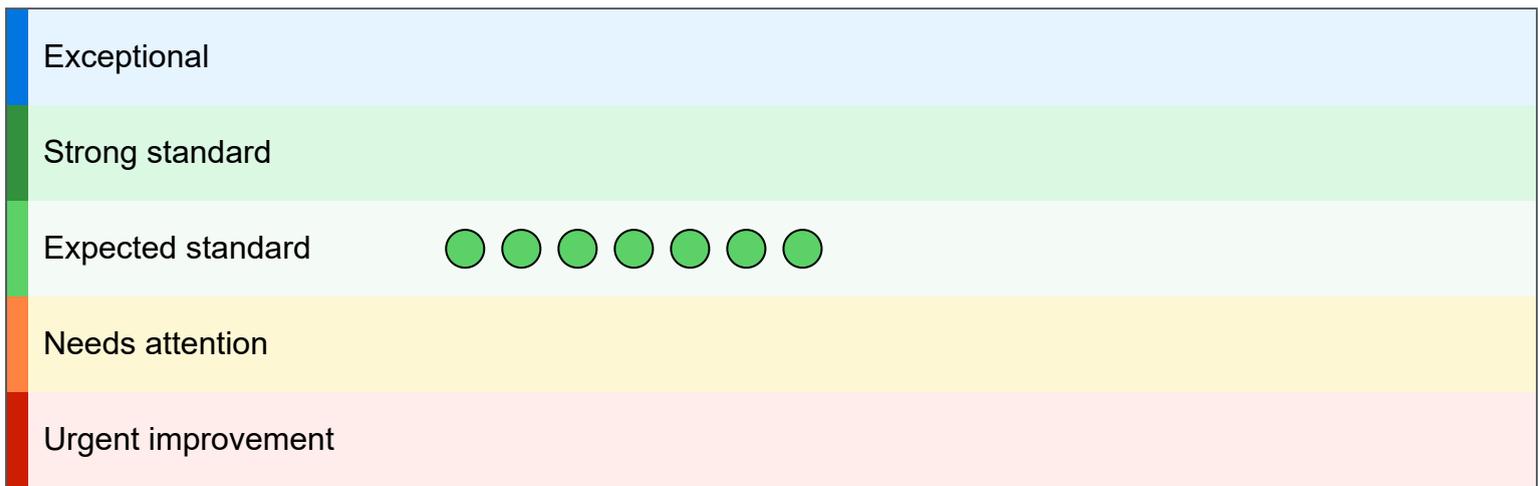


The Edith Borthwick School

Address: Enterprise Drive, CM7 2YN

Unique reference number (URN): 115464

Inspection report: 13 January 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

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils' achievement is shaped by personalised targets that link to their education, health and care plans. Leaders check these targets closely and use this information to understand how well pupils are progressing and where further support is needed. This steady, thoughtful review helps pupils to achieve well over time.

Leaders recognise that certain aspects of pupils' achievement could be strengthened. For example, pupils who can write sometimes struggle to do so independently because the demands of a task do not fully align with their communication or phonics knowledge. This can limit how securely they build the secure knowledge needed to achieve consistently well.

Students in the post-16 provision achieve in ways that prepare them for adulthood. They move on to destinations that match their needs, including specialist college courses and adult social care day provision. These routes allow them to build on what they have already learned and to continue developing important life skills, such as managing change.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders take a supportive approach to attendance difficulties. This works well in many cases, including when leaders work closely with local authority partners to support pupils and their parents or carers. As a result, attendance is improving. Part-time timetables are usually used appropriately, such as when a pupil is recovering from a medical procedure. Still, the current approach does not define clearly enough how leaders will measure the impact of the support in place. This makes it harder to judge objectively when a pupil is ready to increase their time in school and return promptly to full-time education.

Leaders and staff have created a calm and caring culture that supports positive behaviour. They teach pupils clear strategies to help them feel settled and focused on learning. Staff model kindness and respect every day. This supports pupils to feel safe, understood and ready to learn. Many pupils show growing confidence and pride in managing their own behaviour. When behaviour becomes challenging or unsafe, leaders and staff work together to put clear and practical support plans in place. This helps staff respond consistently and reduces repeated incidents. Exclusions and suspensions are rarely used. When they are needed, leaders act appropriately and work openly with parents and carers and other professionals to support pupils well.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders review and refine the curriculum carefully so that it remains relevant to pupils' needs. It rightly prioritises developing pupils' communication and helping them to manage their emotions, whether through spoken language or picture-based approaches. Learning is personalised, with each pupil working towards the long-term goals in their education, health and care plan, and, where relevant, their personalised education plan.

