

Strawberry Lane

Address: Wylam Street, Bowburn, County Durham, DH6 5BE

Unique reference number (URN): 151727

Inspection report: 23 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.
- Insufficient evidence: Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Many pupils' attendance prior to joining school was disjointed. Typically, pupils did not attend school as often as they could or should. The school's work to create and foster a place where pupils want to attend is noteworthy. Pupils now attend regularly. The improvement in pupils' attendance, both as a whole school and as individuals is impressive. Pupils want to come to school. They know the difference the school makes for them. Leaders are relentless in supporting pupils to attend well. Where attendance is challenging, leaders take effective action to support pupils and their families to remain engaged in learning.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils and their behaviour. These expectations are shared by staff. Together, they help pupils live out these ambitions every day. Pupils are motivated to do well. They talk positively about their engagement with learning and school life. Staff are highly effective in supporting pupils. Pupils recognise this and talk about staff who understand and care for them with pride. Pupils respond well to the consistent approach from all staff. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour, including bullying and discriminatory language, are rare. As a result, disruption to learning is rare. Pupils learn in calm and focused classrooms.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders take highly effective action to remove any barriers to learning that pupils may face. This work is pivotal in re-engaging pupils with learning. Many pupils have experienced disrupted learning journeys prior to joining the school.

All pupils who attend have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Leaders begin their work to support pupils before they start school. They work effectively with parents and carers, local authorities and other professionals to support pupils to make the best possible start. This important and impactful work is highly impactful. The school's work to continue to address barriers to learning, including those faced by pupils known or previously known to social care, is relentless. This work is underpinned by leaders' expectations that all pupils will reach their potential.

The school ensures that support for pupils is rigorously monitored. Pupils benefit from daily work to support the individual targets linked to requirements in their EHC plans. The school makes effective use of in-house clinical professionals, such as from occupational health, to ensure that the support pupils receive is precise and timely.

The impact of leaders' work is seen across the school day. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They celebrate the difference the school makes to them. This helps them remain focused on learning, recognise and celebrate their achievements and offers them the opportunity to engage positively in a wide range of experiences.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils do well at Strawberry Lane. Many join the school with gaps in their knowledge due to their previous, fragmented experiences in education. The school is mindful of this and carefully considers pupils' starting points when they join. This helps pupils access the learning pathway best suited to them. On the whole, they build new knowledge and skills steadily. They make progress in their reading, writing and mathematical learning. Over time, pupils are able to write with greater accuracy and sustain this through longer pieces of writing.

The school's work to support pupils to achieve both socially and emotionally is purposeful. Pupils draw upon a range of strategies, as well as support from adults, to help engage in their learning in a positive way. Pupils develop confidence. They are willing to try new things. This fosters greater independence in their learning. Work around food preparation and budgeting helps pupils develop skills in preparation for adulthood. This, alongside their academic learning, helps them to be well prepared for their next steps in learning.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The school's clear and well-sequenced pathways enable pupils to benefit from a broad and ambitious curriculum. Leaders ensure that pupils' starting points are understood well. This supports pupils to access a curriculum that is appropriately matched to their prior knowledge and skills. Leaders and staff maintain the highest expectations for pupils and their learning. Teaching is broken down into smaller steps. This helps pupils to secure and embed important skills and knowledge.

The curriculum is typically implemented in line with leaders' expectations. Staff are skilful in using a range of adaptations, such as writing slopes or specific technology, to respond to pupils' barriers to learning. On the whole, staff make pertinent and purposeful choices about how to teach the curriculum. Occasionally the learning tasks that pupils complete are not fully effective in helping pupils learn in the way leaders intend them to. Strategies to help embed highly consistent teaching strategies in some areas of the curriculum are ongoing.

Leaders use assessment with precision. Daily feedback, weekly meetings with teachers and informal checks on learning help teachers and staff know where to make changes to teaching. As a result, pupils receive appropriate additional support in lessons or through interventions.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and the proprietor share a clear vision for the school. Staff, ably supported by leaders, live this out in practice. The impact of this is that pupils now attend school regularly, engage in learning more readily and make progress through the school's chosen curriculum. Leaders have a precise understanding of the school and its development. They take prompt action to address areas which do not match their expectations. Leaders ongoing work to

fully embed the curriculum are appropriate. This includes precisely aligning further professional development for staff to these curriculum aims and ambitions.

Staff are well supported to understand pupils needs. This work ensures staff are suitably skilled to support pupils and respond to their barriers to learning. It allows pupils to engage with learning more effectively and consistently. Staff are highly positive about being part of the school. They enjoy working together in the best interests of pupils.

