

Bristol Free School

Address: Concorde Drive, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, Bristol, BS10 6NJ

Unique reference number (URN): 136822

Inspection report: 31 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 ●

The school is rightly proud of its published outcomes in national tests and examinations, which have been positive and sustained over a number of years, both at key stage 4 and key stage 5. Many pupils achieve highly, including those who are disadvantaged, and many make excellent progress from their starting points. Where outcomes are not above or significantly above the national average, for example in a very few areas for disadvantaged pupils, leaders have taken appropriate action to address this. For example, they have reviewed the modern foreign languages curriculum.

Across the school, pupils mostly produce high-quality work. In some areas, pupils' work is particularly impressive, including in the sixth form. Pupils talk with confidence and interest about their learning, using subject-specific vocabulary and making links with prior learning. Pupils not only recall what they have learned, but why they have learned it. Overall, they are very well prepared for their next steps.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Pupils attend well because they feel a deep sense of belonging. Overall attendance is above the national average and the number of pupils who are frequently absent is below. Leaders have a detailed understanding of individuals and groups of pupils who attend less well. They work effectively with pupils and their families to understand the barriers they face. This has had a positive impact for many pupils, including those with mental health challenges. The attendance of students in the sixth form is very high.

Leaders and staff have high expectations for all pupils' conduct. Pupils behave exceptionally well and learning is rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. During social times, pupils regulate their own behaviour, so the school feels calm and respectful. Bullying is very rare and leaders address any incidents of discriminatory language robustly. Staff understand the clear behaviour policy and follow this consistently, so pupils feel it is fair. The small number of pupils who do not meet the school's high expectations are well supported. Leaders have responded positively to the increased number of pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, adapting provision to meet these pupils' needs and to reduce the number of repeat sanctions.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders, governors and staff are united in their vision to ensure that all pupils benefit fully from the wide range of opportunities available and achieve highly. Staff know every pupil well. Leaders are tenacious and thorough when identifying pupils' needs. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Leaders have adapted provision in response to increasing needs. They are highly responsive, working with and seeking support from external agencies when required.

Leaders commission alternative learning provision appropriately. They ensure this always supports pupils' learning and wellbeing. Staff have received appropriate training. They are

provided with a wealth of information about how to support pupils with SEND and others who are disadvantaged. Leaders monitor this provision carefully and are relentless in ensuring that it continues to be strengthened.

Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively. For example, it supports sixth-form students by providing IT equipment. It heavily subsidises the cost of participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils in the care of the local authority are well cared for at school. Leaders work with the local authority to ensure these pupils achieve well and are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders and governors are united in their vision to put disadvantaged pupils at the heart of decision making, while maintaining high standards for all. Governors are well informed. They challenge leaders robustly when changes are made. Decisions are always made in the best interests of pupils. Governors understand their statutory duties in relation to safeguarding and other aspects of the school. For example, they have a secure oversight of how additional funding is spent to promote the learning and experiences of pupils entitled to the pupil premium grant. The trust effectively supports governors and leaders in the school, providing ongoing subject expertise, advice and support.

Leaders rigorously evaluate the school's strengths and areas for development, so they are able to adapt provision and respond appropriately. For example, they have strengthened provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and supported more disadvantaged pupils into the sixth form.

There is an extensive programme of professional learning. Staff, including those in the early stages of their careers, value working together across subjects to develop and improve their teaching. Leaders support and facilitate additional professional development opportunities, including visits to other schools to learn from other professionals. The vast majority of staff feel that their workload and wellbeing are carefully considered. They are proud to work at the school.

Leaders engage successfully with parents and carers, who are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Parents value leaders' commitment to providing a wide range of experiences, alongside ensuring pupils achieve well and are well prepared for their next steps.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

The programme to support pupils' character and wider development is impressive. All pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities within and beyond the curriculum. Pupils enjoy discussing and debating ideas in sessions about current affairs, and during their personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons. Pupils develop an understanding of the fundamental British values and increase their cultural awareness, expressing informed opinions and voting weekly on different themes, including international conflicts, the United Kingdom's parliamentary system and the Equality Act. In PSHE, over time, pupils develop increasingly detailed knowledge of important issues such as consent, healthy relationships

and different kinds of families. They understand how to keep themselves safe both on- and offline. This programme ensures that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Extra-curricular provision is extensive, including a variety of sports clubs and teams, residential trips, an annual school production and regular charity fundraising events. Sixth-form students are excellent role models for younger pupils, taking on leadership roles and acting as reading buddies, for example. Leaders monitor participation carefully to ensure all groups of pupils benefit. Notably, very high numbers of pupils complete the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, including disadvantaged pupils.

The school's careers information, advice and guidance programme is a particular strength. Each week, pupils across all key stages attend talks from a range of employers. Older pupils are well prepared for the world of work, through activities such as writing mock job applications and participating in mock interviews. Students in the sixth form take part in programmes, including some delivered by universities, that inspire them and prepare them well for higher education and apprenticeships. As with all aspects of the school's work, staff actively remove or reduce barriers to these opportunities for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Post 16 provision

Strong standard 

The sixth form has grown considerably over time as a result of its positive reputation in the community. Students value the wide range of qualifications offered. The curriculum is ambitious and matched to students' needs and interests. Leaders are highly reflective and have refined this over time, offering new subjects and qualifications when appropriate. Leaders have a precise understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the sixth form. They relentlessly pursue excellence.

