

Hilbre High School

Address: Frankby Road, West Kirby, Wirral, Merseyside, CH48 6EQ

Unique reference number (URN): 138355

Inspection report: 24 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.

Expected standard

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders identify pupils' needs quickly and accurately. They seek specialist advice, when appropriate, and work well with the local authority, parents and carers.

Leaders review pupils' progress systematically. They employ a wide range of strategies to support pupils with their wellbeing and to reduce barriers to learning. For example, recent provision of support for pupils with emotional or medical barriers, including those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is planned well. This is beginning to improve some pupils' attendance and behaviour.

Staff receive training to identify, support and respond to pupils' changing or emerging needs. Staff's expertise to adapt their teaching effectively is developing. Sometimes, pupils do not receive timely or precise support to overcome gaps in their learning.

The school's specially resourced provision makes sure that pupils with SEND receive teaching that supports their academic progress and social inclusion. This includes support for developing pupils' fine motor skills, social communication and functional skills, such as reading.

Leaders use additional funding well to reduce barriers for disadvantaged pupils. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is beginning to improve as a result of these strategies.

Leaders maintain careful oversight of pupils, who attend alternative provision. This ensures that they are kept safe and supported to learn an appropriate curriculum.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Over time, pupils' results in national examinations have remained below national averages. Pupils do not achieve well. In English, pupils attain results in line with national averages. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities do not achieve well across the curriculum.

Leaders put strategies in place to improve pupils' achievement. However, in some parts of the curriculum, expectations of what pupils can achieve from their starting points are not high enough. This means that some pupils are not prepared as well for their next steps.

Leaders have started work to strengthen support to develop pupils' essential knowledge in literacy and number skills. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this. Younger pupils receive support to help them develop their reading skills. However, weaknesses in handwriting and literacy in some pupils' work are not sufficiently addressed.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Pupils' overall attendance has been below national average for some time. The attendance of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is close to average. Leaders have recently strengthened their work to raise attendance. Reconsidered strategies and increased recognition of high attendance encourage pupils to come to school. This has led to incremental improvements in overall attendance and a decrease in persistent absence. However, sustained improvement in attendance, especially for vulnerable pupils, is not evident. This contributes to widening gaps in their learning.

Leaders have made their expectations clearer and strengthened the systems for behaviour. These are beginning to have a positive impact. For example, start-of-day routines support a more orderly and calm entry to lessons. Raised expectations result in fewer pupils truanting lessons. Many staff and pupils report an improvement in the culture of the school. Lessons are generally calm places to learn. Many pupils show interest in their learning. However, inconsistencies in the application of behaviour policies and processes lead to some instances of poor behaviour from a minority of pupils, particularly at social times and lesson changeovers. The school addresses instances of bullying, discrimination or harassment promptly. Leaders have improved the support for pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

In some subjects and phases, the teaching of the curriculum is not implemented well. Some teachers' subject knowledge is not secure. Leaders check the quality of teaching. They know what the areas for improvement are. They plan training and support for teachers around the areas they identify. However, this work is at an early stage.

In some parts of the curriculum, teachers do not check pupils' learning effectively to identify gaps and misconceptions. Expertise in adapting the learning for pupils, when they need it, is not well developed. As a result, teaching activities do not build on gaps in pupils' learning or address errors. This limits how well pupils achieve.

Pupils learn a broad range of academic and vocational subjects in preparation for the next stage of learning or employment. What pupils learn in most subjects has been carefully sequenced. However, some other subjects are relatively new and have not had time to become established.

Leaders make reading a priority. Pupils have planned time to read more widely. However, reading opportunities for older readers who need support is not as well embedded as that for younger pupils. Leaders' strategies to improve pupils' essential skills in handwriting and number are also underdeveloped.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

There have been significant changes to leadership and staffing in recent years. With the support of the trust, leaders have begun to stabilise the school. Trust leaders prioritise resources to support and improve many aspects of the school's provision, including safeguarding.

