

Mowden Junior School

Address: Conyers Avenue, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 9DE

Unique reference number (URN): 138176

Inspection report: 9 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.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders have successful strategies in place to secure high standards of attendance and punctuality. Attendance is seen as the responsibility of all staff. Pupils want to attend regularly because the school is a welcoming place where they feel happy and valued. Leaders work well with pupils and families where any barriers to attendance exist. Staff provide pupils with emotional support to build up their resilience and overcome any anxieties. Leaders have sustained and improved the high rates of attendance over time. This includes improving the attendance of more vulnerable pupils.

Pupils behave consistently well. They are polite and kind. They show high levels of respect for one another and adults. They focus consistently well on their learning. The respectful ethos that leaders have cultivated creates an environment in which all pupils can thrive.

Bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that any incidents will be addressed by trusted adults. Leaders celebrate equality and teach pupils about its importance. Any rare incidents of discriminatory language are thoughtfully addressed. Pupils and parents value the high standards of behaviour. These standards enable pupils to learn well and enjoy their social time with one another.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders put inclusion at the centre of their work. Staff know pupils and their families well. The school creates a strong sense of community where pupils develop a sense of belonging. The inclusion team works closely with pupils, families and external specialists to identify needs. They work closely with staff to raise awareness of pupils' needs and how best to address them. A mixture of quality-first teaching and sensitive, carefully planned adjustments help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to access and progress through the curriculum. Leaders review the impact of support and make subsequent adaptations to check that needs are met on an ongoing basis.

Leaders place a similar emphasis on supporting disadvantaged pupils. Leaders make purposeful use of the pupil premium funding to support their engagement and achievement. Similar care is extended to pupils who may be looked after or known to social care. Staff think carefully about the resources and literature that can enhance pupils' learning and enrich their lives. Leaders make sure that staff are aware of the needs of all pupils. They check the impact of the teaching and extra support that is provided.

The school employs staff to provide one-to-one support for pupils who need help with their behaviour. Additional support is provided for pupils who need help to build their emotional resilience. The positive impact of this work is evident in the high levels of attendance.

The success of the school's work on inclusion is reflected across all aspects of its work. Pupils attend well and demonstrate consistently high standards of behaviour. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND achieve well. Leaders' celebration of inclusion is reflected in the school's personal development programme. Leaders take action to ensure that all pupils

benefit from the experiences on offer. For example, all pupils in Year 6 attended the outdoor residential experience. Such experiences enhance pupils' talents and their wider interests.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

Leaders place a high priority on pupils' personal development. They have developed a coherent programme that considers the needs of children, the local context and the school's core values. Pupils acquire important knowledge about fundamental British values, such as democracy. They learn about the protected characteristics and the importance of responsibility. Personal, social, health and economic education lessons are supported by assemblies and visits.

Pupils have many opportunities to develop responsibility. They support younger pupils and have set up their own school newspaper.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of clubs and activities. All pupils have the opportunity to learn to play a brass instrument. This has encouraged pupils to learn other instruments outside of school. Pupils have regular opportunities to participate in competitive sport.

Pupils have opportunities to contribute positively to their school and community. For example, the choir sings at the local care home. Through links to a building company, pupils have played a role in naming streets in a local housing development.

All pupils, including the most disadvantaged, benefit equally from the personal development programme. Leaders are rigorous in ensuring they identify and remove any barriers to accessing wider experiences.

Staff provide pupils with high standards of pastoral care. The school has thoughtful systems in place to support pupils' emotional wellbeing. The school has recently set up its own wraparound care, Mowden Extra, to give pupils a calm and considered start and end to the day.

Pupils learn how to stay safe online and how to respond to pressures from peers so that they are safe. They learn how they change as they grow and have opportunities to ask questions. Children also know how to stay safe offline.

The school's work promotes positive relationships between girls and boys. The values so thoughtfully highlighted by the personal development programme help pupils to behave with integrity and respect.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Over time, the majority of pupils achieve very well by the end of key stage 2. They achieve outcomes at key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics that are consistently and

significantly above those seen nationally. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well. These outcomes prepare pupils very well for their secondary education.

In subjects such as science and history, pupils learn important subject knowledge and concepts. Pupils can articulate their understanding well. This is also reflected in the high-quality work that many pupils produce.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. Adaptations and support enable them to achieve well.

The majority of pupils build the foundations that they need to achieve well. However, some pupils do not acquire the knowledge in areas such as spelling, handwriting and vocabulary to enable them to achieve as well as they could.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and the curriculum. They have worked with the trust to review practice and put training in place to further enhance the quality of teaching. New approaches to teaching are helping pupils to connect their learning. Effective strategies enable pupils to better recall their times tables.

Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. The core subjects of English and mathematics are taught well. This is particularly apparent at upper key stage 2 where pupils achieve very well in national tests. Leaders have enhanced the curriculum in foundation subjects so that pupils acquire deep knowledge and skills in subjects such as geography and art.

Leaders make sure that teachers are aware of the needs of the pupils. Teachers are mindful of the adaptations that they need to make to help pupils to access the curriculum and deepen their understanding. Staff prioritise a love of reading. They give pupils who need extra support the help that they need.