The quality of teaching is more consistently effective than across the rest of the school. Students achieve highly. The number of students reaching top grades in national examinations is above average. Overall, students make excellent progress from their starting points, including those who are disadvantaged. Over time, the number of disadvantaged students and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has increased. With support, some of these students have won places at prestigious universities and other highly aspirational destinations. The quality of careers information, advice and guidance is high. Students are regularly engaged in activities and programmes that support their applications and prepare them well for their next steps.

The academic curriculum is complemented by an extensive personal, social, health and economic education curriculum. Students participate in various volunteering, mentoring, and leadership opportunities.

Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is broad and ambitious for all pupils. Each subject has been carefully planned to ensure that pupils develop and deepen their knowledge and skills across all 3 key stages. Staff benefit from a range of professional learning opportunities which enable them to develop their subject and teaching expertise.

Leaders have a detailed understanding of the quality of teaching in the school. They use this to drive improvements. Typically, pupils learn effectively. Teachers break down curriculum content appropriately, provide clear explanations and use questioning to deepen pupils' knowledge. Most of the time, they check pupils have understood before moving on. However, sometimes teaching is less effective. When this is the case, teachers do not use the information they have to adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' needs, including those who are disadvantaged. In the few areas where teaching is weaker, the quality of pupils' work is more uneven and the depth of their understanding more limited.

Pupils who have fallen behind in reading, writing and mathematics receive additional support. Reading is prioritised for all pupils, although work is rightly underway to strengthen this provision further. Work to promote high-quality talk and develop pupils' vocabulary is typically very effective, and a particular strength.

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

This is a highly ambitious and inclusive school. Pupils thrive here. Many pupils describe the strong sense of community and say that they feel proud to attend the school. Pupils feel safe, known and valued. They have positive relationships with staff and know that staff will help them if they have any worries or concerns. Bullying is very rare. When it does happen, it is dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils behave well and learning is rarely disrupted. They are respectful of one another and of their differences. As a result of all of this, pupils' attendance is high.

Pupils benefit from a broad and ambitious curriculum, which is typically taught effectively. This is a particular strength in the sixth form. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, enjoy learning. Many pupils achieve very well, making excellent progress from their starting points. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps, not only academically, but also as a result of the high-quality careers information advice and guidance they receive. This includes regular opportunities to hear from a wide range of employers.

The school develops pupils' confidence and independence through an extensive wider offer. This involves a huge variety of clubs, trips, competitions and charity events that extend pupils' talents and offer them experiences they would not otherwise have. Opportunities for rich discussion abound and leaders ensure that pupils develop an understanding of the world around them through reading and debate.

If pupils face any barriers to their learning or wellbeing, leaders and staff proactively identify and remove these. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils receive support that is precisely tailored to meet their needs. These pupils have full access to the school's wider offer.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers understand and consistently use identified strategies to support disadvantaged pupils in the classroom, so that these pupils learn as effectively as possible and their achievement continues to improve.
 - Leaders should continue to strengthen the reading programme, ensuring that all pupils with gaps in reading knowledge receive appropriate support that is precisely matched to their needs.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Russell Education 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), Colin Mackinlay, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Karen Lynch.

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 (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinators and groups of staff during the inspection. The lead inspector met with the CEO and members of the local governing board.

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 school makes use of 2 unregistered alternative provisions and 4 registered alternative provisions.

Headteacher: Susan King

Lead inspector:

Victoria Griffin, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Teresa Hill, Ofsted Inspector

Nic Blunsum, Ofsted Inspector

Sandy Hayes, Ofsted Inspector

Andrew Raistrick, 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 31 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,292

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

1,090

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)

14.48%

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

2.71%

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

16.64%

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

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 (revised)	66.3%	45.4%	Above
2023/24 (final)	66.3%	45.9%	Above
2022/23 (final)	65.3%	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)	56.3	46.0	Above
2023/24 (final)	58.0	45.9	Above
2022/23 (final)	57.8	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)	0.33	-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 (revised)	25.0%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	32.3%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	41.2%	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 (revised)	38.2	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	45.2	34.6	Above
2022/23 (final)	44.7	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)	-0.17	-0.57	Above
2022/23 (final)	-0.41	-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)	25.0%	53.1%	-28.1 pp
2023/24 (final)	32.3%	53.1%	-20.9 pp
2022/23 (final)	41.2%	52.4%	-11.3 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)	38.2	50.4	-12.2
2023/24 (final)	45.2	50.0	-4.8
2022/23 (final)	44.7	50.3	-5.6

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)	-0.17	0.16	-0.33
2022/23 (final)	-0.41	0.17	-0.57

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)	97%	91%	Above
2022 leavers (revised)	95%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	94%	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)	39.46	34.99	Above
2023/24 (final)	37.21	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	34.58	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)	0.2	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	0.4	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 (2 term)	5.8%	8.1%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	6.8%	8.9%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.7%	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)	11.5%	21.9%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	18.3%	25.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	15.8%	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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