The proprietor is suitably skilled. They work with others within the school's wider networks to provide appropriate assurances about the work of the school. This means that over time they ensure the independent school standards are met. The school complies with Schedule 10 of the Equality Act.

Parents and carers are highly positive about the school. They appreciate the care and support the school affords its pupils. Parents recognise the difference the school makes to its pupils and their families. They are fulsome in their praise. These positive relationships are also seen in leaders' work with commissioning local authorities. They work together well to secure positive outcomes for pupils. Leaders, the proprietor and staff maintain a sharp focus on making decisions that are in the best interests of pupils who attend the school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have carefully designed a personal, social and health (PSHE) curriculum that prioritises pupils gaining a range of appropriate skills and developing their wider knowledge. Pupils engage positively in daily PSHE lessons. This complements daily work towards individual targets linked to education, health and care plans which also support pupils' wellbeing. This daily work ensures that pupils revisit their learning and encounter new learning at an appropriate pace. The relationships and sex education curriculum weaves through this. It helps pupils talk about concepts such as consent with increasing confidence.

The PSHE curriculum is carefully adapted, if needed, to meet the needs of individual pupils. Leaders, with staff, work effective to identify pupils who may need support to learn about new concepts. They make appropriate adaptations to support pupils with new learning. This means that pupils may encounter some bespoke support to help prepare them for topics or be supported in smaller groups.

Pupils gain appropriate careers advice, including meeting with an independent advisor. The school builds real life work experience into pupils' time in school. Pupils proudly take up roles supporting at breakfast club, around the site or in the school's main kitchen with catering staff. The school also carefully connects classroom learning to preparation for adulthood. Pupils use mathematical skills to help budget, purchase ingredients and make meals for themselves and others.

Pupils develop a suitable understanding and respect for other faiths and cultures. Pupils visit places of worship and meet with faith leaders. Pupils recognise other fundamental British values. Leaders consider carefully the way in which pupil voice can be heard. They remove barriers to communication to help allow all pupils to contribute effectively. The school's work to support wellbeing is ever present. The relationships staff foster with pupils allow them to feel well supported, listened to and cared for.

Leaders' work to remove barriers for pupils' engagement in the school's personal development offer are effective. It means pupils experience a broad range of experiences.

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

Pupils are proud to be part of this school. They recognise the high-quality support and care they receive from staff who know them well. Before joining Strawberry Lane, many pupils have previously faced challenges attending school or have had disrupted learning journeys. Leaders prioritise pupils feeling safe and welcomed. Carefully planned transitions to school support pupils to re-engage with learning effectively. As a result of leaders' work, pupils make a positive start to life at Strawberry Lane. They feel accepted, understood and enjoy coming to school. Curriculum pathways are well matched to pupils' starting points. Staff understand pupils' needs. Typically, pupils are well supported and make suitable progress through the curriculum.

Pupils learn in calm classrooms. Leaders and staff are highly skilled in supporting pupils at times when they need further support with their behaviour. Bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that staff would support them if they reported it. Pupils feel safe. Pupils know that staff listen to them and will help them. This helps them focus on their learning more effectively.

For many pupils, their engagement with education before this school has been minimal. Leaders' highly effective work around attendance means pupils now attend school regularly and engage well. Pupils' improved attendance allows them to make the most of the school's curriculum and the wider opportunities. Pupils enjoy the weekly enrichment offer. It helps them explore their interests and talents. Pupils enjoy baking in the school's dedicated kitchen classroom and developing skills in hair and beauty. Pupils make use of the local community visiting the library, using local shops and the park. They contribute positively to the area. For example, they organised a litter pick in the local park to improve it for the local community.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that staff make highly effective and consistent choices linked to task design within lessons, to further enable pupils to develop secure and detailed knowledge.
- Leaders should continue their focus on professional learning for staff, so it precisely matches to the school's curriculum-based improvement priorities.

About this inspection

The name of the proprietor is P Bloom Ltd. The chair of the proprietor body is Richard Power.

The fees currently charged annually are £64,230 to £92,000.

The school's email address is admin@strawberrylaneschool.co.uk.

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 headteacher, senior leaders, representatives from the proprietor body and governors during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with pupils, staff and parents and carers. Inspectors spoke with other stakeholders, such as a local authorities who commission places for pupils.

The school offers education for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism.

The school does not use any alternative provision.

This is the first standard inspection for this school after it was registered by the DfE in 2025.

Headteacher: Adam Price

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.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:

Emily Stevens, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Richard Beadnall, 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 23 June 2026

Total pupils

37

School capacity

60

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

37

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0

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.

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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