain.

Early years

Strong standard 

High-quality interactions between staff and children support ambitious outcomes for all children in the early years. Leaders have developed a curriculum with a high focus on communication and language development. Staff liaise with parents and carers and use careful assessment of children's starting points to tailor the curriculum each year. The curriculum prioritises identifying, and closing, gaps in children's knowledge and skills. Staff are very skilled at aligning the learning children undertake to what they can do and need to learn next.

Staff's knowledge of children's individual needs and intended outcomes are precise. This ensures learning activities are tailored to each child's needs. Both teacher input and explorative play are used to secure children's foundational knowledge and skills. Staff model vocabulary very effectively, which supports children's language acquisition and letter recognition. Enabling children's resilience and independence are also priorities in the early years. Activities to strengthen children's social and emotional development are meticulously planned.

Stories and rhymes form an important part of each day. Children have access to a range of appropriate and engaging books. Early reading is prioritised and consistently taught well. Children develop a secure understanding of letters and sounds as building blocks to reading, writing and communication. This prepares children very well for the national curriculum in key stage 1.

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Leaders' strategy for the education of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is highly effective. Each decision made at the school centres around what is best for pupils with additional barriers to their learning. Pupils' needs are quickly and accurately identified. Staff and leaders regularly review the support in place for each pupil. Staff ensure that classroom adaptations closely match children's needs. The school's clinical team add considerable value to pupils' education. Specialist expertise and training around pupils' sensory and developmental needs are provided. This positively impacts upon pupils' academic outcomes as well as their wellbeing and sensory needs.

The progress of pupils with SEND is regularly monitored and reviewed. Precise analysis of the impact of their work allows leaders to swiftly put in place additional adjustments or adaptations. Classroom environments are checked to ensure that they meet the sensory needs of pupils. Leaders have carefully considered how best to respond to the information

that they collect during quality assurance. This has led to strategies that consistently enhance the educational experience of disadvantaged pupils. Well considered staff training directly supports leaders' ambition for a truly inclusive school community. Engagement with external professionals and parents and carers is highly positive. Leaders' actions consistently enhance the opportunities and experiences of pupils with SEND.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

The proprietor ensures that the leaders have the experience, knowledge and capacity to develop and maintain high standards. The proprietor ensures that school leaders consistently make decisions in the best interests of pupils and deploy staff appropriately. Together, the proprietor and school leaders ensure that the independent school standards are consistently well met. For example, the premises of the school are maintained to a high standard. Checks on the welfare, health and safety of pupils are robust.

Leaders have a highly detailed knowledge of their school. Staff understand the vision and ambition of leaders well. Areas for development are swiftly identified, prioritised and acted upon. Those responsible for governance support and challenge leaders to ensure the school continually improves. Governors and the proprietor assure themselves that what they are being told is accurate. Systems and processes to monitor the effectiveness of the school are precise.

Staff benefit from a well-considered professional learning and expertise programme. Staff continually develop their knowledge and and share best practice with others. Staff take responsibility for their own professional learning and are highly skilled and motivated. Many staff have worked in similar settings or with pupils with high needs for many years. This experience directly benefits pupils. Staff are proud to work at the school and to be a part of something they see as unique. Leaders prioritise staff wellbeing and they ensure staff workload is manageable or actively reduced. Leaders take a proactive approach to engaging parents and carers in the work of the school, for example, by holding parental workshops with the clinical team. Feedback from parents is overwhelmingly positive about the impact that the school has on their child.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

High-quality pastoral support is a notable feature of the school. Teaching, pastoral and clinical staff all work together seamlessly to provide the best possible care and support for pupils. Children's needs are quickly identified as they join the school. Appropriate targets are set to support pupils' wellbeing. Pupil's pastoral development is of equal importance to their academic outcomes. Leaders ensure that the care and guidance each pupil receives helps them to flourish. Children in the early years develop personally, socially and emotionally and this continues through school.

The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum is very carefully structured. It helps pupils to gain the knowledge that they need to contribute positively to society. Leaders ensure that pupils have a wide variety of opportunities to enhance their personal development. Staff prioritise teaching pupils about personal safety, hygiene, maintaining a balanced diet and how to communicate feelings and emotions. Relationships education is sensitively structured to help pupils to develop an age-appropriate

understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships. The importance of kindness and acceptance threads through all aspects of the school's work. Books are selected deliberately to support understanding of PSHE themes and important life stages and events.

Weekly enrichment and experiences for pupils enhance their social skills, teamwork and resilience. Pupils benefit from a wide, rich set of experiences that have been carefully crafted over time. Swimming, horse riding and music sessions have a therapeutic and sensory benefit for all pupils. Leaders have designed a personal development programme that develops pupils' appreciation of the world around them. This includes diversity weeks, visiting speakers and themed food in the dining hall. Pupils understand the importance of treating people fairly and celebrating differences. Leaders promote the fundamental British values well. Pupils develop morals, tolerance and empathy that will serve them well in adult life and wider society.

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

Pupils are very well cared for at this supportive, nurturing school. Staff understand pupils and their needs precisely. Adaptations are made regularly in each classroom to support pupils' learning. The curriculum is designed to meet pupils' specific needs. Clear, ambitious targets are in place for children from the early years onwards. Many pupils join the school with significant gaps in their skills and knowledge. Staff enact the curriculum skilfully so that these gaps are quickly filled. Each pupil is supported academically and personally.

Leaders emphasise the value of each member of their school community. Success is regularly celebrated. Pupils develop a sense of belonging at the school. Staff provide a calm, safe environment, where pupils can be themselves. Pupils are taught how to be kind and respectful of one another. Despite many pupils having barriers in communication and learning, any unkind language or actions are never tolerated. Bullying is almost unheard of. Leaders have created a resilient and respectful school culture. Everyone is included, everyone is valued.

Leaders have focused their attention on rapidly creating a stimulating, engaging learning environment. Pupils focus well in their lessons. Staff are positive role models. They demonstrate the calm, attentive, kind mannerisms that they expect from pupils. Over time, pupils' focus on learning becomes more sustained. Pupils experience personal success and growth. They access a wide range of enrichment opportunities. These are tailored to each individual's strengths and areas of interest. Pupils who have attended the school even for a short period of time have benefitted enormously from the care, guidance and support that they receive. Parents cite the dedication and knowledge of staff as one of the school's major strengths. It is evident that the staff go above and beyond for every pupil. Pupils achieve and attend well, are happy and ultimately thrive.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that they sustain the high-quality curriculum and high standards in teaching, so that all pupils quickly and securely develop the knowledge and skills that they need to be successful.
 - Leaders should ensure that their actions have a transformational impact on how well pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other barriers to their learning achieve, thrive and belong and that this work supports best practice locally and nationally.
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About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

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 head teacher, designated safeguarding leader, special educational needs coordinator and other senior leaders during the inspection. One inspector met with parents and spoke to representatives from the local authority. The lead inspector met a representative of the proprietary body and the chair of governors.

The school predominantly caters for pupils with a diagnosis of autism and with speech, language and communication needs. All pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan.

The school uses no alternative provision.

This is the first standard inspection of the school. It was first registered by the DfE on 11th July 2025.

Factual information about the school:

The name of the chair of the proprietor body is Richard Powers

The fees charged by the school are £64,230 to £92,000

The email address of the school is school_office@trimdonhillschool.co.uk

Headteacher: Victoria Muir

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

1. Quality of education provided

Standards met

All standards have been met.

2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information

Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Standards met

All standards have been met.

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:

John Linkins, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Kathryn McDonald, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 7 July 2026

Total pupils

29

School capacity

42

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

29

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

29

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.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

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