Leaders have improved their monitoring of many aspects of the school's provision. They focus on appropriate areas to prioritise for improvement. Leaders have improved the culture and ethos of the school with a more positive, inclusive approach. They have raised expectations of pupils' behaviour and are working to improve pupils' rates of attendance. However, much of this work is new and has not had enough time to impact positively, for example, on the quality of teaching or on pupils' achievement. Furthermore, some staff do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve.

Leaders have improved the level of support for teachers. The professional learning programme is improving. Leaders provide staff with sufficient time to embed some of the recent strategies before introducing the next steps. Most staff feel well supported by leaders with their workload and wellbeing. Leaders work with staff to reduce workload. Leaders are increasingly engaging with parents and carers to improve communication between school and home.

Those responsible for governance are highly committed to the school community. They know the school well. They ask leaders probing questions and support them effectively. Trustees, together with school leaders, ensure that decisions made are in the best interests of pupils.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

Pupils learn about the characteristics protected by law and the fundamental British values. However, pupils' knowledge of these is uneven and, in some cases, lacks depth. This means that some pupils are less well prepared for life in modern Britain than they should be.

The personal, social and health education curriculum is well thought out. Leaders design it so that it is responsive to emerging issues, such as knife crime, drug issues or criminal exploitation. Pupils learn about different religions. This helps them to understand the importance of tolerance. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and consent in an age-appropriate way.

Pupils have many opportunities to broaden their interests and experiences. Leaders have started work to check pupils' participation in extra-curricular activities. However, they have not evaluated the impact of these experiences on pupils.

Pupils can take part in clubs, sports and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Visits, such as to art galleries, museums and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) centres, are frequent. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils access additional experiences that support their learning and wider experiences appropriately.

Pupils enjoy taking on leadership roles. They engage diligently in decision-making in the school. For example, members of the student council have contributed to the development of the school uniform and new reward trips.

Pupils receive helpful impartial careers advice and support with applying to local colleges. Pupils and students gain valuable experience of the world of work through work placements. Leaders organise careers fairs in school for pupils to attend, which broadens their understanding of future pathways. However, careers talks and visits that are matched to pupil aspirations are not as well planned for.

Pastoral support for pupils is effective. Pupils are positively supported to look after their mental health and wellbeing. They have quiet spaces, where they can go when they need to. They know who they can speak with about their concerns.

Post 16 provision

Needs attention 

Outcomes for sixth-form students are not as high as leaders want them to be. Over time, students do not achieve well in academic or vocational courses. Some weaknesses in teaching mean students do not achieve well across the curriculum. For example, teachers do not check students' prior knowledge well enough to identify gaps and to make appropriate adaptations to address them. Some students' work lacks sufficient detail and depth. This means that students, including those who are disadvantaged, do not secure their knowledge well.

The school provides a suitable 16-19 study programme. Students have the opportunity to prepare for their next steps through work experience and visits to universities and local colleges. However, some students rightly would like experiences with a greater variety of employers that match their aspirations for the future. A range of effective pastoral systems and mentoring, including from former pupils, supports students well. This helps to improve the attendance of students with previously low engagement.

The sixth form has a positive and friendly ethos. Students develop responsibility, social skills and a sense of citizenship through taking on leadership roles, such as being a prefect, supporting younger pupils and raising money for local charities. Sixth-form students receive a detailed personal, social and health education curriculum, including age-appropriate approaches to topics, such as healthy relationships.

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

The school supports pupils well. Relationships between pupils and teachers are typically positive. Pupils have trusted staff that they talk to. This gives them confidence to seek help. Staff respond promptly to pupils' wellbeing concerns. Pupils feel safe in school. Staff treat them fairly.

Pupils enjoy learning. They follow the school's clear routines that help them to be ready to learn. Most pupils behave well. However, the behaviour policy is not consistently implemented. Some pupils do not conduct themselves as positively as leaders expect. Sixth-form students demonstrate a mature approach and are positive role models in the school. Pupils' overall rates of attendance have recently improved.

