

Park House School

Address: 277, Cheddon Road, Taunton, Somerset, TA2 7AX

Unique reference number (URN): 145308

Inspection report: 3 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.
- Insufficient evidence: Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Exceptional ●

Attendance and behaviour

Exceptional ●

The school has an extremely positive impact on pupils' attendance. In some cases, this is transformative. Pupils who have not attended school for a long time, or who have had a poor experience of education previously, often attend frequently and do not want to miss a session. Through its meticulous approach to inclusion, the school has created a strong sense of belonging. Pupils feel safe and cared for. For pupils who struggle to attend as often as they should, staff never give up, visiting these pupils every day at home, if needed.

Prior to attending this school, pupils have often struggled to manage their behaviour. Leaders have a deep understanding of the reasons behind these behaviours. They provide staff with extensive training in how best to support pupils. Staff are excellent role models. They build enduring and trusting relationships with pupils. Over time, pupils develop much more positive attitudes towards school than was the case previously. When pupils still struggle to regulate their behaviour, staff use their expertise skilfully to help pupils settle. As a result of this positive work, the number of serious incidents, including incidents of violence or discrimination, decline markedly for the vast majority of pupils. Leaders are quick to spot if a pupil's behaviour begins to change. They intervene quickly to make sure that pupils benefit from the most suitable provision.

Inclusion

Exceptional ●

The proprietor and leaders have developed a school that is remarkably inclusive. Highly vulnerable pupils benefit from exceptional support, often when they have few other options for education available to them.

Strong school systems identify each pupil's needs accurately. This includes a detailed evaluation of pupils' social, emotional and mental health, as well as gaps in their learning. Over time, staff help pupils overcome significant barriers to learning. A flexible and innovative approach means that pupils study a curriculum that is appropriately ambitious. Leaders provide extensive professional development, so that highly skilled staff have the expertise necessary to deliver this effectively.

Each pupil builds strong and trusting relationships with the staff who work with them. This helps pupils to feel safe and ready to learn. A choice of learning spaces allows pupils to study in an environment that is appropriate for them.

A considerable strength is the school's work with external partners, and parents and carers. Leaders ensure that partners contribute fully to reviews of pupils' education, health and care plans and, for children under the care of the local authority, their personal education plans. These partners understand pupils' needs very well, so pupils can learn skills such as animal care or trade skills. The school monitors the progress of each pupil systematically and rigorously. Leaders adapt the provision skilfully, when needed. Because of the exceptional nature of the school's work, many pupils' future life chances are improved significantly.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils often make very positive progress from low starting points. When they arrive at the school, many have significant gaps in their learning. They often lack the confidence and resilience to overcome their difficulties. However, the school's effective work closes these gaps quickly, particularly in reading and mathematics. For example, pupils who struggle to read benefit from swift support. Staff help pupils to find books that spark their interest. As a result, some pupils become avid readers.

Pupils' successes are marked by their very positive progress, both personally and academically. Over time, significant improvements in pupils' engagement with school provide the right foundation for academic success. Those pupils who are able to do so achieve qualifications in functional skills. They work through different levels at a pace that is right for them. Many others achieve awards in areas such as art, cooking, animal care and life skills. For many pupils, these academic achievements are only possible due to the tailored support for their social, emotional and mental health. Put together, pupils make impressive progress and are prepared very well for life beyond school.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

The proprietor has a clear vision for the school, which is shared by leaders and staff at all levels. As a result, leaders and staff are united in their commitment to the pupils in their care. They strive to provide pupils with the right support, particularly when pupils face challenges. The proprietor provides relevant leadership, and expertise in safeguarding and school improvement. They support leaders to ensure that all the independent school standards and the statutory duties are met consistently and securely over time. Staff benefit from an extensive professional learning offer, including in attachment and trauma. This means they are able to support pupils very effectively.

Leaders have a detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. For example, they have identified the need to promote independent learning for some pupils. Leaders recognise when staff do not have the subject expertise necessary to teach some areas of the curriculum, and commission this externally, when needed.

Staff consistently report that leaders give careful consideration to their workload and wellbeing. As a result, staff turnover is low. This means that pupils build strong and sustained relationships with trusted adults, enabling them to thrive.

Leaders and those responsible for governance are relentless in their determination to secure the best possible outcomes for pupils. Pupils are at the centre of all decision-making. Leaders and those responsible for governance work tenaciously with the local authority and the virtual school, and with parents and carers, to ensure that pupils are successful. The proprietor has ensured, over time, that the independent school standards are met.

The school prioritises pupils' social and emotional development. Most pupils learn individually with one or two adults. However, when pupils are ready, staff facilitate opportunities to promote cooperation and conflict resolution. For example, pupils play games in small groups and learn to cook together.

