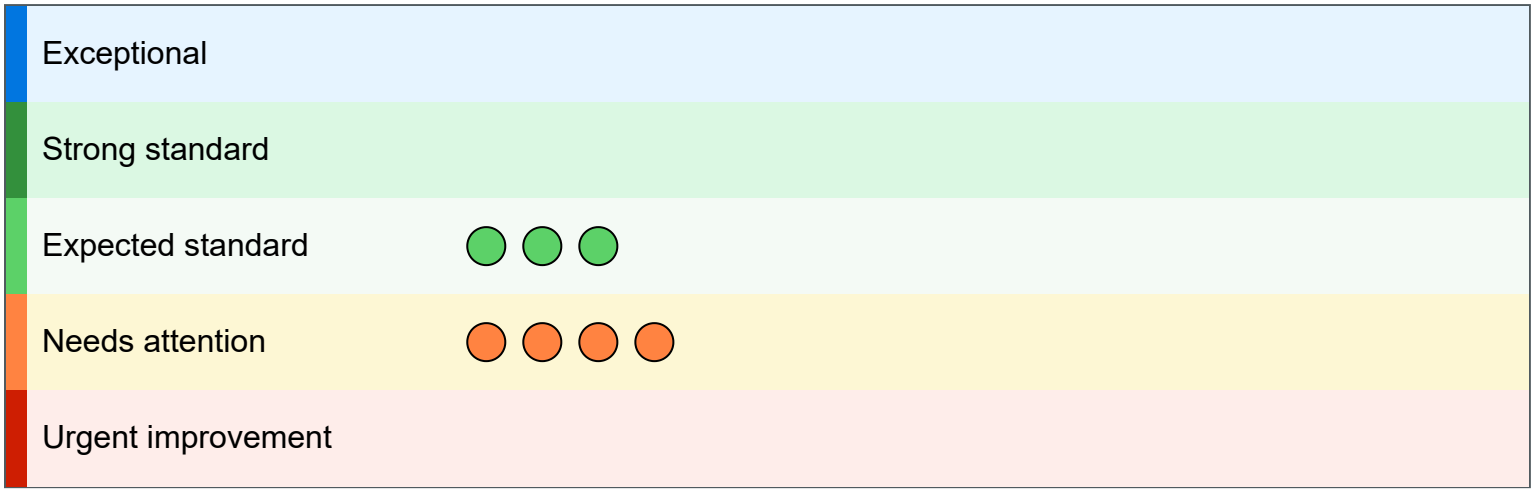
Hillocks Primary Academy

Address: Unwin Road, Sutton-in-Ashfield, NG17 4ND

Unique reference number (URN): 145847

Inspection report: 15 September 2026



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.

Expected standard

Early years

Expected standard

Leaders have prioritised early years and have strengthened the curriculum in Nursery and Reception. The curriculum focuses on communication, early reading, writing, mathematics, physical development and personal development. Adults know children well and build warm relationships. This helps children settle quickly, feel safe and follow clear routines.

In Nursery, children learn through songs, rhymes, talk, play and practical activities. Adults model vocabulary and encourage children to speak in sentences. Children develop independence as they choose resources, count, compare and take part in well-organised learning indoors and outdoors. Staff support children's social and emotional needs sensitively.

In Reception, phonics is taught systematically. Children practise sounds and use what they know when reading and writing. Adults model letter formation and pencil grip carefully. Fine motor activities help children strengthen the skills they need for early writing. Children show focus and resilience, when tasks are challenging.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are included well. Staff make appropriate adaptations so children can access learning and take part with their peers. Leaders understand that some children start school with gaps in language, physical development and early writing knowledge. Their work is helping children build the early knowledge and routines they need for Year 1.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders, including those from the trust, and governors know the school's context well. They understand the barriers that many pupils and families face. They have identified the right priorities. These include improving pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour, inclusion and the quality of teaching. Leaders have acted in pupils' interests. They have drawn on support from the trust, external agencies, other schools and outside professionals. Their work is helping to improve the provision in early years, phonics, reading and mathematics and attendance and pastoral support.

Governors know the school's main priorities. They understand their statutory duties. They ask questions and check information from leaders. The trust has clear systems to check the school's work. It provides coaching, training and school improvement support. These systems help leaders know what is improving and what still needs more work.

Staff are positive about leaders. They say that leaders are visible, approachable and supportive. Leaders take account of workload and wellbeing, when they make decisions. Staff receive training linked to the school's priorities. They also work with colleagues from other schools. This helps staff develop their knowledge and improve their practice over time.

