

Hylands School

Address: Chelmsford Road, Writtle, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 3ET

Unique reference number (URN): 137072

Inspection report: 10 February 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.

This school requires special measures

His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires **special measures** because it is failing to provide an acceptable standard of education, and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Needs attention

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Leaders have taken robust action to address historically low attendance across different groups of pupils. Although this work is at an early stage, it is beginning to have a positive impact. Some pupils now attend more regularly than they did in the past. Leaders recognise that further improvement is needed, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Too many of these pupils continue to be absent too often. While the number of persistently absent pupils is starting to reduce, some pupils continue to miss a considerable part of their education.

Leaders have been effective in establishing clear expectations for behaviour. Consistent routines, such as whole-school line-ups, help to ensure a calm and orderly start to lessons. The school is generally a calm, settled place. Pupils usually treat each other with respect. Bullying and unkind behaviours are rare and are addressed promptly by staff. Pupils who need extra help to manage their emotions receive appropriate care and have trusted adults to speak to. Leaders recognise that pupils are not always fully engaged in lessons, particularly when teaching is less effective.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

Pupils attend a school that serves a community with high levels of deprivation. This makes the school's work to support pupils' personal development, confidence, sense of belonging and aspirations especially important. Leaders have introduced a programme intended to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. Pupils have opportunities to reflect on their own beliefs and experiences, and to learn about different religions and cultures. However, the impact of this work is variable. While some pupils develop a secure understanding of issues such as democracy, respect and tolerance, others do not consistently demonstrate this depth of knowledge.

The curriculum includes opportunities for pupils to build social skills, cooperate with others and learn about their local and wider community. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including online and offline risks. Suitable relationships, sex and health education is taught in an age-appropriate way. The school's pastoral support helps many pupils feel well cared for. Staff provide timely, caring help that supports pupils' wellbeing.

However, leaders' work to strengthen pupils' wider personal development is not secure enough. As a result, not all pupils develop the confidence, resilience and broader awareness they need. Pupils' participation in enrichment opportunities is too low. Many pupils,

particularly those who are disadvantaged, do not benefit from these experiences. Opportunities for pupils to develop leadership, responsibility and wider confidence remain limited.

The school provides careers information, advice and guidance to help pupils consider their next steps. However, this work is not yet sufficiently ambitious or well developed. Too few pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, develop high aspirations or a clear understanding of the full range of pathways open to them when they leave school. Although leaders are beginning to take steps to improve this work, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils staying in suitable education, employment or training remains low.

Urgent improvement ●

Achievement

Urgent improvement ●

The school serves a community with a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils, many of whom join at different points in the school year. Typically, pupils do not progress well through the curriculum. Across year groups, pupils significantly underperform, including those who have been at the school since Year 7 as well as those who joined more recently. From a range of starting points, pupils perform considerably worse in examinations than similar pupils nationally. This has been the case over a sustained period of time.

Despite some improvements in the published outcomes for GCSEs in English and mathematics in 2025, pupils' attainment remains significantly below national averages. Furthermore, these improvements were not reflected equitably for different groups of pupils. For instance, disadvantaged pupils continue to perform markedly less well than others in the school, and similar pupils elsewhere. This gap is widening over time. Many do not obtain the qualifications that they need to successfully move on to further education or training.

Curriculum and teaching

Urgent improvement ●

Leaders are beginning to develop the curriculum and improve teaching so that it better meets pupils' needs. However, this work is at an early stage. It has not led to consistent improvement. At present, many pupils do not benefit from an ambitious curriculum. Too often, teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of how to deliver learning that meets pupils' needs are underdeveloped. This has a negative impact on how well pupils learn.

The school lacks effective systems to identify when pupils have missed or forgotten their learning. As a result, teachers do not have a secure understanding of pupils' starting points. This prevents them from knowing how best to help pupils to improve their work. In turn, pupils' eagerness to learn wanes. They produce work of a low standard. Consequently, many pupils do not build knowledge securely over time or make the progress needed to move on successfully.

Teaching is not adapted well enough to enable disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to learn successfully. When pupils struggle with literacy

or numeracy, the gaps that they have in these basic skills are not addressed well enough. This further limits their learning across the curriculum.

Inclusion

Urgent improvement ●

Leaders' inclusive practices are at an early stage of development. The school uses a range of systems to identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, when these needs are identified, staff lack the expertise they need to meet these pupils' needs effectively. Work to involve pupils and families in this process is only just beginning. Leaders do not check carefully enough on the impact of their support for the most vulnerable pupils. As a result, leaders do not have a clear understanding of how well these pupils achieve. Too many pupils with SEND struggle to access the curriculum. They do not make enough progress in their learning.

Similar weaknesses affect leaders' work to support disadvantaged pupils. Leaders do not monitor the impact of pupil premium funding on raising pupils' achievement. They can not be sure if their interventions, such as literacy support, are helping pupils to catch up in reading, writing and mathematics. This makes it difficult for leaders to adapt their approaches when they are not working. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils achieve poorly and gaps in their knowledge persist. Pupils who attend alternative provision are supported appropriately, and leaders check that these placements meet pupils' needs.