Pupils show respect for the differences between people. Bullying is not common. If it happens, leaders resolve any issues quickly. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and they understand consent. This helps them make appropriate choices. However, their knowledge of some aspects that prepare them for life in modern Britain is not as secure.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who attend the school's specially resourced provision, are generally well supported in their learning.

Pupils take part in a range of activities and curriculum-related trips, which develop their interests and skills. These include the 'rat club', the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, art galleries, residential field courses and sports, including basketball and skateboarding. However, leaders do not check pupils' participation carefully enough to know which pupils benefit.

Some pupils and students, including those who are disadvantaged, do not achieve well across the curriculum. Some parts of the curriculum are not taught well. In these areas, expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high. This means that many pupils and students leave school without being fully prepared for their next stage of education.

Next steps

- Leaders should carefully evaluate and refine their strategies to improve rates of attendance so that pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, attend school regularly and that recent gains are sustained over time.
 - Leaders should ensure that their high expectations for behaviour are maintained through the consistent application of systems and protocols by staff, so that pupils conduct themselves consistently well.
 - Leaders should ensure that high-quality teaching implements the curriculum effectively across all key stages, in order to maximise pupils' and students' development of essential skills and their attainment in national examinations.
 - Leaders should ensure that across all key stages, staff use assessment strategies effectively to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge, so that pupils are supported effectively to correct their misconceptions and secure their learning.
 - Leaders should ensure that the programme for personal development develops pupils' understanding of fundamental British values and the protected characteristics fully, and that the careers offer better aligns with pupils' and students' needs, in order that pupils are fully prepared for their future in modern Britain.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Oak Trees Multi Academy 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), Tony Lacey, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jane Owens, MBE.

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 headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with trustees and members of the local governing board. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority, a virtual school headteacher and with representatives of the alternative provisions that the school uses. Inspectors spoke with pupils and staff.

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 provides a specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The provision supports 32 pupils with autism spectrum disorder and moderate learning difficulties.

The school makes use of 3 registered and 2 unregistered alternative provisions.

The school has undergone significant change since the last inspection. The school joined the Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust in September 2024. A new headteacher and 2 acting deputy headteachers were appointed in September 2025. Some other senior leaders have also been recently appointed.

Headteacher: John Barlow

Lead inspector:

Ahmed Marikar, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Liz Kelly, Ofsted Inspector

Ian Young, Ofsted Inspector

Sue Farrimond, Ofsted Inspector

Eleanor Overland, 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 24 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,174

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

1,160

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)

29.48%

Close to 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

8.18%

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

14.65%

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

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)

Resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SpLD - Specific Learning Difficulty, VI - Visual Impairment, HI - Hearing Impairment, SLCN - Speech, language and Communication, ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health, MSI - Multi-Sensory Impairment, PD - Physical Disability, MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty, SLD - Severe Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (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)	24.5%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	24.4%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	29.0%	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 (revised)	39.0	46.0	Below
2023/24 (final)	35.4	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	39.4	46.3	Below

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	Below
2022/23 (final)	0.01	-0.03	Close to average

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)	18.5%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	14.0%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	24.4%	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 (revised)	31.8	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	29.1	34.6	Below
2022/23 (final)	33.9	35.0	Close to average

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)	-0.85	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.23	-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 (revised)	18.5%	53.1%	-34.6 pp
2023/24 (final)	14.0%	53.1%	-39.1 pp
2022/23 (final)	24.4%	52.4%	-28.0 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)	31.8	50.4	-18.6
2023/24 (final)	29.1	50.0	-20.9
2022/23 (final)	33.9	50.3	-16.4

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)	-0.85	0.16	-1.02
2022/23 (final)	-0.23	0.17	-0.39

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)	91%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	94%	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)	22.27	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	24.28	34.38	Below
2022/23 (final)	17.32	34.16	Below

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)	-0.4	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	-0.3	0.0	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)	9.4%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	10.3%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	10.7%	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)	26.6%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	31.2%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	32.1%	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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