Leaders work with parents, carers and other professionals to support pupils and families. Most parents and carers who shared their views value the school's caring, welcoming ethos. Leaders' actions are beginning to make a difference in some areas. However, the full impact

is not yet secure. Teaching, achievement, attendance, behaviour and inclusion are not yet consistent enough. Leaders know this and continue to act with focus and care.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders have planned a broad programme for pupils' personal development and wellbeing. It reflects pupils' needs and gives safeguarding a high priority. Personal, social, health and economic education is at the heart of this work. Pupils learn through age-appropriate relationships and sex education and health education, assemblies, religious education, computing and pastoral support. They learn about healthy relationships, online safety, mental health, racism, the dangers of drugs, knife crime and personal safety.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. They can explain how to report concerns and seek help. Leaders respond to emerging risks. For example, they have strengthened teaching about online behaviour and discrimination, when concerns have arisen. Pupils learn about characteristics that are protected in law, fundamental British values, fairness and respect. However, their recall of this knowledge is not yet consistent across all year groups.

Pupils benefit from sport, music, performances, residential visits, university links and clubs. They take on responsibilities, such as school-council roles, behaviour-ambassador roles and librarian duties. This helps pupils develop confidence and contribute to school life. Leaders track the participation of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They encourage pupils to take part.

Pastoral support is a positive feature of the school. Staff know pupils and families well. They use nurture, behaviour mentoring and family support to help pupils manage feelings, friendships and worries. Children in the early years learn routines, share with others and begin to manage feelings through warm relationships with adults. Leaders adapt personal development work for pupils with SEND, including when learning about bodies, privacy, health and keeping safe. Leaders have identified where pupils' knowledge is less secure and are strengthening provision.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention

Published outcomes show that pupils do not achieve well enough over time, particularly in reading, mathematics, phonics and the combined measure of reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils achieve less well than other pupils in the school and pupils nationally.

Leaders understand the causes of weaker achievement. They have acted through trust and external support to improve the teaching of phonics and mathematics. There are now clearer checks of what pupils know and can do. There are early signs of improvement. More pupils are gaining secure phonics knowledge, and some pupils explain their mathematical thinking more confidently. However, this work is too recent to show sustained impact. Too many pupils still have gaps in important knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics.

Some disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and pupils who started with gaps in their learning do not catch up quickly enough. This means they are not as ready as they should be for the next stage of education.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention

Leaders have not yet secured regular attendance of all pupils. Attendance has been below national averages over time. Too many pupils are persistently absent, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders understand the barriers that affect pupils' attendance. They check attendance daily, and use a range of strategies to support pupils to attend. This includes working with families, the local authority and other agencies. Staff are increasingly involved in conversations with families. This helps pupils attend more regularly. However, strategies are not embedded enough to improve attendance for all groups of pupils.

Most pupils are polite and respectful. Relationships with adults are positive. Pupils say bullying is rare and trust adults to deal with concerns. Leaders record and respond to bullying, discrimination, harassment and harmful behaviour, including online concerns. They provide a range of support to help pupils, including those with SEND, to manage their feelings so they can focus on their learning. Suspensions have reduced.

However, behaviour and attitudes to learning are not consistently positive. In some lessons, pupils become passive or distracted, particularly when activities do not move their learning on sufficiently. Routines when pupils move around school are not always followed or addressed quickly enough.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention

The curriculum is broad and sets out what pupils should learn. Leaders have prioritised developing assessment, early reading, mathematics and agreed teaching approaches. However, teaching is not consistently effective across the school. Pupils do not develop the basic knowledge necessary in writing and mathematics securely enough.

Some practice is improving. Staff teach phonics securely. Pupils at the early stages of reading practise sounds. They read books that match these sounds and receive extra help when they fall behind. In some mathematics lessons, pupils explain their thinking and say that new approaches help them understand their work. Some teachers use a range of practical resources to help pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to progress through the curriculum.

However, teaching remains too variable. Teachers do not always check pupils' learning well enough to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge or adapt tasks accordingly. Sometimes, work is too easy for some pupils and too hard for others. Some pupils lose focus or wait too long before teachers move on their learning. Additional adults are not always used well enough to support or extend learning. Teachers do not have consistent expectations of handwriting, spelling, presentation and the use of basic skills across subjects. This limits how well pupils learn.

Inclusion **Needs attention**

Leaders have not yet ensured that support for pupils who face barriers is consistently effective. Some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils receive support, but the success of adaptations in classrooms vary. At times, staff do not use pupils' plans or communication approaches precisely enough. In 'the nest', pupils receive nurture and emotional support. However, planning and assessment do not always show clearly what pupils should learn next or how much progress they make. As a result, some pupils' barriers to learning and wellbeing are not reduced quickly enough.

