

Cranbrook School

Address: Waterloo Road, Cranbrook, Kent, TN17 3JD

Unique reference number (URN): 137739

Inspection report: 6 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 ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils consistently achieve highly across the curriculum and in public examinations at the end of key stage 4 and post-16. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve above the national average in these examinations. Across subjects, pupils produce high-quality work. They demonstrate detailed knowledge and skills. This is shown through their impressive written work. Pupils write fluently and use complex technical vocabulary with accuracy.

The school is highly successful in its work to enable pupils to be ready for what comes next. This includes preparing pupils for further study at post-16. Within the sixth form, there is a culture of high achievement and aspiration. As a result of students' consistently high outcomes at end of key stage 5, they move on to destinations that reflect the ambitious nature of the school and students.

Well-planned interventions for a small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language enable them to access the full curriculum and achieve as well as their peers.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Pupils are keen to come to school each day. They value the warm relationships fostered by staff and the tailored support provided. Consequently, attendance is high and has been consistently above the national average over time. Leaders' actions to strengthen the school's inclusive practice have resulted in a significant improvement in the attendance of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The attendance of pupils with SEND is now above the national average. Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken highly effective action to improve the attendance of students in the sixth form. This has led to a considerable reduction in persistent absenteeism of students at post-16.

Leaders' high expectations of pupils' behaviour, together with well-embedded routines, ensure that learning is calm and focused. Pupils across the school are self-disciplined and respectful. As a result, instances of bullying and discriminatory language are rare and never tolerated. Pupils have a clear understanding of what is expected of their conduct. Their attitudes to learning are exemplary. Pupils are sensible during social times and act with integrity. This purposeful ethos helps to prepare pupils for life beyond the school. Students in the sixth form set a very good example for younger pupils.

Post 16 provision

Strong standard ●

Students in the sixth form benefit from an ambitious programme that prepares them very well for their next steps. The broad academic curriculum meets the needs and interests of students. Leaders have refined the 'Cranbrook Diploma' to complement the curriculum. This gives students the opportunity to develop their interests and talents further. Students contribute fully to the wider community and act as positive role models for younger pupils.

Teaching in the sixth form is highly effective. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to help students achieve well, including students who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is reflected in the typically above national outcomes in public examinations at the end of key stage 5. Across the breadth of subjects, teachers explain key concepts clearly. They use well-considered questions to help students connect increasingly complex ideas. Students use subject-specific vocabulary fluently. They understand exactly what they need to do to improve their work.

Students take part in an extensive range of enrichment opportunities. These include debating, creative writing, the performing arts and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Students take their leadership responsibilities seriously. They value organising activities for younger pupils. Consequently, students leave the sixth form resilient, independent and well prepared for life beyond the school.

Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is broad, ambitious and appropriately challenging for all pupils. It equips pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for future success. Leaders have a secure understanding of the quality of teaching across the school. They use accurate information to identify where improvements are needed. Recent changes to the curriculum have ensured that teachers use an agreed set of principles to help pupils build knowledge more securely across subjects and phases.

Teachers demonstrate detailed subject knowledge. They provide frequent opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of technical vocabulary. Typically, teachers explain new learning clearly. They adapt their teaching well to address barriers that disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities face. Where teachers use the school's agreed set of principles consistently, teachers check pupils' understanding effectively. However, some variability remains in how precisely teachers check what pupils have understood before moving on to new learning. This means that some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Where teaching is sometimes less secure, leaders provide effective support to help develop staff expertise.

A small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language receive the help they need to access the full curriculum.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders are ambitious for vulnerable pupils to achieve highly and overcome barriers to success. Pupils' individual needs are identified as soon as they join the school. Leaders remove obstacles to learning and wellbeing through targeted support, inclusive classroom practices and working closely with external agencies, such as the local authority. Knowledgeable teaching assistants provide appropriate support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in the classroom.

Leaders have recently started to review the impact of support that the school provides, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. They know what is working well and what needs to improve further. They take effective action to bring about improvement. This includes ongoing training for staff to help them remove barriers consistently across the curriculum.

The school has a well-informed strategy to ensure that additional funding, such as the pupil premium grant, supports disadvantaged pupils effectively. This work has a positive impact on pupils. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well across the curriculum and outperform national averages in external examinations. They benefit fully from the school's extensive extracurricular programme. Pupils who speak English as an additional language benefit from ongoing support that enables them to access the full curriculum.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have a detailed understanding of the school and its context in the local community. They have a clear strategic vision that reflects their high aspirations for all pupils. Leaders act with pupils' best interests in mind. This is shown in the consistently above-average outcomes and in the pride pupils have in their school. Leaders' work to continue to improve attendance has been successful, notably for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Leaders have recently begun to evaluate the support given to the school's most vulnerable pupils with more precision. They ensure that staff benefit from a coherent and comprehensive professional learning programme that helps staff remove pupils' barriers to success consistently well. Leaders have plans to monitor the impact of training to help them identify more clearly how their actions are removing barriers to learning.

Those responsible for governance share leaders' vision and ambitions for the school. Governors and trustees meet their statutory responsibilities and provide appropriate support and challenge. At times, they do not always check how well leaders are achieving their improvement priorities with enough precision. Governors scrutinise leaders' use of resources and ensure that funding for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND is improving the academic and personal outcomes of these pupils.

