

Knutsford Academy

Address: Bexton Road, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 0EA

Unique reference number (URN): 138002

Inspection report: 10 March 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, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, successfully gain strong foundations for their learning. They build knowledge securely as they progress through the curriculum from Year 7 to Year 11. This is reflected in the high quality of pupils' work and in their ability to retain and articulate a deep body of knowledge across subjects. Over time, this has consistently led to high levels of attainment in national examinations that often exceed the average for all pupils nationally. Disadvantaged pupils attain as highly as their non-disadvantaged peers nationally in English and mathematics. Across other subjects, gaps in attainment for disadvantaged pupils are closing swiftly. Pupils leave the school, whether at 16 or 18, with a wide range of qualifications that support them very well into ambitious next steps in education, training or employment.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders ensure that regular attendance has a high profile in school and is prioritised at all times. They follow coherent processes to track absences and ensure that support is in place to help pupils back into school, including for pupils who are vulnerable or require additional pastoral care. Leaders have strengthened their relationships with the local authority and other agencies to ensure that any temporary dips in the attendance of specific groups, such as disadvantaged pupils, are addressed and improved swiftly. As a result, overall attendance rates, including those for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are consistently above national averages. Rates of persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils are improving.

The school environment is calm and conducive to learning. Pupils display high levels of respect, tolerance and cooperation. In lessons, pupils engage with enthusiasm and focus on their learning, asking meaningful and relevant questions. Any disruption to lessons is rare and dealt with effectively through a clear behaviour policy. The impact of the school's successful work to tackle poor conduct is evident in the low and reducing number of suspensions. Pupils who sometimes struggle to regulate their own behaviour benefit from sensitive and highly effective support from staff.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have constructed a balanced and ambitious curriculum in all key stages. Across subjects, teachers have a shared understanding of the specific knowledge that pupils need to be taught and the order in which they should learn it. Teachers and staff receive regular, highly effective training. For example, since the school's previous inspection, this training has improved assessment systems so that staff are adept at identifying and addressing gaps in pupils' learning. Teachers' feedback supports pupils to develop a more detailed understanding about what they need to do to improve. In addition, teachers receive pertinent information about pupils' specific needs, and they use this skilfully to adapt their delivery of the curriculum. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, remember their prior learning and apply this with confidence in different contexts.

Leaders prioritise securing important foundational knowledge for all pupils. For example, swift and targeted support helps pupils to overcome any difficulties with reading, handwriting and numeracy skills. Leaders are highly focused on developing language and communication skills. The school's focus on oracy supports pupils to articulate their learning with clarity. The impact of this work is increasingly evident as pupils progress through the school.

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Leaders have highly effective transition processes in place to support pupils as they progress through each key stage. This ensures that staff receive detailed and helpful information about the individual needs of pupils who are disadvantaged, have special educational needs and/or disabilities or are known to social care. Ongoing training ensures that staff expertly target support for these pupils when teaching so that they access the same challenging curriculum as their peers. This support successfully reduces any gaps in these pupils' achievement.

School leaders identify opportunities to champion any differences and provide support for struggles that their pupils may face. All are fully included in school life. Leaders encourage pupils to attend school even when facing challenges, for example by creating a social support club for pupils who are young carers. Alternative provision is used appropriately to support the needs, interests and achievements of a minority of pupils, including those with specific medical needs.

Leaders monitor the impact of their interventions and support, including how they get the best value from additional funding such as the pupil premium. This allows leaders to check that their strategies are working and that disadvantaged pupils are thriving at school. Leaders' analysis allows them to provide additional pastoral support when needed. This includes the thoughtful use of external agencies where appropriate.

Expected standard

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Trust and school leaders have a clear and accurate view of the school's many strengths. Since the previous inspection, they have focused their efforts, even during times of considerable change, on securing continued improvements. The impact of this can be seen, for example, in the consistency of teaching across subjects and the successful support for pupils who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Trust and school leaders also have an accurate understanding of key areas for further improvement, including the use of information more precisely to check the impact of their actions. Leaders have high standards and want the very best for pupils. Increasingly, this vision is one that is shared and understood by governors, staff and leaders at all levels. This is helping to drive further improvements for pupils from an already established position of strength in many areas.

The trust provides the school with helpful support, for example through subject networks and professional development opportunities. There is a wide professional learning offer, with high levels of engagement from staff. Teachers appreciate the range of development opportunities available to them so that they are more effective in their roles and can use their training to impact positively on pupils' experiences.

Staff, including early careers teachers, feel well supported. The majority of staff speak positively about the school's approach to wellbeing and workload and are proud to be part of the school community. Trustees fulfil their statutory duties well. Leaders and trustees are committed to making decisions in pupils' best interests to ensure that they benefit from the best possible experience at school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils are well supported by a wide-ranging programme of personal development that provides opportunities to broaden experiences and develop talents. Pupils appreciate the variety of trips that they can attend, alongside sporting, wellbeing and arts activities. Leaders have started to track pupils' engagement with the programme, and it is steadily growing. Further refinements are planned so that this information helps to ensure that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, benefit fully from the comprehensive offer, for example the hugely popular drama productions that draw in audiences from the community to great local acclaim and the school's football academy that has allowed former students to secure football scholarships in America when they leave school.

