

Bury St Edmunds County High School

Address: Beetons Way, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP32 6RF

Unique reference number (URN): 136990

Inspection report: 19 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.

Strong standard ●

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

The personal development and wellbeing offer has a positive impact on the culture of the school. Leaders have implemented a highly effective personal, social and health education programme that is well-sequenced and adapted to suit the needs of pupils. It is structured so that pupils build a detailed and secure understanding of key topics such as healthy relationships and mental health. Pupils talk maturely about their learning. They can apply this to real life scenarios. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. They learn about different cultures and religions. Consequently, they develop a keen sense of respect and get on well with each other.

The wide range of extra-curricular activities further supports pupils' learning. For example, pupils can study Japanese or a range of science, technology, engineering and mathematics accreditations. In addition, leaders ensure that all pupils can access a variety of clubs that range from choir and drawing to sports and chess. Pupils benefit from regular outings. For example they visit the theatre, travel abroad and volunteer in local community events. This helps them to understand the world around them and to develop their confidence. Many of them take part in the annual school musical. Opportunities like this help pupils to express themselves creatively. Pupils develop leadership skills through roles such as prefect, student council or form representative. Pupils are encouraged to play a key role in the life of the school. This helps them to develop a strong sense of belonging. Pupils are confident that their voices are valued and heard.

The effective careers programme ensures that pupils are well-informed about their future choices. Leaders bring this to life by hosting a number of external speakers and planning trips to local post-16 providers. Leaders ensure that pupils receive personalised careers advice. Pupils are very well-prepared to take their next steps.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Pupils make steady progress through the curriculum. They achieve well. This is reflected in published outcomes which are in line with national averages. Pupils' achievement in English and mathematics is a particular strength. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities also achieve well. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is starting to close. Leaders use assessment to identify where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding as well as to ensure that effective interventions are in place. As a result, these pupils catch up quickly.

In general, pupils produce work that reflects their increasingly detailed understanding of key topics. Leaders have placed an explicit focus on subject-specific vocabulary. This means that pupils are confident in talking about their learning. Targeted reading programmes help younger pupils quickly develop the essential skills they need to become confident readers.

Pupils are well prepared for their next steps. They access a range of destinations that suit their interests and abilities.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have a secure understanding of attendance across the school. They work tirelessly with staff, pupils and families to highlight the importance of attending regularly. Attendance is improving in most year groups, particularly in the lower school. Leaders use a range of supportive strategies to encourage pupils to attend regularly such as access to the 'Wellbeing Hub'. Persistent absence is decreasing for the majority of pupils. All staff take responsibility for promoting attendance and building relationships to ensure pupils want to come to school. There is clear impact from this work.

Leaders have embedded clear routines and high expectations that are well understood by pupils and staff. Pupils behave well. The site is calm and orderly. Pupils have a positive attitude to learning. In lessons, there is little disruption. If it does occur, staff implement the school's behaviour policy consistently. Leaders have developed a rewards system that is valued by pupils. They are proud of the points and badges they achieve. They report that these help them to behave well. Social times are inclusive and pupils generally get on well with each other. Pupils feel valued as members of the school community. Bullying is not tolerated. Pupils feel confident that any concerns would be taken seriously and dealt with effectively by staff.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders ensure that the curriculum is ambitious for pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. The curriculum is well-sequenced and builds on prior learning. Leaders have identified the key knowledge that pupils need to make progress and to achieve well. Leaders use assessment effectively to identify any gaps pupils may have in their knowledge. Typically, teachers check on pupils' understanding in lessons. They re-shape their teaching to address any misconceptions. As a result, pupils make suitable progress. Pupils who fall behind in reading, writing, spelling and mathematics receive additional help to catch up with their peers.

Leaders have a detailed understanding of the quality of teaching in the school. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. In general, teachers model new ideas and knowledge well. They choose appropriate activities that engage pupils and move their learning on. Typically, they adapt their teaching to cater for pupils' additional needs. On a few occasions, teaching does not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to embed their understanding because misconceptions are not identified quickly enough. Sometimes, teachers do not fully implement adaptations to teaching that help to remove barriers to learning. Leaders are addressing these variations through training and coaching for staff.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have established effective systems to identify pupils' needs. Staff are provided with detailed information so they can support pupils' learning. Ongoing training helps the majority of staff to make thoughtful adaptations to learning tasks for pupils with special educational

needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This supports pupils to access the curriculum and improve on their learning over time.

The use of pupil premium funding is effective, particularly in supporting academic outcomes and pupil wellbeing. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils achieve well. Pupils with SEND are well cared for. Nurturing staff in the 'The Martlet Centre' support pupils with SEND to participate fully in all aspects of school life. This includes break and lunchtime clubs, targeted help and small group teaching. Pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read follow an appropriate phonics programme. This helps them to improve their reading and access the curriculum more confidently.

