

Cloughwood Academy

Address: Stones Manor Lane, Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire, CW8 1NU

Unique reference number (URN): 140093

Inspection report: 28 April 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 ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

By the time pupils start at the school, many have disengaged with their education completely. Leaders work tirelessly to establish positive relationships with parents and carers. They support pupils and their families to enable regular attendance. Leaders have an acute understanding of the reasons behind pupils' absences. They are highly effective at breaking down barriers to ensure that pupils, including those who are persistently absent, make notable improvements in their attendance over time.

There are highly effective strategies in place to support pupils with their special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with social, emotional and mental health needs. As a result, pupils have excellent attitudes towards school. Staff are highly skilled in nurturing pupils to become well-behaved, responsible members of the school community. Staff consistently follow the behaviour policy so that pupils feel supported and cared for. Staff guide pupils to manage their own emotions so that they conduct themselves extremely well, including at breaktimes. Disruption to learning is rare and handled well when it does happen. Staff pick up on early signs of bullying and address this quickly. For example, they address emerging issues such as the use of derogatory language swiftly and effectively. Discrimination, harassment and any form of abuse or violence, including online, is not tolerated. The school uses suspensions and exclusions proportionately and fairly to help keep pupils safe.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have introduced the 'Cloughwood profile'. This helps staff to identify and successfully address pupils' needs, which are often multiple. Staff use this information well. They are highly skilled at supporting pupils to maintain their wellbeing and be ready to learn. Leaders carefully check on pupils to identify any emerging needs, particularly those pupils with other vulnerabilities. Staff are trained to a high degree to adapt their lessons and adjust the environment to enable pupils to access their learning and succeed.

The support for pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs is highly effective. It focuses on making sure that pupils feel valued and included. The nurturing approach of staff transforms pupils' attitudes towards school.

Leaders successfully incorporate the voice of parents and carers in their approach. They work productively and positively with other professionals, including the virtual school. The advice and guidance they receive helps to shape carefully tailored provision that closely meets the needs of each individual. The school's approach is successful in setting realistic but aspirational goals for pupils to achieve in all aspects of their school life.

Leaders use the pupil premium funding to great effect. This extends the school's provision and provides disadvantaged pupils with considerable enhancement opportunities that they may not otherwise access. For example, this funding has been key in extending the vocational offer so that pupils in key stage 4 can achieve appropriate functional skills and industry standard qualifications.

The school's personal development programme is tailor-made to address pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs and other vulnerabilities. It successfully alters their sense of self-worth and raises their aspirations.

Pupils have a positive understanding of difference, including a knowledge of how faiths differ and are similar to one another. They learn to respect others' opinions and understand that their own has value. Leaders' work on building social skills helps pupils to understand how to work cooperatively and how to resolve conflicts with others. Pupils also learn about different cultures through their studies of inspirational people. The school's values run throughout the personal, social, health and relationships curriculum to consistently reinforce important ideas, including the British values of mutual respect and tolerance.

The relationships, health and sex education curriculum is highly suitable. It helps pupils to understand what makes a healthy relationship, including concepts such as consent, aspects of sexual health and self-care skills. They debate right from wrong through different scenarios that equip them well to manage risk, including when online.

The school provides an extensive range of wider opportunities. Pupils are enthusiastic about the variety of trips, enrichment activities and learning experiences outside of the classroom. These contribute significantly to their engagement and personal development, for example, through their whole-school bake-off and 'Master Chef' competitions.

As part of their vocational studies, pupils develop their character through a range of careers opportunities, such as work experience in professional kitchens. The careers programme is comprehensive. Leaders have aligned the curriculum to offer industry-standard qualifications based on information from local employers. The programme is designed to meaningfully prepare pupils for adulthood by equipping them with the skills they need for future employment and to become active, productive members of the community.

Pupils are clear about the difference that the school makes to their personal development. It helps them to aspire to be the best they can be.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

The way in which the school prepares pupils for the future is a strength. Pupils develop important skills of independence, collaboration and employability as they learn the curriculum. The vast majority of students who access the post-16 offer gain industry-standard qualifications to enable them to enter meaningful employment.

From their various starting points, pupils generally progress well. Typically, pupils at the end of key stage 4 are successful in gaining relevant qualifications. This readies them for their next steps in education, employment or training. However, the lack of clarity over some key knowledge means that pupils' progress through the curriculum is not as consistently positive as it could otherwise be.

For pupils with multiple barriers to their learning, including those who have had social care involvement and disadvantaged pupils, staff provide comprehensive support to enable the pupils to achieve as well as their peers.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Many pupils start at the school having previously missed large parts of their education. Staff adapt the curriculum well to meet pupils' needs. There is a focus on developing pupils' basic knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics to help to fill any gaps in pupils' understanding. Teachers help pupils to revise and revisit learning so they can use and apply what they know with accuracy. In all subjects, there is a clear focus on extending pupils' vocabulary and language. Where necessary, pupils have extra support to ensure that this knowledge forms a solid foundation for their next steps.

Leaders understand the quality of the school's provision. They have revised the school's vocational offer to set higher aspirations for pupils' achievement. Pupils have options to choose to study catering, horticulture and construction and joinery, so that they can see a clear purpose to their learning.

