

Colchester Royal Grammar School

Address: Lexden Road, Colchester, CO3 3ND

Unique reference number (URN): 149899

Inspection report: 14 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.

Exceptional ●

Achievement

Exceptional ●

Pupils develop deep and cumulative knowledge across the curriculum. They achieve extremely well. Pupils use subject-specific vocabulary fluently in both writing and discussion, demonstrating excellent understanding of subject content. Pupils are confident, articulate and intellectually curious, with secure foundations that support high achievement across all subjects.

Outcomes at key stage 4 are exceptionally strong, with pupils achieving attainment outcomes and progress scores that are consistently well above national averages. Post-16 achievement is similarly commendable.

Inclusive practice is embedded across the school rather than delivered through bolt-on intervention. This ensures equity without lowering expectations. Early identification, close monitoring and targeted academic and pastoral support ensure that barriers to learning are addressed swiftly and effectively. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress that matches or exceeds that of their peers. This demonstrates leaders' commitment to transform outcomes for pupils who may struggle to succeed.

Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps. This reflects leaders' ambition and their commitment to defining achievement beyond examination outcomes. Every pupil receives personalised guidance and structured support to make informed and ambitious choices.

Curriculum and teaching

Exceptional ●

Leaders provide clear and highly effective strategic leadership of the curriculum and teaching. This ensures that curriculum intent, subject design and classroom practice are closely aligned. Leaders work together to review, refine and improve provision, informed by research and supported by effective links with external experts.

The curriculum is thoughtfully designed and ambitious. Knowledge is tightly sequenced within and across subjects, enabling pupils to build, retain and apply learning over time. Teachers demonstrate a shared and sophisticated understanding of curriculum intent, with clear rationale for what is taught and when. Wider themes, including personal development, are meaningfully threaded through the curriculum. This is visible in pupils' thinking, discussion and work. By design, the curriculum goes beyond examination success and prepares pupils successfully for future study, employment and life beyond school.

Teaching is consistently highly effective and delivered by subject specialists. Teachers use their expertise to make deliberate teaching decisions that help pupils develop a deep understanding. Assessment is used well to shape teaching, address misconceptions early and ensure that learning builds steadily. Classrooms are calm and purposeful, allowing pupils to engage confidently with challenging ideas.

Where pupils face barriers to learning, support is immediate and highly effective. As a result, pupils take part fully and confidently, and the quality of their work remains consistent.

Leadership and governance

Exceptional 

Strategic leadership is a defining and distinctive strength. Leaders show deep understanding of the school and a keen awareness of its strengths and priorities. Leaders have an uncompromising focus on improvement, firmly rooted in pupils' best interests. Safeguarding and pastoral systems have been transformed and are now highly effective, coherent and consistently applied. Inclusion is central to leaders' thinking, with a positive philosophy that shapes systems, classroom practice and decision-making.

Leaders demonstrate honesty and precision in evaluating their work and identify aspects they wish to refine further. Leaders are clear that improvement is continuous and remain driven by the belief that their work is never complete.

Governance is highly effective and makes a tangible contribution to sustained improvement. Both the trust and governors work closely with leaders to monitor priorities, evaluate impact and ensure that statutory responsibilities are met. This close strategic partnership secures consistently high standards, safeguards pupils effectively and supports leaders' long-term vision.

Leaders take staff wellbeing seriously. High expectations are balanced with thoughtful systems, shared responsibility and autonomy. Early career teachers speak extremely positively about the support they receive. Professional learning is high quality, purposeful and sustained, fostering a culture of reflection and refinement. This investment in expertise results in excellent standards of teaching.

Engagement with parents and carers, professionals and the wider community is highly effective. Parents have overwhelming confidence in the school, with many describing it as inclusive, nurturing and transformative.

Post 16 provision

Exceptional 

Post-16 leadership is highly effective, strategic and inclusive. This secures sustained excellence at scale. Transition into Year 12 is meticulously planned so students arrive confident, settled and academically prepared. Particular attention is given to welcoming and supporting girls joining the sixth form. They feel respected and valued. Leaders make deliberate decisions to ensure that the provision meets the needs of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Any barriers are swiftly removed.

