

Darwen Aldridge Enterprise Studio

Address: Police Street, Darwen, Lancashire, BB3 1AF

Unique reference number (URN): 139924

Inspection report: 20 January 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

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Inclusive practices are firmly embedded throughout the school. Leaders have developed their transition arrangements to ensure that they have as much information as possible about pupils before they join the school. Central to the school's work on inclusion is getting to know and understand pupils and their families. This fosters a personalised approach. Leaders rigorously identify any barriers to learning that pupils may have, such as any special educational needs and/or disabilities that may previously have been undiagnosed. Staff are skilled in recognising and addressing barriers to pupils' wellbeing.

Leaders collaborate effectively with external agencies to deepen staff expertise and to ensure that the most appropriate strategies are employed to meet pupils' needs. They implement tailored support effectively and rigorously reflect on the impact of this support. Staff are flexible in their approach and adjust strategies when needed. As a result, pupils' needs are met.

Leaders use a small number of alternative provisions appropriately and maintain extensive oversight of pupils' experiences. Nearly half of the pupil population is disadvantaged. The school makes judicious use of the pupil premium funding to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are successful. For example, it is used to provide additional tutoring.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Typically, pupils achieve well. However, published key stage 4 outcomes do not meaningfully reflect this. Pupils join the school in Year 9. Many of these pupils arrive lacking the knowledge that they need to be successful. As a result, national examination data does not fully capture the progress pupils make from their starting points. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve outcomes close to national averages.

Across most subjects, pupils develop specialist knowledge that builds securely over time. Their work shows a deepening understanding of their chosen career pathways. Many arrive with gaps in their learning, which the school identifies and addresses quickly. The handwriting intervention, for example, has had clear impact, with pupils' books showing more legible and fluent script. Pupils who struggle with reading receive targeted support that helps them to catch up and access the wider curriculum. Nearly all pupils move successfully into education, employment or training.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

A significant number of pupils have had previous negative experiences of education. Many did not attend school regularly, or at all, before joining this one. Leaders work closely with

parents and carers and pupils to promote the importance of regular attendance. Staff use a range of creative strategies to support this. For example, morning wake-up calls have helped more pupils arrive at school on time. As a result, pupils' attendance has improved over time, and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced. Even so, some pupils still do not attend regularly enough.

Leaders have created a nurturing culture in the school. Routines are firmly embedded and shared expectations around behaviour are applied consistently by staff. When needed, staff make appropriate adjustments for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, helping them to regulate their behaviour. Staff build positive relationships with pupils. Consequently, pupils feel known and understood, and many report that this has helped them to improve their behaviour since joining the school. Pupils behave well and show more-positive attitudes to learning than they did previously. They are accepting of each other and treat their peers kindly. On the rare occasions when this is not the case, leaders address it swiftly.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed a unique curriculum. The creative, game design and care sector pathways are shaped carefully around pupils' starting points. Each pathway is logically sequenced so that pupils build the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their chosen employment sector. Many elements of the curriculum are delivered by industry experts. Preparation for the world of work, including first-hand experience in relevant industries, enables pupils to develop a deep body of knowledge within their chosen pathway. Leaders review the design and teaching of the curriculum and bring about improvements, when necessary.

In the main, teachers deliver the curriculum well. They choose activities closely linked to the aims of the curriculum. Teachers are highly skilled at adapting learning to help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Mostly, teachers carefully check what pupils know and can do. However, at times, these checks are not as effective as they could be. Occasionally, teachers move on to new learning before some pupils are ready. This hinders a small number of pupils from building knowledge securely and connecting new ideas with prior learning.

A high proportion of pupils join the school with gaps in their numeracy and reading knowledge. Leaders and staff prioritise filling these gaps. Effective programmes are in place to help pupils to develop this knowledge.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and governors share a moral purpose to provide an education that makes a tangible difference to pupils' lives. Many pupils have had negative or disrupted experiences of education before joining the school. Leaders are determined to help them to reconnect with learning and rebuild their confidence. This shared ambition underpins leaders' decisions and drives their commitment to carving out a positive future for every pupil.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that require further development. They use a range of information to evaluate the school's

effectiveness and to plan improvements. In a minority of areas, leaders are not as precise in identifying the strategies that will bring about the most rapid improvement. As a result, the pace of change in these areas is sometimes slower than leaders intend.

Trustees provide robust challenge and support. They hold leaders to account for the quality of education and ensure that the school maintains a strong focus on pupils' academic success alongside their emotional wellbeing.

Staff expertise is strengthened through a well-structured programme of professional development. Leaders model high standards of professionalism and create a culture in which staff feel respected and valued. Staff appreciate leaders' thoughtful approach to workload, including realistic deadlines.

Leaders invest time in building positive relationships with parents and carers. Parents speak highly of the care and support their children receive, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They recognise the difference the school makes to pupils' confidence, behaviour and engagement with learning.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The specialist nature of the school means that careers provision is woven through all aspects of its work. Pupils are exposed to experiences that equip them well for their next steps in education, training or employment. They engage with a range of local employers through their curriculum. For example, filmmakers visit the school and work with pupils to produce their own films. Pupils also visit a variety of workplaces, where they learn first hand about appropriate work-based behaviours. One-to-one careers guidance ensures that pupils are well informed and able to choose appropriately ambitious career paths.

