

Inspection of Alston Primary School

Church Road, Alston CA9 3QU

Inspection dates:	21 and 22 January 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel a strong sense of belonging at this small, happy school. They are confident that staff know them well and will support them with any worries that they may have. Pupils of all ages interact positively with each other. For example, they delight in playing group games together at playtimes. Pupils are happy at school and learn in a calm and caring environment.

Pupils develop their confidence and leadership skills by taking on roles such as reading buddies, school councillors and 'mini police'. Pupils are proud of the impact that they have on others through these roles. For example, pupils speak about how they keep younger children safe at playtimes and how they raise money for charities.

The school's curriculum reflects its high expectations for pupils' achievement. It has considered the local, rural context of the school when designing the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs and interests of the pupils. Pupils enjoy their learning and typically achieve well across a broad range of subjects.

Pupils are polite and respectful towards others. Staff provide effective support to pupils who struggle to regulate their emotions. Pupils are clear that everyone is equal and is welcome at their school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school's curriculum is broad, ambitious and engaging. In the main, the school has identified what pupils should learn across the curriculum. However, in some subjects, the essential knowledge that pupils must know has not been defined clearly enough. Consequently, at times, pupils' learning does not build securely, and they struggle to remember knowledge in the longer term.

Staff's subject knowledge is secure. They benefit from professional development, which supports them to deliver the curriculum well. Staff use resources, such as artefacts, to help bring learning to life. The school makes adaptations to the delivery of the curriculum to enable pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to successfully learn alongside their peers.

The school utilises a range of methods to check how well pupils are learning. Staff review pupils' work and ask them questions. In the main, these checks on learning provide the school with clear information about how well pupils understand and remember the knowledge that has been taught. However, in some subjects, these processes are still being refined and are not as effective as they could be in identifying, with precision, any gaps in pupils' learning.

The school works closely with parents and carers and its feeder nursery to gain an understanding of children's needs before they start attending the school. This ensures a smooth transition for children into the Reception class. The school identifies the additional

needs of pupils with SEND swiftly and accurately and ensures that support is put in place to meet these needs.

Staff foster a love of reading among pupils. They read to pupils in a way that excites them. Pupils have opportunities to engage with illustrators to find out how they bring the characters to life through their illustrations. The school delivers its phonics programme as soon as children start in the Reception class. Pupils rapidly gain confidence and fluency in reading. Staff diligently check how well pupils are progressing with reading and provide swift and effective support to pupils who struggle to keep up with the phonics programme.

The school maintains high rates of attendance. Staff monitor pupils' attendance carefully and act swiftly to identify and resolve any issues. This includes offering individualised support for families, which has a demonstrable impact on improving their children's attendance.

Pupils understand, and live up to, the school's high expectations of their behaviour. In the early years, children listen carefully to staff's instructions and readily follow the embedded routines at transition times. They collaborate and sustain concentration as they engage in creative, active play.

The school provides pupils with experiences that they may not otherwise encounter. For example, they have opportunities to play wheelchair basketball, to visit a music studio and to learn to play musical instruments. Pupils develop their interests and talents through attending a range of clubs, including football, choir, computing and dance. Pupils enjoy participating in performances to a range of audiences, including in the recent school production. They represent the school at sporting, dance and singing events. Pupils contribute to their community through helping to plant trees in the local area and taking part in local events to commemorate Remembrance Day.

The governing body provides effective support and challenge to the school. It considers the well-being and workload of staff. The school collaborates across the federation to share expertise.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the essential knowledge that pupils should learn is not clearly identified. As a result, at times, pupils' knowledge in these subjects does not build securely. The school should ensure that there is clarity about the essential knowledge pupils should learn in all subjects, so that pupils develop a deep body of knowledge and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

- In some subjects, the school's checks on learning do not provide information that precisely identifies how well pupils have learned the curriculum and whether there are any gaps in their knowledge. This means that gaps in pupils' understanding are not addressed as quickly as they could be. The school should strengthen its work to develop its checks on learning so that staff are able to identify precisely how securely pupils have learned the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	112101
Local authority	Westmorland and Furness
Inspection number	10348086
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	89
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jim McCarry
Headteacher	Rob Dawson
Website	www.alstonmoorfederation.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has experienced changes to its leadership since the previous inspection. The current headteacher has been in post since 2024.
- The school does not currently make use of alternative provision for pupils.
- The school operates a breakfast club before school.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other leaders, governors and staff at the school. The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and computing. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils at social times and when moving around the school.
- Inspectors spoke to parents and carers and considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors spoke to pupils and to staff to gather their views. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including those related to the governance of the school.

Inspection team

Liz Dayton, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Karen Morris

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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