Leaders regularly review the impact of the support provided to disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. They make adjustments as necessary. Whilst attendance for disadvantaged pupils is improving, it remains below national averages.

Leaders engage well with external agencies to shape their work with pupils. Leaders use alternative provision appropriately and ensure that it has a positive impact on pupils.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and those with responsibility for governance have a secure understanding of the school's context. Together, they have established a positive culture and maintained the quality of provision over a period of significant change. Leaders at all levels share a clear vision and moral purpose. They place pupils' best interests at the heart of decision making.

Leaders use well-embedded monitoring and evaluation systems to determine precisely the impact of their work. They work closely with the trust to celebrate success and identify further areas for improvement. As a result, standards are continually improving. Leaders have developed a high-quality professional learning programme which is contributing to improvements in the quality of teaching. Staff appreciate the opportunities to develop as individuals and as leaders. Teachers who are in the early stages of their careers receive timely support.

Trustees and leaders ensure that staff wellbeing is a priority. They take effective action to manage staff workload and ensure that staff feel valued. Consequently, staff feel proud to work at this school.

Leaders make every effort to build positive relationships with families and the local community. After a period of considerable change within the school, this is now starting to embed. Parental perception is increasingly positive.

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

Pupils enjoy attending this friendly and inclusive school. They describe a strong sense of community where their voices are valued and listened to. This is evident in the positive relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils feel cared for. They are confident that staff will prioritise their needs and support them.

Pupils feel happy and safe in school. Discrimination and bullying are not tolerated. If any issues or concerns do arise, staff are quick to respond. Anti-bullying ambassadors promote a culture where pupils look out for each other. Pupils report that diversity is celebrated. They enjoy taking part in activities such as the International Evening and the Community Christmas Party.

Pupils behave well in lessons and at social times. Classrooms are calm and purposeful. This allows pupils to focus on their learning, make progress and achieve well. When pupils need help to manage their emotions and behaviour, staff intervene swiftly and effectively. Where additional support is needed, it is personalised. This helps pupils to reflect on their actions and improve their engagement with learning. Attendance is improving and most pupils attend school regularly.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported to access the curriculum. In most lessons, teachers use helpful adaptations to ensure pupils learn the same curriculum as their peers. Many pupils benefit from targeted additional teaching that helps them to keep up.

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils and nurture their ambitions. There are a wide range of inclusive extra-curricular activities on offer. These help pupils to develop skills such as confidence and resilience. As a result, high numbers of pupils with barriers to learning access them. Many pupils take on leadership roles such as school council member, prefect or reading buddy. This helps them to cooperate well with each other, developing strong teamwork and social skills. Pupils are well-prepared for life beyond school. They receive valuable advice and guidance to help them understand the range of future pathways available.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue their work to support pupils to attend regularly, particularly those who are disadvantaged and who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Leaders should embed the consistency of adaptive teaching to further raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

About this inspection

This school is part of Unity Schools Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Dominic Norrish, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Christine Quinn.

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 (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMI.

Inspectors spoke with the chair of trustees, the Chief Executive Officer, the Director of Education, members of the local governing body including the chair, the headteacher, senior leaders, staff and pupils during the inspection. Inspectors reviewed the findings of the parent, staff and pupil Ofsted online surveys.

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 headteacher took up their position in September 2021. Since the last inspection there have also been significant changes to the senior leadership team.

The school currently makes use of 7 alternative provisions, including 6 that are unregistered.

Headteacher: Sally Kennedy

Lead inspector:

Jane Bennett, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Duncan Ramsey, Ofsted Inspector

Jennifer Brassington, Ofsted Inspector

Tom Sparks, 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 19 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

739

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

1,020

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: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

24.63%

Close to 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

2.17%

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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

16.10%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Below 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)	53.0%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	45.7%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	38.8%	45.3%	Close to average

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)	49.8	46.1	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	46.2	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	46.4	46.3	Close to average

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)	-0.09	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.17	-0.03	Close to average

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)	24.2%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	21.2%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	17.1%	25.2%	Close to average

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)	37.1	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	34.3	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	34.8	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)	-0.90	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.74	-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)	24.2%	53.1%	-28.9 pp
2023/24 (final)	21.2%	53.1%	-31.9 pp
2022/23 (final)	17.1%	52.4%	-35.3 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)	37.1	50.4	-13.3
2023/24 (final)	34.3	50.0	-15.7
2022/23 (final)	34.8	50.3	-15.5

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)	-0.90	0.16	-1.06
2022/23 (final)	-0.74	0.17	-0.91

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)	98%	92%	Above
2022 leavers (revised)	96%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	98%	94%	Above

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	41.13	34.38	Above
2022/23 (final)	29.20	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (revised)	0.4	0.0	Above

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)	9.5%	8.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	10.8%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	10.2%	9.0%	Close to average

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)	27.2%	23.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	30.5%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	29.0%	26.5%	Close to average

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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