

Essa Academy

Address: Lever Edge Lane, Bolton, Greater Manchester, BL3 3HH

Unique reference number (URN): 135770

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 ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, typically achieve highly over time across a range of subjects, as reflected in national examinations. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils show that previous gaps in achievement are narrowing. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well from their varied starting points. This is a consequence of the highly effective support and guidance that they receive.

Across the curriculum, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, develop detailed knowledge. This is consistently evident in the high quality of pupils' work and their detailed responses in lessons. Pupils confidently draw on knowledge from previously learned content. As a result, their knowledge and skills develop progressively as they move through the school. Pupils make sustained progress through the curriculum. They are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils develop strong foundations in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. This enables them to access increasingly complex concepts as they move through the school. Pupils use subject-specific vocabulary with accuracy.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

High-quality teaching, support and a range of rewards contribute to pupils wanting to come to school. Attendance continues to improve and remains above the national average, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders are proactive in their approach to supporting pupils with their attendance. Robust systems enable leaders to support pupils and families when attendance needs to improve. Leaders respond swiftly to concerns and discuss each pupil on the vulnerable register regularly. This has contributed to improved attendance rates and a reduction in persistent absence.

Leaders have established a culture of high expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct where pupils flourish. Staff apply behaviour expectations and routines consistently and fairly. Pupils exhibit exceptionally positive behaviour both in lessons and during social times. In lessons, pupils listen carefully to each other and contribute thoughtfully. Pupils demonstrate strong commitment to their learning and seldom require reminders about expectations. Leaders have created a positive environment in which any bullying is addressed quickly.

Staff provide high levels of support for pupils who need help managing their behaviour, including seeking advice from external agencies. Suspensions are used appropriately. The school reintegrates pupils well, supporting them to improve their behaviour.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the effectiveness of the curriculum. They have made refinements to ensure that it is of a high quality across all subjects and key stages. Leaders ensure that teachers know precisely what to teach and when. Subject curriculums

clearly set out what pupils need to know, with learning ordered logically. This enables pupils to build their understanding effectively over time. Pupils have well-designed opportunities to revisit and deepen their learning.

Teachers appreciate the professional learning that they receive. They use their excellent subject knowledge to explain new content clearly and effectively. Teachers adapt lessons where needed. This enables all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with other barriers to learning, to engage successfully with the curriculum and to build securely on prior learning. Teachers check what pupils know and use this information to expertly shape subsequent teaching. They address misconceptions swiftly and use targeted questioning to deepen pupils' understanding further.

Reading is a high priority in the school. Highly trained staff swiftly identify and support pupils who are at the earlier stages of learning. This helps these pupils to catch up and enables them to develop their confidence and fluency in reading. Highly effective teaching of reading is firmly embedded across the school. Pupils develop their spoken and written vocabulary and increase their reading competency across all subjects.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have a very secure understanding of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), disadvantaged pupils and those known to social care. Leaders work effectively with parents, carers and external agencies to support these pupils. This collaborative approach results in well-considered strategies that help pupils, particularly those known to social care, to thrive both personally and academically.

The school has well-developed systems for the early identification of pupils' needs. Ongoing checks help ensure that support is put in place swiftly to remove barriers to learning. For example, leaders work closely with the virtual school to ensure that support can be adapted when pupils' needs change. This supports pupils' attendance in school. Staff receive high-quality training that enables them to make skilful adaptations to activities. This helps pupils with SEND to access the full curriculum alongside their peers.

Leaders ensure that support within the in-school provision is well targeted and purposeful. Pupils, including those who arrive at different times of the year, benefit highly from the bespoke support that they receive.

Additional funding is used effectively on priorities aligned with disadvantaged pupils' needs. The progress of these pupils, as well as their attendance and behaviour, is rigorously reviewed. The strategies used to support these pupils have a very positive impact on their rates of attendance and progress.

Alternative provision is only used when absolutely necessary. Leaders ensure that any pupils using alternative provision continue to make progress and remain safe.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders, together with governors and the trust, are ambitious for pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders

and governors rapidly and accurately identified aspects of the school's provision that needed improving when the school joined the trust in June 2024. They have an insightful understanding of the school's context and its priorities for improvement. Leaders at all levels make consistently purposeful contributions to school priorities. They ensure that actions are robustly reviewed to check that they have a positive impact.

Leaders make decisions that are in the best interests of pupils. This is demonstrated by highly effective support to address pupils' needs so that they are fully included in school life.

Governors are deeply committed to the school. They use their extensive experience to hold leaders to account and provide highly effective levels of support. Governors have a detailed knowledge of the school's work. They use this information to provide robust challenge. This ensures that the school continues to make rapid improvements.