Staff are proud to belong to the Cranbrook community. They value the approach taken by leaders to manage their workload. Early career teachers are well supported and benefit from ongoing coaching. Parents and carers champion the safe, welcoming and supportive learning environment leaders have created.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have thoughtfully designed an appropriate programme of personal development. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum supports pupils to develop a detailed understanding of risks to their physical and mental wellbeing. Pupils are knowledgeable about potential hazards associated with being online. This includes identifying harmful influencers. Pupils have mature attitudes to relationships and consent. They know what it means to be in a healthy, respectful relationship. The PSHE curriculum

supports pupils to make healthy choices about diet and exercise. However, pupils' knowledge in some aspects of the citizenship curriculum is not as secure as it could be.

Pupils develop their confidence, resilience and social skills through the vast clubs, activities and trips on offer. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported to benefit fully from what is on offer, including the extensive overseas trips. Pupils develop their talents and interests through clubs, such as art, music, sports, the performing arts, chess and 'Warhammer'. Pupils debate important world affairs through the debate club and current affairs society. This supports their understanding of fundamental British values. The extensive personal development programme at post-16 prepares students very well for adulthood.

The school provides highly effective, personalised pastoral support. Pupils are well known by staff. Leaders work closely with parents and external agencies to act quickly, when pupils have concerns. Pupils value the warmth and care shown by staff, when they have worries about upcoming examinations.

Leaders have established a well-planned careers programme. This includes access to work experience, one-to-one advice, meaningful encounters with universities and employer engagement. Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND receive individualised careers advice to help them make ambitious plans for their future. Pupils are well prepared for further education, employment or training.

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

Pupils are incredibly proud of their vibrant school. Leaders have created a warm and welcoming environment, where pupils feel safe and are happy. Pupils truly feel like they belong in this cohesive community. Mutual respect underpins the relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils value the support they receive, both academically and personally. Pupils take pride in upholding the school's values. They act with integrity and show kindness to each other. The high expectations set by leaders help pupils to 'strive for something greater'.

Behaviour across the school is calm and orderly. Pupils demonstrate committed attitudes to their learning. They are driven to be successful and try their best. During social times, shared spaces are harmonious and friendly. Pupils feel that everyone is treated equally and fairly. Bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that it would be dealt with decisively should it occur. Pastoral support is comprehensive. Staff take time to identify where pupils may need help if they have any worries. Consequently, pupils feel included and attend regularly.

Pupils achieve consistently well across the curriculum and in national tests, including in the sixth form. They enjoy their experiences of learning. In lessons, pupils actively take part. They develop an impressive understanding of technical vocabulary, which they use with confidence. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the support they need to succeed. Students in the sixth form study a range of academic subjects that help them move on to their chosen next steps.

There is an extensive enrichment programme in the school. There is something for everyone. Where clubs and activities do not exist, sixth-form students create them for younger pupils. The broad leadership roles, including the 'senior four', help students learn the importance of helping others. Younger pupils aspire to become the positive role models they see in sixth-form students.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to monitor the impact of their inclusion strategy and ensure that training is consistently improving inclusive teaching and reducing barriers to learning.
 - Leaders should ensure that checks on learning are used consistently and precisely, so teachers know that pupils have understood important knowledge before moving on to new learning.
 - Leaders should ensure that pupils develop secure and detailed knowledge across all aspects of the personal development programme so that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
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About this inspection

This school is the only school in the Cranbrook School Academy Trust. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gordon Young.

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, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and staff at the school. Inspectors spoke with pupils at different times across the school day. The lead inspector met with members of the local governing body and chair of trustees.

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 post in September 2023.

The school has an on-site boarding provision for pupils in year 9 onwards.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Lead inspector:

Stephen Cattell, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Keith Pailthorpe, Ofsted Inspector

Michelle Payne, His Majesty's Inspector

Christie Ransom, Ofsted Inspector

Ben Greene, 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 6 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

918

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: 1,067

School capacity

954

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)

6.22%

Well below 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

0.22%

Well below 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

1.31%

Well below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

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).

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)	86.3%	45.4%	Above
2023/24 (final)	94.0%	45.9%	Above
2022/23 (final)	83.0%	45.3%	Above

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)	66.9	46.1	Above
2023/24 (final)	69.1	45.9	Above
2022/23 (final)	66.0	46.3	Above

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)	0.43	-0.03	Above
2022/23 (final)	0.25	-0.03	Above

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)	33.3%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	100.0%	25.8%	Above
2022/23 (final)	83.3%	25.2%	Above

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)	48.2	34.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	68.3	34.6	Above
2022/23 (final)	58.8	35.0	Above

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)	S	-0.57	S
2022/23 (final)	S	-0.57	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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)	33.3%	53.1%	-19.8 pp
2023/24 (final)	100.0%	53.1%	46.9 pp
2022/23 (final)	83.3%	52.4%	30.9 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)	48.2	50.4	-2.2

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	68.3	50.0	18.3
2022/23 (final)	58.8	50.3	8.5

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)	S	0.16	S
2022/23 (final)	S	0.17	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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)	97%	92%	Above
2022 leavers (revised)	100%	93%	Above
2021 leavers (revised)	100%	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
2024/25 (final)	40.61	35.00	Above
2023/24 (final)	39.77	34.38	Above
2022/23 (final)	37.00	34.16	Close to average

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 (final)	0.4	0.0	Above
2023/24 (revised)	0.2	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)	5.0%	8.4%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	6.0%	8.9%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	4.0%	9.0%	Below

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)	11.2%	23.4%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	17.7%	25.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	5.9%	26.5%	Below

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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