The personal, social and health education curriculum is planned carefully. The school ensures that pupils learn about important issues such as healthy relationships, consent, personal safety and the rule of law. As with other aspects of the curriculum, staff are innovative in how they teach this. They know that some of these topics will be challenging or hard for pupils to understand. Staff take every opportunity to discuss these issues with pupils, teaching them to empathise and accept different viewpoints.

Pupils' timetables are highly personalised to meet their individual needs. Opportunities for pupils' broader development are integrated into more formal learning. For example, pupils who struggle at the start of the week learn subjects they enjoy most on a Monday morning. Many pupils have helped to build the school's forest shelter and outdoor kitchen. They learn to use tools safely and develop their carpentry skills. Their work contributes positively to the school community.

A number of pupils have completed The Duke of Edinburgh's Award successfully. As part of this, they take part in community projects such as litter picking, helping pupils to understand the importance of taking care of their local green spaces. When necessary, the school makes reasonable adjustments so that pupils can complete the award successfully.

The oldest pupils receive extensive support to prepare them for further education or training, including work experience, when appropriate.

Each week, leaders deliver a livestreamed assembly to pupils and staff across the school's different sites. During this time, the school community celebrates pupils' achievements, cultivating a sense of belonging and pride.

Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is broad and ambitious, covering a wide range of appropriate subjects. The school has improved the quality of its core curriculum in English and mathematics. These subjects are planned carefully so that pupils build their knowledge in a logical sequence.

Staff work together closely to share resources and develop their subject expertise. They are adept at finding innovative ways to engage pupils who may be reluctant to learn or who have gaps in their learning. For example, when teaching 3D shapes in mathematics, pupils take pictures of real-life examples and use them to apply their learning. Staff assess pupils' knowledge carefully to identify any topics that need to be revisited.

Pupils enjoy reading often. Staff make sure that pupils who need support to improve their reading skills get the right help, including learning phonics. Leaders know that many pupils lack confidence and fluency with writing. While work has started to address this, this work is not consistently effective. Sometimes, staff miss opportunities to develop pupils' writing fluency and transcription skills. They often prioritise pupils' wellbeing and positive engagement ahead of writing, despite pupils finding this part of the curriculum challenging because they have missed a lot of school.

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

Attending Park House School is life-changing for many pupils. Pupils who go to this school have often had a poor experience of education previously. Many have had extended periods out of school completely, often in the care of the local authority. When pupils start at Park House, staff take the time, and great care, to understand each pupil's strengths and difficulties. They use this information to design a curriculum that is personalised to each pupil's needs, both academically and emotionally. Highly bespoke packages of education and pastoral care include access to a range of sports, art, and personal, social and health education. This approach helps many pupils to gain a positive view of education. This is often reflected in their high rates of attendance.

The school identifies gaps in pupils' knowledge of reading, mathematics and spoken language quickly. Skilled staff deliver curriculums in these subjects that are designed precisely to match pupils' individual needs. As a result, pupils often make significant progress from their starting points in these areas. While some pupils learn to read for the first time, others discuss important issues such as how to keep themselves safe or complete project work about space or ancient civilisations.

Pupils' changing needs are met closely thanks to leaders' tenacious work to review and adapt the provision. The school uses different sites and external partners appropriately to support and enrich pupils' experiences. For example, some older pupils learn practical skills in plastering, woodwork and welding at an alternative provision. Pupils are well prepared for life after school. For instance, many enjoy budgeting and shopping for ingredients, before learning how to prepare meals safely and independently.

Pupils feel safe when they are at school. They know they have trusted adults who will help them to manage their behaviour when they find it difficult. Many pupils thrive thanks to the school's innovative and relentless work.

Next steps

- Leaders must ensure that there is a clear strategy for teaching writing, and that staff have the confidence and professional expertise to teach accurate transcription and improve pupils' writing fluency.
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About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

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 and other leaders in the school, as well as members of the proprietor body, including the chair.

The proprietor body is Five Rivers Childcare Ltd.

The fees currently charged are £76,596 to £92,664.

The school's email address is Sally.Pitkin@five-rivers.org.

Inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

Park House School is a specialist provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have education, health and care plans. Their placements are funded by several different local authorities.

The school uses 10 unregistered alternative provisions.

As well as the school's main site, the school operates from 2 additional permanent sites: Conquest Centre, Conquest Farm, Norton Fitzwarren TA2 6PN and The Nurture Shed, Middlezoy TA7 0PQ. In addition, the school makes use of learning venues in pupils' local communities. This is part of the social enterprise focus of the company that runs the school.

Headteacher: Sally Pitkin

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

1. Quality of education provided

Standards met

All standards have been met.

2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information

Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Standards met

All standards have been met.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:

Victoria Griffin, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Stephen Lee, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 3 February 2026

Total pupils

School capacity

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

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

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.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

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