Staff feel very well supported with their workload and wellbeing. They report that leaders listen and respond to feedback effectively. Staff appreciate that meaningful steps, such as the introduction of live marking, improved assessment schedules and streamlined planning resources, reduce unnecessary burdens on their workload. Staff, including early career teachers, benefit from high-quality, research-informed professional learning that contributes to improvements in teaching. Staff speak positively about leaders' commitment to their growth. They appreciate that the support they receive enables them to meet the needs of pupils with a wide range of abilities.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders provide an ambitious programme for personal development that equips pupils with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive when they leave the school. The 'LIFE' curriculum is regularly reviewed and adapted to help pupils to stay safe in the community. Pupils gain a firm understanding of a range of topics. For example, they learn how to stay safe online and about healthy relationships.

Pupils develop a detailed understanding of fundamental British values. For example, they learn about democracy through the election of the president and vice president of the school council. Pupils learn about diversity and to appreciate different religions and beliefs. They develop thoughtful viewpoints. This enables them to interact respectfully with their peers and staff. Pupils receive timely pastoral support. This contributes to them feeling safe, valued and confident to seek help from trusted adults when needed. Pupils develop into reflective individuals who behave with integrity.

Leaders ensure that the personal development programme is tailored to removing barriers for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This gives them access to a wide range of opportunities that develop their talents and interests. These include taking part in the annual school production, outdoor activities, debating activities and the orchestra. This results in pupils becoming confident and resilient.

Pupils receive highly effective careers advice and guidance that helps them to make informed choices about their next steps. Leaders ensure that support for pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils is prioritised. This enables them to fully participate in careers activities and raises their aspirations. The school engages well with a wide array of employers and colleges in the local area through careers fairs, visits to employers and

virtual work experience opportunities. As a result, a range of professionals and local employers visit the school to provide insights into the world of work. Most pupils move on to appropriate destinations in education, employment or training.

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

The school provides a caring and supportive environment. Improving pupils' life chances is at the heart of everyone's work. Staff work effectively to remove barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieve highly in national examinations. They are very well supported and benefit from high-quality careers advice. Pupils leave school well prepared for their next steps.

The school celebrates and embraces diversity within the school community. This gives pupils a strong sense of belonging. Pupils are proud to speak about their school. They feel safe and look after one another. Pupils' attendance is high. They love coming to school. Pupils demonstrate excellent behaviour. The school is a calm and orderly place where pupils move around the building purposefully and with maturity.

Pupils have extremely positive relationships with their teachers. They are polite and courteous. Bullying is uncommon. On the rare occasions it occurs, pupils are confident that staff will resolve it quickly. Pupils are eager to interact with staff, contributing to a culture of mutual support. They enjoy learning and are highly motivated. They engage respectfully, contribute positively to discussions and show well-developed moral and social awareness.

Pupils enjoy a wealth of trips and visits, including to theatres, museums and football stadiums. They connect with their community by, for example, visiting the mayor's office and fundraising for local charities. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with SEND, benefit from activities that enrich their learning, such as learning to play a musical instrument. They enjoy a wealth of sports and activities, including participation in the National Citizenship Service, the Combined Cadet Force and being school councillors. These activities are very effective in developing pupils' personal, social and leadership skills. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should sustain the effectiveness of their work in all areas. They should seek continued improvement, overcoming barriers and challenges, in order to drive a transformational impact for all pupils.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Northern 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 Wilson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mark Sanders.

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 principal, trust leaders, other senior leaders in the school and staff. The lead inspector spoke with the CEO, deputy CEO and the vice chair of the trust board. He also spoke with a representative of the local authority. An inspector spoke with a representative of the alternative provider that the school uses.

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 one registered alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The school became part of the Northern Education Trust in June 2024. The principal joined the school in 2025.

Principal: Melanie Flynn

Lead inspector:

Ahmed Marikar, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Timothy Gartside, Ofsted Inspector

Dympna Woods, Ofsted Inspector

Sally Kenyon, Ofsted Inspector

Alexia Barnes Gargrave, 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

1,077

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

990

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: 1,152

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

46.80%

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

2.60%

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

13.28%

Close to 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 (provisional)	54.0%	45.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	40.2%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	41.2%	45.3%	Close to average

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)	52.9	45.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	47.1	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	45.7	46.3	Close to average

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)	0.73	-0.03	Above
2022/23 (final)	0.25	-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 (provisional)	48.8%	25.6%	Above
2023/24 (final)	26.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	32.9%	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)	50.5	34.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	41.7	34.6	Above
2022/23 (final)	41.4	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)	0.56	-0.57	Above
2022/23 (final)	-0.07	-0.57	Above

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)	48.8%	52.8%	-4.0 pp
2023/24 (final)	26.7%	53.1%	-26.5 pp
2022/23 (final)	32.9%	52.4%	-19.5 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)	50.5	50.3	0.3
2023/24 (final)	41.7	50.0	-8.3
2022/23 (final)	41.4	50.3	-8.9

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)	0.56	0.16	0.40
2022/23 (final)	-0.07	0.17	-0.24

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)	92%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	89%	93%	Below
2021 leavers (revised)	89%	94%	Below

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)	6.6%	8.1%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	5.4%	8.9%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	5.4%	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)	19.3%	21.9%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	15.2%	25.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	14.5%	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.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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