The curriculum is organised into clear pathways, with well-sequenced expectations that show how pupils' knowledge and skills should develop over time. Staff usually make helpful adjustments that support pupils' learning. For example, pupils learning to read are given books that match the sounds and words they know. Staff also consider pupils' speech sound difficulties, so they can provide precise help.

Leaders routinely check teaching and use this to support staff development. Staff benefit from training and clear guidance that set out effective teaching approaches. This is particularly effective for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Staff use established routines and resources skilfully. As a result, pupils steadily develop early communication skills, such as using gestures or tracking with their eyes, and they show enjoyment when engaging with sensory activities.

Occasionally, activities do not match the curriculum or pupils' needs closely enough, which leaves pupils unsure and overly reliant on adult support.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders gather detailed information about pupils during the admissions process. They use pupils' education, health and care plans effectively to understand individual needs and put appropriate support in place. As a result, pupils feel safe, cared for and ready to learn. For example, leaders work closely with medical professionals to develop individual healthcare plans and ensure that staff are trained to follow them. This helps ensure that pupils' medical needs are consistently met. Leaders support children in care effectively through strong oversight and regular review of personalised education plans.

Speech and language therapists and occupational therapists work closely with staff to shape teaching, so it complements the targeted support pupils receive. Staff use tools such as symbol boards and high-tech communication apps with increasing confidence. These help pupils to communicate choices and participate more fully in learning.

Leaders and teachers work closely with parents, carers and other professionals and share information regularly. Staff set clear, measurable and time-limited targets, enabling leaders to capture the impact of the personalised curriculum on pupils' progress.

Leaders have a clear understanding of how funding is intended to support disadvantaged pupils. However, they do not always monitor its impact closely enough. This makes it more difficult for leaders to demonstrate effectiveness or adapt approaches swiftly when they are less effective.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders provide calm, steady leadership that helps the school run smoothly and creates a supportive working environment. They value staff highly, encouraging teamwork and taking workload seriously. Leaders consult staff well when introducing changes, which helps build trust and contributes to a positive professional culture. Most parents and carers appreciate the school's regular, celebratory communication, such as photos and videos showing pupils'

achievements. Families also value opportunities to connect with one another, including through the parent support group.

Leaders keep pupils' needs central to their decisions. For example, they reorganise pupil groups thoughtfully to maintain calm, purposeful classrooms and ensure that pupils can progress successfully through the curriculum.

Staff typically benefit from well-focused professional learning. A particular strength is the support provided by the therapy team, who helps staff to understand and respond to pupils' immediate needs. This includes knowing when a quick movement break is appropriate and when a calmer regulation break will better support a pupil's emotional state.

Leaders are visible around the school, enabling them to gain an accurate understanding of what is working well and what needs to improve. However, improvement planning is not always as sharp as it could be. Success criteria is not consistently clear, which makes it harder for leaders to evaluate the impact of their actions with precision.

The governing body has undergone changes over the past year. Governors fulfil their statutory duties, including maintaining a strong culture of safeguarding. They provide appropriate support, though at times their challenge is not sharply focused on next steps. As a result, some issues, such as aspects of financial oversight, take longer than necessary to resolve.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils enjoy rich experiences that help them feel proud of their school and community. Members of the eco council eagerly recycle materials. The school council visits the local church to decorate the Christmas tree. Pupils pause together on Remembrance Day. These shared moments help pupils understand their place in the world and feel connected to others. Teachers also weave British values into everyday learning. For example, pupils learn about democracy when they take turns in conversation or games.

Staff teach important ideas with confidence and care. For example, they use correct scientific language when helping pupils understand their changing bodies and personal hygiene. The curriculum also prepares pupils well for adulthood. Through independence and life skills, pupils learn to cook and manage money. Staff actively encourage pupils to speak up for themselves. Pupils learn to show what they enjoy, what they do not and when they need help. For example, pupils who use picture boards confidently select the 'help' symbol. These moments show growing independence and self-belief.

Leaders understand the vital role the school plays in supporting pupils' wellbeing. Pastoral support is well organised and makes a real difference, especially for disadvantaged pupils and their families. Key staff help families navigate processes, including completing the referral forms that social care use when deciding on respite care. As a result, care and support often extend beyond school into the family home.

An expanding extra-curricular offer, including bushcraft, martial arts and swimming, gives most pupils opportunities to try new things and succeed. Leaders plan to widen these

experiences further, so teachers can plan more opportunities for pupils to spend time in the community.

By the end of post-16, careful preparation over time helps students step confidently into their next education or care setting. For students in care, leaders work closely with all relevant professionals to ensure that the right next step is in place.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders have refined the 'moving on' pathway so that it provides a clearer structure for students preparing for adulthood. Teachers mostly deliver this curriculum well. They build regular opportunities for students to communicate, read, write and use mathematics in meaningful contexts. A small number of students is appropriately supported to take entry-level qualifications, which they complete successfully.

