

Polam Hall School

URN: 142174 | Inspected: 25 November 2025

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.

Achievement

Expected standard

Outcomes for phonics have significantly improved in recent years. At the end of the primary phase many pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, develop secure knowledge across English, mathematics and the wider curriculum. They are well prepared to begin the secondary phase. In the secondary phase, pupils learn important knowledge across the range of subjects they study. This is reflected in their achievement at the end of key stage 4. Outcomes at GCSE are broadly in line with national averages for most subjects and groups of pupils. Leaders have identified the need for improvement in a few GCSE examination subjects for some cohorts of pupils. In these areas, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Pupils' success in being able to move on to academic and vocational courses when they leave Polam Hall helps show that pupils are fully equipped for life after secondary education.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

The school's broad curriculum builds from the early years and gives pupils opportunities to develop deep subject knowledge. Staff receive training that clarifies the school's expectations. This includes guidance on using targeted questions to promote independent thinking and strengthen pupils' understanding of the content being taught. Leaders recognise the need to strengthen consistency across the school so that all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, achieve as well as possible. This includes developing strategies to ensure that teachers check learning effectively during lessons. Teachers develop detailed subject knowledge through working within departments and trust subject networks. Leaders ensure that those teachers who work outside their subject specialism receive tailored training and support. In this all-through school, leaders ensure that there is a seamless transition in the curriculum between primary and secondary. Teachers share subject knowledge and expertise across primary and secondary phases. Secondary-age pupils who need help to develop core reading and mathematical skills receive regular support from expert teachers. In the primary phase, calculation strategies and subject-specific vocabulary in mathematics are used regularly. This helps pupils to develop a clear and precise understanding of the language that they should use when talking about mathematics.

Polam Hall School

URN: 142174 | Inspected: 25 November 2025

Early years

Expected standard

The school's early years provision provides a positive start to life at Polam Hall School. Children are warmly welcomed to school each day. Well-understood routines mean that learning starts promptly with activities to build social and language skills. For example, on 'check-in Tuesday', children might think about how they show their appreciation for others. Children quickly learn important knowledge of literacy and numeracy. Teachers model mathematical language in all areas of the early years provision. This helps to reinforce what children learn. Adults place considerable emphasis on developing children's communication. When children start to form letters, teachers encourage this through rhymes and songs. Staff teach daily phonics provision expertly. Children swiftly develop the ability to read. Well-informed staff provide appropriate extra help for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Activities such as mini-beast hunts enhance learning. The work children create shows that staff promote independence from the start. This builds the confidence and knowledge that children need to be ready for Year 1. The spacious outdoor area has a wide range of activities to help children's physical development and to encourage them to take appropriate risks. Children play well together and show empathy for each other, for example, by sharing toys and games. Leaders develop positive partnerships with parents to ensure that they understand and have confidence in the school's routines.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders' vision that all pupils will flourish at Polam Hall is well understood by staff. They have an accurate understanding of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff use this knowledge to provide these pupils with tailored support, for example, around reading. Leaders keep a close eye on how well the most vulnerable achieve. Where leaders judge that a strategy is not working as well as it should, they make suitable changes. The school's in-house provisions, such as 'Portunus', 'Hercules', 'Ancora' and 'Salus', provide long- and short-term support for pupils' needs ranging from anxiety to literacy and numeracy. Leaders identify pupils who need support, so they can get help and return to mainstream classrooms. Leaders have sharpened staff training programmes to focus on developing inclusive practices. They have also set up working parties. This allows staff to coordinate support for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have developed a pupil premium strategy that outlines clear approaches to support pupils in lessons. The focus on positive relationships means that pupils are confident that they can ask for help from their teachers.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and use this knowledge to maintain and improve the quality of provision. Leaders' communication with staff is clear. For example, recent work to develop staff training around inclusion and to support the most disadvantaged pupils is clearly linked to development

Polam Hall School

URN: 142174 | Inspected: 25 November 2025

priorities and is well understood by staff. For those staff new to the school, leaders ensure that the vision, ethos and expectations are clearly shared. Governors and trustees have a thorough overview of the school. Recent governance restructuring has further developed the extent and precision of their knowledge. The trust plays its full part in supporting the school. Trust-wide networking groups focus on specific aspects of provision, such as teaching and learning and provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This helps to develop staff expertise and confidence to carry out their jobs effectively. The induction of new staff, the commitment to ongoing training and the openness of leaders in the school develop a strong sense of togetherness and community across the school. Staff feel able to raise and share concerns and suggestions, and leaders act on this to constantly improve the experiences of pupils and children who attend the school.

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

From the start of early years, pupils develop a positive view of their school. They forge warm, respectful relationships with teachers and support staff. Pupils feel safe and know who to turn to for advice and support should they need it. Across the whole school, pupils understand what is expected of their conduct. They behave well and follow school routines. Their good-natured conduct at social times and in lessons contributes to the school's vibrant and cheerful atmosphere. Children in the early years play and learn happily with the friends they make at the school. Pupils are enthusiastic and proud members of their school houses, Swale, Skerne, Kent and Tees. These houses provide healthy competition and high-quality pastoral care to enable pupils of all ages feel a part of one community. They enjoy working together across age groups. Older pupils take on leadership responsibility for their younger peers. Pupils' positive feelings about school reflect in their attendance. In the primary phase, pupils learn to read with confidence and fluency. Many enjoy doing so. They have plenty of opportunities to practise using this knowledge across the curriculum. Pupils like learning and generally achieve well. Pupils enjoy and gain a great deal from the school's 'Concordia Crescimus' curriculum. They particularly enjoy being part of the school's cadet force and completing activities that allow them to 'graduate' from key stage 3. Pupils are very positive about the pastoral care and support that they receive. In the primary phase, pupils enjoy completing activities which help them to gain a 'passport' to secondary education. Pupils' independence and confidence are developed at all stages of their school life through these strategies. This helps to make sure that pupils are ready for life after secondary school.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to use their quality assurance systems to monitor and improve teaching across the school, so that the delivery of the curriculum across the school matches that of the most effective areas.
- Leaders should continue their work to develop whole-school strategies that will enable pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to achieve consistently well.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Pupils generally attend well. Leaders ensure that attendance is part of everyone's routine day-to-day focus.

Polam Hall School

URN: 142174 | Inspected: 25 November 2025

Frequent celebration of pupils' successes builds positive attitudes to school. This has led to a consistently improving picture of attendance. Leaders keep a watchful eye on each pupil's attendance. This means that leaders are able to step in and offer specific support, for example, through access to external agencies or the on-site school counsellor. Form tutors and pastoral staff have a precise lens on attendance. Pupils are given regular reminders of the importance of coming to school. Polam Hall School is a calm, positive place to learn. Pupils enjoy warm relationships with each other and with staff. Where behaviour does not meet expectations, leaders are quick to act and support pupils to bring about changes. Being kind and respectful is woven into the ethos of the school. Pupils are accepting of the differences and diversity they see and are proud to be part of a supportive school community. In lessons, many pupils are active participants in learning. Effective routines are consistently applied by all teachers, both in lessons and at social times. This creates a safe environment where pupils of all ages happily mix with each other.

For detailed performance data including disadvantage gap analysis, historical trends, and comparison tables, visit the school's profile on WhatSchool:

<https://whatschool.ai/en/school/polam-hall-school-darlington>