Leaders know many pupils and families. They have strengthened systems to identify needs, through inclusion meetings, learning plans and advice from outside professionals. Staff use nurture, external support, communication aids, visual supports and flexible arrangements. This helps some pupils settle, manage their emotions and take part in school life.

Leaders use pupil premium funding to provide extra adults, interventions, resources and access to wider opportunities. Leaders track pupils' participation and clubs are freely accessible. However, leaders do not yet evaluate which actions improve disadvantaged pupils' achievement, attendance and wellbeing. Pupils known to social care receive joined-up support from safeguarding, pastoral and family-support staff.

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

Pupils at Hillocks are welcomed by adults, who know them and their family well. Pupils say they feel safe and know which adults will help them if they are worried. They describe bullying as rare. They say adults deal with concerns when they happen. Pupils enjoy school, their friendships and the school's play equipment.

Pupils learn important messages about kindness, respect and friendship. Older pupils understand online safety and can explain why discrimination is wrong. They take on some responsibilities, such as school council roles and helping in the library. However, these opportunities are not developed in the same way across all classes. Pupils do not consistently remember what they have learned about different faiths, cultures and ways of life.

Children in the early years make a positive start. They settle quickly because adults build warm relationships and clear routines. Children learn through talk and play, and through phonics, early writing and number activities. Staff support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) so they can join in.

Pupils benefit from leaders' work to make the school more inclusive. Some pupils receive helpful support through nurture, 'the hive', 'the nest' and pastoral care. This helps pupils feel understood and ready to learn. However, support does not reduce barriers consistently enough for all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

Pupils do not yet achieve as well as they should. Too many pupils have gaps in reading, writing and mathematics knowledge. Some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or have lower starting points, do not catch up quickly enough. Teaching is improving, but

pupils’ experiences vary between classes. Sometimes, work is not matched closely enough to what pupils need. At times, pupils lose focus or wait too long to move on with their learning. Attendance is improving for some pupils, but too many pupils still miss too much school.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) meets pupils' needs. They should check the impact of this work on pupils' progress.
- Leaders should ensure that pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, secure the essential knowledge they need in phonics, writing and mathematics, so they achieve well by the end of Year 6.
- Leaders should develop staff expertise in using assessment to identify what pupils know and can do, and adapt teaching to match pupils’ needs.
- Leaders should ensure that work to reduce persistent absence is effective and that behaviour routines are applied consistently, so pupils attend more often and stay focused.

About this inspection

This school is part of Diverse Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), David Cotton, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Schwarz.

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 principal and other school leaders during the inspection. They also spoke with the chair of governors, the director of education of the trust and the CEO.

Inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Principal: Claire Gledhill

Lead inspector:
Rob Della-Spina, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Kyna Adkins, Ofsted Inspector
Sylvie Newman, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from different sources. More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 15 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

271
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: 268

School capacity

329
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)

53.09%
Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 26.5%

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

2.58%
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: 4.1%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

31.37%
Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational needs support at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Well above 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	38%	61%	Below
2024/25 (final)	32%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	37%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	47%	60%	Below

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	56%	74%	Below
2024/25 (final)	53%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	56%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	58%	73%	Below

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	62%	72%	Below
2024/25 (final)	57%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	61%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	67%	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	47%	73%	Below
2024/25 (final)	43%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	44%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	56%	73%	Below

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	22%	46%	Below
2024/25 (final)	17%	47%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	23%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	27%	44%	Below

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	45%	62%	Below
2024/25 (final)	43%	63%	Below
2023/24 (final)	50%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	41%	60%	Below

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	49%	59%	Below
2024/25 (final)	39%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	55%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	55%	58%	Close to average

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	30%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	22%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	32%	59%	Below
2022/23 (final)	36%	59%	Below

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	22%	68%	-45 pp
2024/25 (final)	17%	69%	-52 pp
2023/24 (final)	23%	67%	-45 pp
2022/23 (final)	27%	66%	-39 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	45%	80%	-35 pp
2024/25 (final)	43%	81%	-37 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	80%	-30 pp
2022/23 (final)	41%	78%	-37 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	49%	78%	-28 pp
2024/25 (final)	39%	78%	-39 pp
2023/24 (final)	55%	78%	-23 pp
2022/23 (final)	55%	77%	-23 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	30%	80%	-50 pp
2024/25 (final)	22%	81%	-59 pp
2023/24 (final)	32%	79%	-48 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	36%	79%	-43 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)	7.8%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	8.1%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	8.1%	5.9%	Above

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)	20.1%	13.0%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	21.8%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	29.8%	16.2%	Above

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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