The curriculum in all subjects is generally taught effectively. Leaders ensure that staff have the subject knowledge that they need to teach well. However, at times, there is a lack of precision in determining what key knowledge leaders want pupils to know and remember, including in the vocational curriculum. As such, sometimes, completing tasks becomes more important than developing pupils' subject knowledge. There is also some variation in the quality of phonics teaching. This means that some pupils do not learn to improve their reading as well as they could.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Over time, leaders have established and maintained a school culture that focuses on raising pupils' aspirations. Leaders and trustees make all decisions about school improvement in the best interests of pupils, for example, the introduction of vocational options for pupils in key stage 4. This, along with the move to industry-standard qualifications for construction and joinery, horticulture and catering, has ensured that pupils have a clearer pathway into post-16 education and into the world of work. These changes are particularly benefiting vulnerable pupils by giving them a clear purpose in learning.

Leaders have in place a high-quality professional development strategy. Staff receive training that aligns with their career stage and school development priorities. Staff are overwhelmingly positive about leaders' approach to developing the school. Leaders consider staff workload and wellbeing with great care when bringing about change.

Trustees and governors ensure that they fulfil their statutory duties. They question leaders well on a range of matters to gain an accurate understanding of the school. They know that there are priorities that they need to work on in some areas of the school's provision to make it even better. However, some of the checks on the quality of the curriculum have not

been clear enough on what specifically needs to improve, such as in defining key knowledge in some subjects consistently well.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality and sustainability of the post-16 study programmes. Their decision to move to different, more in-depth qualifications has been informed by feedback from local employers. Leaders have ensured that there are links with industry partners that offer meaningful work experience opportunities. Their recruitment of specialists in these fields, alongside professional learning, ensures that staff have the expertise to teach these qualifications. Teachers adapt the curriculum well to students' individual needs. However, as in the main school, some aspects of the curriculum focus on tasks rather than what students need to learn. As such, some of the key knowledge is not reinforced as well as it could be in some topics.

The school's careers information, education and guidance programme ensures that students are being better prepared for their next steps. Students are active participants in setting ambitious and realistic goals for their future careers. The vast majority of students move on to some form of appropriate employment, education or training. Careers education is integrated throughout. Pupils receive enrichment, such as professional courses and collaboration with industry partners, including Michelin-starred restaurants. The strong emphasis on preparing students for adulthood includes the development of skills such as travel training, banking and employability, ensuring all students gain financial literacy. Further enrichment of the curriculum includes workshops, such as mock interviews with staff from the Department for Work and Pensions.

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

Pupils feel like they belong here because they are accepted for who they are. They have trusting relationships with staff, who care deeply for their wellbeing. Pupils enjoy the school's calm atmosphere, and they maintain positive friendships. They behave respectfully towards each other. Bullying is rare. Staff deal with this decisively if it occurs. Pupils feel safe and included in all aspects of school life.

Many pupils have previously been disaffected with education. However, during their time at Cloughwood, there are considerable and sustained improvements in pupils' attitudes to school, which are reflected in their improved attendance rates. Pupils begin to love learning again.

From their varying starting points, pupils generally progress well through the broad and interesting curriculum. Staff address any barriers to learning quickly and effectively. Pupils succeed in gaining appropriate functional skills, qualifications and GCSEs. There is a clear focus on ensuring that pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, training or employment.

Older pupils relish the opportunities to act as role models. They have a range of responsibilities, such as reading buddies, sports leaders or helping out in the kitchen. They

experience a range of enrichment activities. These include learning to play the guitar or drums, playing golf and taking part in residential visits. Interesting trips and a range of visitors enhance the curriculum and equip pupils for life beyond school. For example, a recent visitor helped pupils to learn about the dangers involved in gangs and knife crime. Pupils are well supported to understand what it means to be a positive and productive member of society. Leaders ensure that pupils have the right knowledge and skills to be very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that staff are provided with the support they need to deliver the phonics curriculum with greater precision to help pupils make even better progress in securing and applying their reading knowledge.
 - Leaders should refine the curriculum to be even more specific about the key knowledge that they want pupils to know in some subjects to help deepen pupils' understanding.
 - Trust and school leaders should check on the quality of the curriculum and teaching more closely to ensure that subjects are consistently and highly effectively taught to promote even higher expectations for pupils' achievement.
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About this inspection

This school is part of the Kaleidoscope Learning Trust. Cloughwood is currently the only school in the trust. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Michelle Duval, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mrs Hannah Madeley.

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 chair of trustees, the chair of the local governing board, the CEO, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers, the special educational needs coordinator, the designated safeguarding lead and a range of staff and pupils 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.

Inspectors only inspected the education provision at this school.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and have an education, health and care plan. The school caters primarily for pupils who have social, emotional and mental

health needs.

The school does not use any alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change in staffing since the last inspection. Almost all teaching staff are new to role, including the school's senior leadership team. Almost all of the local governing board are new to their roles since the last inspection, and over half of the trustee board.

The inspection started on 28 April 2026. Inspectors returned on 9 June 2026 to gather additional evidence in line with Ofsted inspections and visits: Deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence policy.

Inspectors were aware during this inspection of a serious incident that had occurred since the previous inspection. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' evaluations.

Headteacher: Robert Newton

Lead inspector:

Sue Dymond, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Steve Bentham, His Majesty's Inspector

Orienne Langley-Sadler, Ofsted Inspector

Sally Timmons, His Majesty's 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 28 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

118

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.

School capacity

120

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.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

71.43%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

100.00%

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.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

What does this mean?

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

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).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

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
2023 leavers (revised)	71%
2022 leavers (revised)	60%
2021 leavers (revised)	70%

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
2024/25 (3 term)	14.0%

Year	This school
2023/24 (3 term)	16.4%
2022/23 (3 term)	21.6%

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school
2024/25 (3 term)	46.0%
2023/24 (3 term)	52.4%
2022/23 (3 term)	53.0%

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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