The majority of pupils learn the foundational skills they need in reading, writing and number to help them to succeed throughout the curriculum. However, teaching does not consistently identify and address the gaps in foundational knowledge for some pupils. When this is the case, weaknesses in spelling, handwriting and the understanding and use of vocabulary are less successfully addressed than they are for other pupils.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's context. The new headteacher is building on existing strengths while taking purposeful action to further enhance standards. Partnership with the trust is strengthening the school's leadership. Leaders welcome external scrutiny. They also welcome the increased opportunities for training and development that partnership with the trust has brought.

Staff are highly appreciative of the training that they receive. Leaders are sensitive to staff's workload and wellbeing. One member of staff captured the views of many by writing, 'Staff

are valued and respected. Children are the main focus of all the activities within the school and everyone is included and supported.'

Leaders have developed positive links with parents and carers. The overwhelming majority of parents would recommend the school and believe that their child is safe and happy.

Trustees and governors know their statutory responsibilities well. They provide the challenge and support that leaders need to sustain improvement. The trust executive team provides valuable expertise and 'supportive scrutiny' to further the improvement journey.

Leaders consistently act in the best interests of pupils. They have a clear set of values that are evident in their actions. Leaders have a continuous focus on providing the best education and wider support for all pupils.

Leaders have secured strong standards in many aspects of the school's work. They are making important improvements in early mathematics and wider aspects of teaching and learning. There are some areas of teaching and achievement where leaders' actions have not fully had an impact. However, there is a clear trajectory for improvement that is driving the school forward.

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

Pupils benefit from a warm and supportive learning environment. Staff put pupils' needs and best interests at the centre of their work. Pupils are happy and safe in their learning and play. They know that staff care for them and want them to achieve well. Parents and carers value the support and the wider experiences that their children receive.

Staff treat pupils with kindness and respect. Pupils reciprocate these behaviours in their interactions with one another and with members of staff. Bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that trusted adults will address any concerns that may arise. Pupils show consideration for one another.

Pupils behave consistently well. Staff have built an environment where pupils can thrive. Pupils show respect for one another. They are keen to learn and to do well. They articulate their thoughts and opinions clearly. Staff are keen to listen to the views of pupils about their learning and other aspects of school life. Pupils know that their voices will be heard. This gives them confidence.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of experiences to develop their talents and interests. From sport to dance and residential trips, leaders ensure that all pupils benefit from the school's extensive offer. Pupils develop leadership skills by supporting other pupils. They learn about the world of work by visiting local employers. Such experiences prepare them well for their next steps.

The majority of pupils achieve well. By the end of key stage 2, pupils achieve very well, with outcomes significantly above those seen nationally. Leaders work carefully to identify and support those who have barriers to their learning, including pupils with special educational

needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. Some pupils in lower key stage 2 do not develop foundational skills in spelling and aspects of writing as well as their peers.

Next steps

- Leaders should work with staff to further improve the quality of teaching so that pupils in all year groups consistently benefit from the high standards seen in the best of the school's work.
 - Leaders should work with staff to further enhance pupils' achievement so that those pupils with gaps in their spelling, handwriting and number formation, and in their understanding and use of subject vocabulary, make the strong progress that many of their peers make.
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About this inspection

This school is part of the Northern Arch 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), Tim Fisher, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Iain Clyde.

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, senior leaders, school staff, pupils, trustees, the CEO and members of the trust central team, and the chair and vice chair of the local governing body during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of no alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2025.

The school joined the Northern Arch Learning Partnership in March 2025.

Headteacher: Lexi Wilkinson

Lead inspector:

Malcolm Kirtley, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspectors:

Nichola Irving, Ofsted Inspector

Katrina Morley, 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 9 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

318

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: 272

School capacity

248

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)

14.47%

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: 26.3%

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

3.14%

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

10.38%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs 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).

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	74%	61%	Above
2024/25 (final)	77%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	76%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	68%	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	84%	74%	Above
2024/25 (final)	86%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	87%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	80%	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	81%	72%	Above
2024/25 (final)	80%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	84%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	77%	71%	Close to average

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	87%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	86%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	90%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	85%	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	57%	46%	Above
2024/25 (final)	60%	47%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	50%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	60%	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	76%	62%	Above
2024/25 (final)	80%	63%	Above
2023/24 (final)	69%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	80%	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	69%	59%	Above
2024/25 (final)	70%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	63%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	73%	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	73%	60%	Above
2024/25 (final)	65%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	75%	59%	Above
2022/23 (final)	80%	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	57%	68%	-11 pp
2024/25 (final)	60%	69%	-9 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	67%	-17 pp
2022/23 (final)	60%	66%	-6 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	76%	80%	-3 pp
2024/25 (final)	80%	81%	-1 pp
2023/24 (final)	69%	80%	-11 pp
2022/23 (final)	80%	78%	2 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	69%	78%	-9 pp
2024/25 (final)	70%	78%	-8 pp
2023/24 (final)	63%	78%	-15 pp
2022/23 (final)	73%	77%	-4 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	73%	80%	-7 pp
2024/25 (final)	65%	81%	-16 pp
2023/24 (final)	75%	79%	-4 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	80%	79%	1 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)	3.3%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	3.7%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	4.3%	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)	2.8%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	4.9%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.8%	16.2%	Below

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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