Leaders have recently strengthened the personal development programme, including how relationships and sex education and health education is delivered. Staff have been equipped with the knowledge and skills to teach this confidently. As a result, pupils have a secure understanding of topics such as consent, healthy relationships and internet safety.

Pupils' wellbeing is prioritised. Excellent pastoral care helps pupils to thrive, and many acknowledge the positive difference the school has made to them. Leaders take effective action to raise pupils' aspirations. For example, all pupils visit a university, and leaders track pupils' engagement to ensure that they benefit from the opportunities available.

Pupils learn about how they can contribute to a democratic society. Artistic opportunities are plentiful and play a key role in this. Some pupils recently achieved success in a national art competition. Others won a competition to design a healthcare app. Pupils develop an understanding of active citizenship.

Leaders cultivate a community where pupils embrace individuality. Pupils are encouraged to debate thoughtfully and develop an understanding of the diverse make-up of society, including different faiths and religions. They enjoy trips to local attractions and residential visits, which broaden their appreciation of the world around them.

Leaders have recently implemented carefully considered changes to the qualifications on offer so that the post-16 curriculum is appropriately matched to students' needs. Students build on their previous learning and benefit from increased work-based learning opportunities. They have access to industry-standard equipment, which deepens their learning further. This is reflected in the high-quality work they produce. Students talk confidently about what they know and remember, and they connect new learning successfully with prior learning.

Nearly a quarter of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school reduces any barriers these students may face, enabling them to achieve well. Over time, attainment in national examinations has followed a positive trajectory and is now close to average. Students make steady progress from their starting points. Most move on to destinations that match their interests and aspirations. A minority do not sustain these placements, and leaders have begun work to understand and address the reasons for this.

Leaders curate opportunities that continue to prepare students for the world of employment. Students are confident and passionate about their chosen specialisms. They develop leadership skills and work towards the 'personal development' award by completing a range of enrichment activities.

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

Many pupils see this school as a fresh start. They quickly develop a sense of belonging and benefit from a highly nurturing environment where they gain the confidence to be themselves. Pupils spoke about the kindness shown to them by staff. In turn, they are respectful towards one another. As a result, incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils feel safe in school and trust that staff want the very best for them.

Staff quickly understand pupils' needs, including any barriers to learning or wellbeing. Pupils, including students in the post-16 provision 'D6', are well supported to achieve. Support is tailored carefully to meet individual needs. For example, pupils value spending time in the hub during social times or attending 'brew club', which provide safe spaces to talk and feel understood.

Staff reinforce the importance of attending school each day. Most pupils now attend more regularly than they did previously, although some pupils still do not attend as often as they should.

Pupils rise to the school's expectations for behaviour. They demonstrate the 'Aldridge attributes' of teamwork, creativity, problem-solving, risk-taking and passion. The specialised curriculum fuels pupils' interests and equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed next steps in education, employment or training. Students in the sixth form are workplace-ready. From their starting points, pupils make good progress through the curriculum.

Pupils learn how to take up their place in society. For example, a group of pupils visited Downing Street as part of a food poverty campaign. Pupils enjoy trips to museums and theatres, which broaden their cultural understanding and appreciation.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue their work to remove barriers to pupils attending school, ensuring that the number of pupils attending regularly continues to increase.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff use strategies to check what pupils know and can do consistently well so that any misconceptions can be addressed before learning moves on.
 - Leaders should ensure that priorities are identified consistently promptly so that any areas for improvement are acted upon swiftly and effectively.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Aldridge 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), Jane Fletcher, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Rupert Nichols.

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.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the principal, the executive principal, senior leaders and other staff, the CEO, and representatives of the trust board and local governing committee, including the chairs, 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.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

- The school is a studio school. This means that pupils join the school at age 13, with a focus on preparing pupils for their future careers by providing an integrated academic and professional education.
- The school makes use of 2 alternative provisions.
- The principal has been in post since 2023.

Principal: Miss Julie Green

Lead inspector:

Jenny Jones, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Aly Spencer, Ofsted Inspector

John Cowper, 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 20 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

264

Well below 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

300

Well 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)

47.06%

Well above 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

6.06%

Well above 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

29.92%

Well 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

Close to 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 (provisional)	27.5%	45.2%	Below
2023/24 (final)	21.7%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	25.0%	45.3%	Below

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 (provisional)	34.5	45.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	36.4	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	35.5	46.3	Below

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 (provisional)	20.5%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	14.8%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	20.8%	25.2%	Close to average

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 (provisional)	31.0	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	34.3	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	34.3	35.0	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 (provisional)	20.5%	52.8%	-32.3 pp
2023/24 (final)	14.8%	53.1%	-38.3 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	20.8%	52.4%	-31.6 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 (provisional)	31.0	50.3	-19.3
2023/24 (final)	34.3	50.0	-15.7
2022/23 (final)	34.3	50.3	-16.1

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)	88%	91%	Not available
2022 leavers (revised)	86%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers (revised)	87%	94%	Not available

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)	36.97	34.99	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	35.00	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	32.31	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)	0.2	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)	17.4%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	14.1%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	13.0%	9.0%	Above

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)	54.7%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	47.5%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	42.9%	26.5%	Above

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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