The curriculum is unapologetically academic and intellectually demanding. Teaching is consistently of a very high standard, characterised by discussion-rich lessons. Students debate ideas fluently and justify viewpoints, and their work demonstrates depth of understanding and sophisticated thinking.

Academic outcomes are significantly above national averages. A-level attainment is especially high, with many students successfully completing 4 A levels. Outcomes for

disadvantaged students are excellent, and many progress to highly prestigious destinations. Students feel overwhelmingly supported as they move through their studies.

Preparation for next steps is exceptionally well developed. All students receive personalised careers guidance, structured follow up and access to alumni mentoring. This supports thoughtful and aspirational progression routes. Sixth-form students play a central role in the wider school community as mentors, leaders and role models. The inclusive culture and sense of belonging have a significant impact, particularly for the most vulnerable students, and underpin the quality of the post-16 provision.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Overall attendance at the school is consistently above the national average. Attendance for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is similarly positive. Leaders identify trends, pressure points and individual pupils who may be at risk of poor attendance. They remove barriers through targeted support and close communication with families, ensuring that pupils remain engaged with learning during periods of absence.

Behaviour across the school is excellent. Leaders have established a positive environment of care and high expectations where pupils learn well. Pupils are focused, motivated and independent in their learning. They show curiosity, resilience and collaboration rather than simple compliance. Clear routines are embedded throughout the day. Pupils are well mannered, respectful and take responsibility for their own conduct. Staff apply behaviour systems consistently and fairly, ensuring that expectations are well understood. Pupils rarely report bullying and express confidence in reporting concerns. Discrimination, harassment, abuse or violence are not tolerated. Leaders are quick to act if concerns arise. They promote a clear culture of shared responsibility, where pupils understand that there are no bystanders. Inclusive approaches to behaviour ensure that pupils with SEND are well supported, with appropriate adjustments made as necessary.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Inclusion is central to the school's ethos and practice. Leaders identify pupils who face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing at an early stage and put consistently effective support in place. They work closely with families and external agencies when needed, helping pupils to keep up with learning during absence and to return smoothly to school. As a result, these pupils participate fully and confidently in their learning and wider school life.

Support for disadvantaged pupils is highly effective and precisely targeted. Leaders use pupil premium funding intelligently to remove barriers to learning, wellbeing and participation. Leaders ensure that support is applied consistently across subjects and phases, rather than relying on isolated interventions. Classroom practice reflects this approach. Equitable access to enrichment, pupil leadership and wider school experiences is firmly embedded, ensuring that all pupils benefit from the same opportunities.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well developed and carefully targeted. In particular, leaders give close attention to pupils with autism, anxiety or experiences of trauma, drawing effectively on specialist expertise and partnership working. Leaders take a proactive and inclusive approach to supporting pupils with additional or emerging needs. This includes those experiencing mental health challenges, pupils new to the school or those requiring short-term support.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Personal development and wellbeing are embedded across the school's culture, curriculum and daily practice. Leaders demonstrate a clear and consistent commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Pupils speak with maturity, respect and confidence about difference. Sixth-form students play an active role in leading groups such as 'FemSoc' and 'LGBT+ Soc', which contribute positively to school life. Their leadership and commitment help to ensure that the school community feels valued, respected and safe.

Assemblies, tutor time and the curriculum explicitly link the school's core values to real-world role models and lived experiences. This strengthens pupils' sense of purpose, belonging and moral responsibility. Pupils develop a secure and confident understanding of fundamental British values. They articulate concepts such as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect with clarity. Pupils apply these ideas thoughtfully in discussion and daily school life. Pupils show a depth of knowledge about relationships, consent and healthy choices. Teaching equips pupils with the knowledge and confidence to navigate social situations safely and responsibly, including online and offline risks.