Leadership and governance

Urgent improvement ●

Over a considerable period of time, those responsible for governance have not fulfilled their roles effectively. They have not provided sufficient challenge or support to leaders. They have not checked closely enough whether their decisions, including the use of pupil premium funding, are helping pupils to achieve more. Trustees have not intervened promptly when strategies have failed to have a positive impact for pupils. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils continue to achieve poorly. Gaps between them and their peers remain wide.

Leaders understand the school's key priorities, particularly the challenges associated with serving a community with high levels of deprivation. However, their overgenerous evaluation of the school's work has hindered them from focusing sharply enough on the most urgent issues. External support is beginning to strengthen leaders' work, for example in improving attendance. In addition, recent changes to school and trust leadership have helped the school to raise its expectations of what pupils can achieve. It remains too early to see the impact of these changes on the standard of education that pupils receive.

Leaders have introduced a professional learning programme that staff value. This work is at an early stage and has not led to a sustained improvement in the quality of teaching across the school. Leaders are considerate of staff workload and wellbeing.

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

Pupils' experiences in lessons are highly variable, and many pupils do not achieve well. While some pupils enjoy their learning and make progress from their starting points, this is not typical. Learning is frequently ill-matched to pupils' needs. Too often, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. This is partly because leaders do not have effective systems to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge, including in the fundamentals of reading, writing and number. As a result, teachers do not have a secure understanding of pupils' starting points. When pupils struggle to keep up in lessons, the ways in which the school helps them are often ineffective.

Many pupils miss parts of the curriculum because they join the school part-way through the year, or have low attendance. Leaders do not have effective processes in place to help pupils catch up with missed learning. This particularly affects disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, many pupils do not make the progress they should. They are poorly prepared for their next steps.

Pupils typically have positive relationships with staff and their peers. They benefit from supportive pastoral care, for example when they need help to manage their feelings. Bullying and unkindness are rare. This helps pupils to feel safe in school. Pupils value the small size of their school because it helps them build strong friendships. Behaviour is generally calm, and pupils respect each other regardless of differences between them.

Although attendance is beginning to improve, it remains too low for many pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged. Some pupils benefit from a small range of clubs, particularly sports. However, too many pupils miss out on wider opportunities that would help them develop their confidence, interests and sense of belonging within the school community.

Next steps

- Trustees and governors must strengthen their challenge and support to leaders in order to ensure that their actions, including the use of additional funding such as the pupil premium, are making a positive difference for pupils.
- Trustees, governors and leaders should ensure that they have an accurate oversight of the quality of the school's provision, so that they can identify and act on the most urgent priorities for improvement.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of pupils' starting points and provide work that is appropriately ambitious and well adapted so that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), can access the curriculum and achieve well.
- Leaders should strengthen systems to identify, review and support the needs of pupils with SEND, and ensure that staff develop the appropriate expertise to help pupils with SEND access learning successfully.
- Leaders should evaluate more rigorously the impact of strategies to improve pupils' foundational skills, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

- Leaders should continue to develop and embed their strategies to improve attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND and those who are persistently absent.
 - Leaders should ensure that careers education, information, advice and guidance are effective in raising pupils' aspirations and improving their understanding of the full range of pathways available, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
 - Leaders should take steps to increase pupils' participation in enrichment opportunities. This is to ensure that a much greater proportion of pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, benefit from activities that develop their confidence, leadership skills and sense of belonging.
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About this inspection

This school is part of The Kemnal 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), Russell Hobby, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gaenor Bagley.

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 CEO, deputy CEO, the headteacher and other senior leaders, staff and some parents 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.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

HMCI is of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers. The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of 5 alternative provisions, including 2 that are unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection, with a new headteacher joining in 2024 and a new CEO starting in 2025.

The school is registered as having a sixth form, although there are currently no pupils on roll in this provision.

Lead inspector:

Bessie Owen, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Sally Nutman, Ofsted Inspector

Susan Sutton, Ofsted Inspector

Sarah Fowler, 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 10 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

640

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

1,100

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: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

44.39%

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

2.97%

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

18.91%

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 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 (revised)	37.8%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	25.3%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	25.2%	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 (revised)	37.8	46.0	Below
2023/24 (final)	32.6	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	35.0	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)	-0.86	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.89	-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 (revised)	9.7%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	15.8%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	9.4%	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 (revised)	23.7	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	24.5	34.6	Below
2022/23 (final)	26.4	35.0	Below

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)	-1.12	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.25	-0.57	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' 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 (revised)	9.7%	53.1%	-43.5 pp
2023/24 (final)	15.8%	53.1%	-37.3 pp
2022/23 (final)	9.4%	52.4%	-43.0 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 (revised)	23.7	50.4	-26.7
2023/24 (final)	24.5	50.0	-25.5
2022/23 (final)	26.4	50.3	-23.9

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)	-1.12	0.16	-1.29
2022/23 (final)	-1.25	0.17	-1.42

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 (provisional)	82%	91%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	89%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	90%	94%	Below

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
2024/25 (revised)	31.43	34.99	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	26.58	34.38	Below
2022/23 (final)	17.55	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
2024/25 (revised)	-0.3	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	0.0	0.0	Close to average

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 term)	11.9%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	12.7%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	13.3%	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 term)	31.9%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	34.6%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	37.4%	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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