

Blacon High School, A Specialist Sports College

Address: Melbourne Road, Blacon, Chester, Cheshire, CH1 5JH

Unique reference number (URN): 111396

Inspection report: 12 May 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.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders view improving attendance as a priority. They have a well-considered approach to reducing absence. They use external support to help pupils with the biggest barriers to coming to school. Leaders prioritise those with low attendance and use data to track their progress. Although attendance is below average for all groups of pupils, leaders' work is resulting in a gradual improvement in pupils' attendance over time.

Leaders have renewed their focus on the effective application of the behaviour policy. School rules are now commonly understood and used appropriately by staff. They report any incidents to parents and carers efficiently. This increased communication and consistent approach have contributed to high expectations and improved behaviour in school.

Leaders analyse data and respond well to trends. This allows them to provide support to pupils in a timely manner. Leaders' recognition of positive attitudes to learning and the use of rewards have led to a positive climate for learning in classrooms.

Leaders' approach to behaviour is adapted for pupils with additional needs. As a result, vulnerable pupils are supported to behave well. Leaders respond effectively to incidents of bullying, discrimination and derogatory language, in collaboration with partner agencies.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The personal development programme spans all aspects of school life. Learning is delivered through a taught curriculum. A comprehensive assembly programme reinforces important knowledge. This allows pupils to remember key information. The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is reactive to local needs. For example, leaders have recently introduced information about the risks of county lines. The curriculum is designed to develop pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. For example, pupils from a Muslim background have delivered assemblies on fasting during Ramadan. Leaders monitor the quality of the PSHE curriculum and check it is delivered appropriately to meet the needs of pupils. As a result, pupils are typically equipped with the knowledge to recognise risks and be prepared for life in modern Britain.

Pupils have access to a wide range of leadership opportunities. They take part in democratic processes to elect pupil leaders. Leadership teams lead fundraising activities and support the school during events to build self-esteem and confidence. The school's Combined Cadets Force and Duke of Edinburgh's Award provide an engaging approach to promoting pupils' resilience and leadership skills.

Pupils enjoy the sporting activities on offer. They can also take part in music and drama activities. For example, pupils recently performed a school production. Pupils benefit from a wealth of trips. These range from visits to Chester Zoo, to local residential visits and international experiences in Italy or Bulgaria. Where possible, leaders proactively seek opportunities to offer experiences free of charge. Most pupils benefit from the enrichment programme. Leaders track pupils' participation effectively and use this information to reduce pupils' barriers to accessing the extra-curricular offer.

Pupils receive careers guidance from Year 7. Pupils in Year 10 benefit from work experience, including from some prestigious organisations. Along with mock interviews and CV writing workshops, the careers offer helps pupils to secure places in education, employment or training after school.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Many pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), do not achieve as well as they should. This is reflected over time in low achievement in national examinations at the end of key stage 4.

Although leaders are closing pupils' gaps in reading and mathematics, pupils' writing skills are variable. This is particularly the case for pupils with SEND. Leaders' actions to address issues with handwriting and spelling are in their early stages. Many pupils do not gain the skills and knowledge they require to be well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training. This is common across all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils.

Pupils' learning across the curriculum is uneven. They perform better in vocational qualifications. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well from their starting points in some subjects.

Leaders have identified the need to improve underperforming areas of the curriculum as a priority. However, their actions to raise standards are in their infancy.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

The curriculum is ordered logically to build on prior skills and knowledge. Leaders ensure experts with deep subject knowledge are in place to deliver the content of the curriculum. However, the teaching of the curriculum is inconsistent. Leaders' actions to improve teaching are in the early stages and have not been fully adopted by staff. Moreover, some teachers do not sufficiently check pupils' learning. As a result, they do not make required changes to their teaching based on what pupils have learned. This means pupils are left with gaps in their knowledge.

There is a suitable programme in place to support pupils with gaps in their reading and mathematical knowledge. However, leaders are at the early stages of implementing support for pupils with spelling and handwriting difficulties. Some pupils struggle to articulate their ideas in their written work.

For some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, teachers do not make appropriate adaptations to reduce any barriers to learning. Consequently, these pupils do not access the curriculum as successfully as their peers.

Leaders provide suitable training to address inconsistencies in teaching. They have prioritised the monitoring of teaching in the school to improve practice across the whole

curriculum. However, this work is at an early stage.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Leaders' actions to reduce pupils' barriers to learning are inconsistent. In particular, leaders' strategies to reduce any barriers that affect how successfully pupils learn and communicate are not effective. As a result, some pupils do not learn as well as they should.

However, leaders identify and support any social, emotional or mental health difficulties that pupils have effectively. These pupils' support plans are reviewed regularly in partnership with parents and carers. This helps to promote a sense of belonging for these pupils. Leaders work effectively with external partners to ensure pupils known to social care receive the support they need to overcome any barriers to their wellbeing.

Leaders have identified suitable actions to support those disadvantaged pupils in receipt of additional funding. However, the application of some of these strategies is in the early stages and they are not showing impact.