Personal development and wellbeing are inclusive by design and meet the needs of all pupils. Opportunities beyond the classroom are extensive and open to all. Pupils engage meaningfully in enrichment activities, leadership roles and volunteering opportunities. Leaders ensure that pupils who may be less confident or face additional barriers are supported to take part fully. The school offers a range of international trips and participation in many national competitions. All pupils have the opportunity to take part. This has a significant impact on pupils' cultural development and broadens their horizons far beyond the classroom.

Pastoral support is a notable strength. Pupils speak highly of trusted relationships with staff and explain that they feel safe, listened to and well supported. Systems are well coordinated and responsive, enabling staff to identify concerns early and provide timely support.

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

At Colchester Royal Grammar School, excellence is experienced every day, not just talked about. Pupils feel inspired, supported and valued as part of a community. The school's values, such as compassion and generosity, shine through the pupils. They form caring relationships and shared responsibility for one another's wellbeing and success.

Learning is intellectually ambitious, rich and carefully crafted. Teachers are experts and guide pupils with confidence and precision. As a result, pupils develop deep understanding,

speaking with confidence using sophisticated subject language and produce high-quality work. Achievement here is not about pressure or narrow outcomes. Pupils feel stretched, supported and well prepared for whatever comes next.

Relationships between pupils and staff are warm, trusting and professional. This creates an environment where pupils feel valued and listened to. The school offers a wealth of broader experiences that extend far beyond academics. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about opportunities that help them grow in confidence, leadership and independence. Students in the sixth form play an important part in supporting younger pupils. They establish and lead many societies and assemblies and mentor pupils.

The school environment is calm, safe and purposeful. High standards of behaviour are the norm, rooted in mutual respect. Pupils are confident that any concerns are dealt with quickly and fairly. Pupils are safe, supported and able to approach trusted adults at any time. This secure foundation means pupils attend regularly. They relish the opportunities that are on offer here.

What truly distinguishes pupils' experience here is the sense of belonging that underpins everything. Pupils are known as individuals and treated with respect. Inclusion is woven seamlessly into teaching, enrichment and the school culture. Everyone participates fully and confidently, whether in lessons, leadership roles, clubs, trips or wider community activities. Being a pupil here means feeling challenged but cared for and ambitious but grounded. Pupils feel part of a community that brings out the very best in everyone.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure continued improvement to all areas of school work, particularly building on strong standards seen in attendance, inclusion and personal development.

About this inspection

This school is part of the Thinking Schools Academy Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Stuart Gardner, and is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gerard Newman.

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 members of the school's leadership, the chair of the trust, the CEO and the local governing body.

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:

Inspectors only inspected the education provision at this school.

The school currently makes use of no alternative provision.

Headmaster: John Russell

Lead inspector:

Louise Cooper, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Sarah Fowler, Ofsted Inspector

James Shapland, Ofsted Inspector

Likhon Muhammad, Ofsted Inspector

Teri-Leigh Jones, 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 14 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,059

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

777

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: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

6.57%

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

0.38%

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

7.27%

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

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).

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)	100.0%	45.4%	Above
2023/24 (final)	100.0%	45.9%	Above
2022/23		45.3%	

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)	82.1	46.0	Above
2023/24 (final)	83.4	45.9	Above
2022/23		46.3	

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)	1.09	-0.03	Above
2022/23		-0.03	

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)	100.0%	25.8%	Above
2023/24 (final)	S	25.8%	S
2022/23		25.2%	

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)	77.6	34.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	S	34.6	S
2022/23		35.0	

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		-0.57	

‘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 (revised)	100.0%	53.1%	46.9 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	53.1%	S
2022/23		52.4%	

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)	77.6	50.4	27.2
2023/24 (final)	S	50.0	S
2022/23		50.3	

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		0.17	

‘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.

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)	51.32	34.99	Above
2023/24 (final)	49.64	34.38	Above

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)	0.2	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)	3.9%	8.1%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	5.2%	8.9%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.5%	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)	7.9%	21.9%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	16.0%	25.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	26.9%	26.5%	Close to average

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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