However, as in other phases of the school, some planned activities do not link closely enough to curriculum aims or what students need to learn next. When this happens, a small minority do not build their knowledge as securely as they could.

Students receive clear, impartial careers guidance. This includes advice from trained local authority advisers and purposeful conversations during pathway planning and annual education, health and care plan reviews. These discussions help students understand realistic next steps and broaden their ambitions. Leaders also organise a cross-school destinations event with other special schools. Colleges and alternative providers present their offers directly to students and families, helping them make informed decisions about future education or care settings.

Students take on responsibilities enthusiastically. Where a student's special educational need and/or disability makes this more challenging, staff prioritise building personal responsibility in other ways. Students learn to share their thoughts, preferences and feelings through their chosen communication method. This consistent support helps all students develop confidence, independence and self-advocacy as they move towards adulthood.

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

A typical day starts with a warm, well-organised arrival. It continues with calm, clear lessons that help pupils settle and succeed. The day ends just as it began. This predictable rhythm matters. It helps pupils feel safe and ready to learn, building a strong sense of belonging. Pupils are comfortable being themselves around staff who understand pupils' unique ways of learning, including pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Staff notice the smallest signs of discomfort and act quickly. Adjustments are thoughtful and often subtle, enabling pupils to focus on learning alongside their peers. This also supports improving attendance and respectful behaviour. If a pupil faces a setback, sensitive support typically helps them move forward again.

Lunchtime reflects the same care. Some pupils eat in the hall, while others eat in classrooms. Staff know what works best for each pupil, and dietary and medical needs are met well. Pupils are free to chat with friends or simply enjoy being together.

Beyond lessons, pupils enjoy a growing range of clubs and trips. These bring real joy, such as being creative through art and music or staying active through horse riding or swimming. This is reflected in how positively pupils communicate about these experiences.

Students in the post-16 classes take on increasing responsibility. They volunteer around school and support each other, setting a positive example for younger pupils. In the café, they take turns serving drinks and snacks, with ordering a hot chocolate being a firm favourite. These moments build confidence and communication skills.

The curriculum is shaped carefully around each pupil. Education, health and care plans guide learning. Leaders also widen pupils' experiences and ambitions, and students work towards suitable qualifications where appropriate. Planning for next steps starts early, with families closely involved. Pupils make sound progress from their starting points and leave well prepared for what comes next.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers support pupils to build securely on their prior learning, checking this carefully so that teaching is consistently effective and maximises pupils' achievement.
 - Leaders should manage part-time timetables more effectively, setting clear goals that enable timely review and support pupils' prompt return to full-time education.
 - Leaders should refine strategic planning, including the pupil premium strategy, by using clear measures to judge whether actions are improving outcomes for pupils across the school.
 - Governors should strengthen and formalise their approaches to checking and challenge so that identified priorities lead to clear actions, consistent follow-up and sharper accountability.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Stephanie Taylor.

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.

During the inspection, inspectors met with a range of school leaders. This included six governors, the headteacher (who is currently on secondment to work in the local authority), the interim headteacher, the two deputy headteachers and the three assistant headteachers. Inspectors also spoke with local authority representatives, including a school effectiveness adviser and a member of the Essex Virtual School team.

The school reasonably interprets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.

The school does not use alternative provision.

The school does take children in the early years. However, at the time of the inspection, there were not enough children for inspectors to give this part of the school its own grade. Instead, inspectors considered these children's education and experiences within the other areas they evaluated.

At the time of the inspection, the interim headteacher had been in post for one week. The substantive headteacher had begun a two-year secondment to the local authority the previous week, but was also present for the inspection.

Headteacher: Mrs Sam Lawrence

Lead inspector:

Daniel Short, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Helen Jones, Ofsted Inspector

Lynda Walker, 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 13 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

241

Well below 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: 1,067

School capacity

245

Well below 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: 1,152

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

44.79%

Well above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 28.9%

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

100.00%

Well above 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: 3.1%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

Well below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13%

Location deprivation

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).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

VI - Visual Impairment, HI - Hearing Impairment, SLCN - Speech, language and Communication, ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, MSI - Multi-Sensory Impairment, PD - Physical Disability, SLD - Severe Learning Difficulty, PMLD - Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers	100%	91%	Not available
2022 leavers	96%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers	92%	94%	Not available

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 (2 terms)	10.6%	8.1%	Above
2023/24	9.9%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23	11.8%	9.0%	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 (2 terms)	33.9%	21.9%	Above
2023/24	34.5%	25.6%	Above
2022/23	40.5%	26.5%	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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