Alternative provision is commissioned appropriately and is used in pupils' best interests. Leaders work closely with these providers. Leaders make an additional effort to ensure these pupils continue to feel part of the Blacon family. For example, pupils are invited to attend the school prom at the end of Year 11.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Leaders understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement. However, their actions to improve aspects of the school's provision have not been sufficiently quick or effective. For example, leaders recognise the need to increase pupils' attainment by enhancing the quality of teaching and increasing pupils' attendance. However, leaders' actions have been delayed due to local challenges, and improvements are still in the early stages. As a result, pupils still do not achieve as well as they should from their starting points.

Leaders are realistic and highly reflective of their practice. They show a willingness to learn from the success of other schools. Leaders invite external audits to validate the impact of their actions. This is beginning to make a difference, but improvements are in their infancy.

Governors have a wealth of expertise and experience. They are invested in the school and receive appropriate training to provide leaders with effective challenge and support. Governors' understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development is accurate. Governors and leaders work together towards a common vision. Nevertheless, improvements in underperforming areas of the school have not been swift enough.

Leaders have established constructive relationships with parents and carers and the wider community. This includes the sharing of regular newsletters, holding information events for parents and posting celebratory news on social media channels. Where parents raise concerns about changes, leaders arrange meetings to provide clarity.

Leaders are role models. They value staff's wellbeing and are responsive to any concerns, including about workload. Leaders provide a suitable array of professional development opportunities to support the school's priorities. This is beginning to develop staff's expertise, although inconsistency remains.

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

Pupils are safe and happy at Blacon High School. They enjoy the community feel. Leaders know pupils well. Pupils are proactively educated on local risks and trends. For example, local experts visit the school to educate pupils on the dangers of drugs and knife crime. This prepares pupils well to tackle risks outside of school.

Pupils respect each other and live the values of the school. They build positive relationships with peers and staff. Leaders have further raised expectations of pupils' behaviour and embedded effective routines. This has helped create a calm culture. Bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively by leaders when it happens.

Pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This results in gaps in their learning. However, leaders' relentless focus on attendance is resulting in gradual improvement.

Pupils display positive attitudes to learning and respond well to teachers. Low-level behaviour incidents are few. Pupils benefit from effective routines at the beginning of lessons. However, classroom routines designed to extend pupils' thinking are not consistently embedded. As a result, pupils do not develop a depth of knowledge in some areas of the curriculum. They do not achieve as well as they should.

Leaders' actions to remove any barriers to pupils' learning are not as effective as they should be. This contributes to gaps in pupils' learning. However, pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs are supported well. When required, external partners are used to provide further support for these pupils. For example, mental health practitioners and counsellors share strategies to reduce barriers to pupils' wellbeing.

Pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities and experiences. These include international trips and participation in whole-school productions. Pupils enjoy sporting opportunities. When pupils struggle to engage with the school's personal development offer, leaders work effectively to help them overcome any barriers.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the adaptations that are put in place to reduce any barriers to learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are effective so that these pupils can access the curriculum successfully.
- Leaders should further develop their strategies to close gaps in pupils' writing and spelling so that pupils secure the important building blocks that they need for future learning.

- Leaders should ensure that improvements to teaching, including the checks made on what pupils know and remember, are embedded across all subjects and lead to positive trends in pupils' achievement.
 - Leaders should continue to implement their strategy to reduce absence so that the number of pupils who attend school regularly continues to rise.
 - Leaders should ensure that any aspect of provision that falls below the expected standard is dealt with quickly and effectively so that pupils benefit from a high-quality education.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Judith Gilmour.

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 headteacher, other senior and curriculum leaders, staff and pupils.

The lead inspector spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. They also spoke with representatives from alternative providers and the local authority during the inspection.

The school meets 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 uses one unregistered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Rachel Hudson

Lead inspector:

Usman Kothia, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

David Roberts, Ofsted Inspector

Michael Gun-Why, Ofsted Inspector

Karen Parker, 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 12 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

705

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

750

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: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

47.38%

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

6.67%

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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

22.84%

Well above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

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

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	17.3%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	23.6%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	20.6%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	33.2	46.1	Below
2023/24 (final)	37.2	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	35.1	46.3	Below

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.63	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.65	-0.03	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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	13.6%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	20.3%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	15.3%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	28.0	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	33.9	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	32.5	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.80	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.86	-0.57	Close to average

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	13.6%	53.1%	-39.6 pp
2023/24 (final)	20.3%	53.1%	-32.8 pp
2022/23 (final)	15.3%	52.4%	-37.2 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	28.0	50.4	-22.4
2023/24 (final)	33.9	50.0	-16.2
2022/23 (final)	32.5	50.3	-17.8

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.80	0.16	-0.96
2022/23 (final)	-0.86	0.17	-1.02

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 (revised)	75%	92%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	79%	93%	Below
2021 leavers (revised)	77%	94%	Below

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)	14.6%	8.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	14.9%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	14.8%	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 (3 term)	43.2%	23.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	44.7%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	42.3%	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.

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