There is a well-planned personal, social and health education curriculum that teaches pupils important information such as how to stay healthy and safe, including online. Pupils appreciate how this learning is brought to life through assemblies and the promotion of activities that champion and celebrate diversity, for example the rainbow club for pupils who are part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Pupils demonstrate maturity and an awareness of life in modern Britain when discussing their learning, for example when talking about the fundamental British values.

A comprehensive careers programme ensures that pupils are informed and supported when they are planning their next steps. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), typically go on to sustain places in further education, apprenticeships or employment when they leave the school.

Pupils have a clear sense of belonging to the school, and they benefit from nurturing pastoral care. Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND, and those with additional pastoral needs, are well supported in their personal development.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Sixth-form students enjoy their studies, and they appreciate the considerable support that they receive to help them to succeed in school and after they leave, including careers support and guidance. The sixth-form provision contains suitable study programmes that are broad, diverse and inclusive. For example, pupils engage in work experience and are supported to resit their GCSEs if they need to. Students benefit from a well-planned personal development and enrichment programme that is tailored to their interests. Students

consistently act as positive role models to their younger peers. They attend regularly and contribute to the wider school, for instance in running student leadership groups or engaging in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. These opportunities equip them to succeed in life and be active citizens.

Most students benefit from teachers with strong subject knowledge who deliver lessons well. Typically, pupils achieve in line with national averages and gain the knowledge and skills that they need to be successful in their next steps. However, leaders recognise that a more systematic approach to monitoring the quality of sixth-form provision would strengthen their oversight and help to bring about further improvements. This is so that students are supported to achieve even more highly from their starting points. Leaders, supported by the trust, have begun this process of change, but it is ongoing, and the impact of this is not fully realised.

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

Pupils are proud to belong to this thriving and successful school community. Pupils form respectful, caring relationships with each other and the adults that work with them. This ensures that pupils feel safe and listened to. For many pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the strength of this pastoral support and care is a key reason that they decide to continue their studies as students in the sixth form.

Pupils benefit from a broad and enriching curriculum offer. They attend school regularly and are actively engaged in lessons, where they enjoy learning without disruption. Staff know pupils well and expertly remove any barriers to learning so that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, can access the same ambitious curriculum. Pupils develop a deep body of knowledge across all subjects that supports their high achievement.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, display a high level of independence. The school is a calm and purposeful place to be. If pupils face personal difficulties that affect their wellbeing, they benefit from effective pastoral support. This helps pupils to manage their own emotions and resolve conflicts in a respectful way.

All pupils enjoy access to a comprehensive offer of personal development opportunities that extend beyond the academic curriculum. Pupils are active contributors to their school community, for example through their executive pupil councils and student parliament, where they help to make decisions about how the school is run. These opportunities help to develop pupils' confidence, social skills and understanding of what life is like in modern Britain. For example, pupils attend school trips both locally and internationally. Poets visit the school to provide masterclasses, and a wide range of extra-curricular activities are on offer, such as football and dance.

Next steps

- Leaders should more closely analyse the participation and performance of different groups of pupils, including those who are vulnerable, so that they can more effectively use this information to inform their priorities for improvement, for example, in their work to improve the personal development and wellbeing provision for pupils.
 - Leaders should more carefully track and analyse the quality and impact of the provision for students in the sixth form. This is so that they can make more astute adaptations to support students to achieve highly.
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About this inspection

This school is part of The Learning Partnership 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), Dan Thomas, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Woottan.

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 spoke with the headteacher, other school and trust leaders, the CEO and his deputy, the chair of the board of trustees, representatives of the local governing body and a representative of the local authority.

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 school makes use of 2 alternative provisions for a small number of pupils, including one that is unregistered.

Headteacher: Karen Key

Lead inspector:

Amanda Downing, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Sally Kenyon, Ofsted Inspector

Scott Maclean, Ofsted Inspector

Rebecca Smith, Ofsted Inspector

Helen Fowler, His Majesty's Inspector

Steve Coyle, 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 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,325

Above 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

1,606

Well above 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)

14.91%

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

2.34%

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

18.11%

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

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)	67.5%	45.4%	Above
2023/24 (final)	67.4%	45.9%	Above
2022/23 (final)	57.8%	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 (revised)	54.9	46.0	Above
2023/24 (final)	54.2	45.9	Above
2022/23 (final)	52.7	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)	-0.03	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.05	-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 (revised)	57.1%	25.8%	Above
2023/24 (final)	55.6%	25.8%	Above
2022/23 (final)	13.6%	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)	46.3	34.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	41.7	34.6	Above
2022/23 (final)	36.1	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)	-0.63	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.61	-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 (revised)	57.1%	53.1%	4.0 pp
2023/24 (final)	55.6%	53.1%	2.4 pp
2022/23 (final)	13.6%	52.4%	-38.8 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)	46.3	50.4	-4.1
2023/24 (final)	41.7	50.0	-8.3
2022/23 (final)	36.1	50.3	-14.2

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)	-0.63	0.16	-0.80
2022/23 (final)	-0.61	0.17	-0.77

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)	98%	91%	Above
2022 leavers (revised)	97%	93%	Above
2021 leavers (revised)	95%	94%	Average

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)	35.17	34.99	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	36.58	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	33.50	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 (revised)	-0.1	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	0.1	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)	5.9%	8.1%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	6.3%	8.9%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.8%	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 (2 term)	13.1%	21.9%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	15.6%	25.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	15.7%	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.

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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