

King James I Academy Bishop Auckland

Address: South Church Road, Bishop Auckland, County Durham, DL14 7JZ

Unique reference number (URN): 136770

Inspection report: 17 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders identify the needs of pupils quickly and accurately. They are committed to providing astute support for all pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders consistently break down barriers to learning by making sure that all pupils have everything they need to thrive in school. Teachers have the information they need to make reasonable adjustments and adaptations to lessons and do so effectively. They use their knowledge to make sure no pupil is left behind. Pupils who need some extra help receive it. They access a range of highly effective interventions to support their wellbeing needs. Leaders carefully track the progress of pupils and adapt their approach when they need to. Leaders work closely with external agencies and professionals to make sure the right support is in place.

Leaders use additional funding appropriately to make sure the most vulnerable pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those known to or previously known to social care, receive any required additional support. All pupils are included in the wider school community and access a wide range of experiences and opportunities. The school uses alternative provision effectively to support pupils to engage well with their education.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Pupils progress well through the curriculum at all stages. Most pupils produce high-quality work that shows their progress over time. In post-16 provision, students achieve in line with their peers nationally at the end of key stage 5. Pupils typically achieve close to national averages at the end of key stage 4. Pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress well from their starting points, and some achieve higher than their peers nationally. However, there is more work to do to make sure all pupils achieve as highly as they could. This is particularly the case in the core subjects of English and mathematics. Pupils who need some extra help to secure their foundational knowledge receive this support, and most catch up with their peers. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps. They have the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their future. Most pupils move on to sustained education, employment or training. At the end of post-16 provision, many students go to university or secure apprenticeships.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard ●

Leaders prioritise improving school attendance. Most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), attend school well. Leaders carefully monitor absence and provide extra help and support to pupils and their families when they need it. They intervene early to reduce any barriers to attending school. Staff support pupils and their families to understand the importance of attendance. A

minority of pupils are absent from school too often, but this is reducing because of leaders' actions.

Pupils behave very well in lessons and during social times. Leaders have created a calm and orderly learning environment. Pupils benefit from clear expectations and routines. Consequently, incidents of low-level disruption are rare. Staff implement the behaviour policy consistently well. Some pupils, including those with SEND where appropriate, receive extra help, which is effective in supporting them to understand and manage their emotions. The vast majority of pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning. They value the positive relationships that they have with staff. Pupils know where to go if they have any worries or concerns. They are kind and respectful towards their peers. Leaders create a culture where bullying and discrimination are not tolerated. On the rare occasions these do happen, staff deal with them effectively.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders know where there are strengths in the curriculum and teaching. They take effective action to make improvements where needed. The curriculum is sequenced well. It provides pupils with the knowledge that they need for their next steps. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge, including in post-16 provision. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, generally benefit from high-quality teaching. However, some strategies implemented by leaders have not been consistently embedded. For example, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not check what pupils know and remember before moving learning on. This means that a minority of pupils develop gaps in their knowledge. Teaching extends pupils' vocabulary across the curriculum. Pupils learn how to communicate well when speaking and in their writing. In key stage 4, pupils benefit from extra help and support to prepare for their examinations. Some pupils need extra help to secure their foundational knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders make sure that teachers have the skills to support these pupils to catch up with their peers, and the majority of pupils do so.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders create an inclusive environment that supports all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to be ready for their next stage. They make decisions in the best interests of their pupils. Leaders understand the school's strengths and know where they need to make improvements. They are taking appropriate action to address these. Leaders engage well with parents, carers and wider professionals to make sure pupils have everything they need to be successful in school.

Trustees and governors know the school well. They fulfil their statutory duties and hold leaders to account effectively. Governors are part of the school community and visit regularly. They are proud of the work of leaders but challenge them to make further improvements.

Leaders care about the wellbeing and workload of their staff. They offer support to staff when they need it. Staff have opportunities to collaborate and share ideas with their colleagues. They are proud to work at this school. Leaders have implemented a suitable

professional learning programme. It is informed by research and supports staff to teach and support pupils effectively. Staff, including teachers who are in the early stages of their career, value this training. However, the professional learning programme is not as precisely matched to key priority areas as it could be.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils benefit from a structured programme of personal development. Leaders tailor their approach to tackle issues relevant to their pupils and the local community. Pupils learn how to look after their physical and mental health. They learn about healthy relationships and know how to keep themselves safe, including online. However, a minority of older pupils and post-16 students spend less time than their peers studying the curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education. As such, they have fewer opportunities to embed previous learning.

Pupils have access to high-quality pastoral support. They know where to go when they need some extra help and receive the support that they need.

Pupils have opportunities to explore local heritage through workshops at museums and galleries. They learn about other faiths and cultures through religious education. The school's equality, diversity and inclusion group raise awareness of the importance of protected characteristics. They plan activities to celebrate key events, such as Durham Pride. Pupils learn to respect differences and treat others with kindness and respect. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

The school offers pupils leadership opportunities. Some pupils, including students from the post-16 provision, proudly represent their peers following election to the academy council. Others choose to become ambassadors in areas such as mental health, anti-bullying and sport. Leaders make sure that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit from these opportunities. Pupils care about their local community. They are keen to support others by raising money for charity, creating bird boxes for the local hospital garden and delivering food to those in need.

Leaders have implemented a suitable careers programme. Pupils, including students in post-16 provision, benefit from appropriate advice and guidance. They have opportunities to meet with local employers and visit local colleges and universities. This contributes to pupils' preparedness for their next steps.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders offer a wide range of options for post-16 study. Students benefit from well-designed study programmes to prepare them well for their next steps. Leaders regularly review the offer to ensure it meets students' needs. Teachers have the subject knowledge they need to deliver their study programmes effectively. Students benefit from high-quality teaching, often in small classes. There is an adapted offer to meet the needs of all students, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students have access to additional support when they need it.

Students benefit from leadership opportunities. Some students provide outreach to local primary schools and run after-school clubs. They manage a food stall at breaktimes for younger pupils. Some students attend clubs such as computer coding, video editing and the school choir. They are very much part of the wider school community.

Students achieve in line with national averages in national examinations. They are well supported to realise their aspirations. Students benefit from impartial careers advice and guidance, visits to universities and opportunities to engage with apprenticeship providers. The majority of students go on to sustained education, employment or training.

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

Pupils, including students in post-16 provision, are happy and safe at King James I Academy. They thrive as a result of the positive relationships that they have with staff and their peers. Pupils behave very well in lessons and during social times. Incidents of bullying are rare. Leaders deal with it effectively if it happens. Most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), attend school regularly.

Staff create a positive and productive learning environment in which pupils enjoy learning. Pupils study a broad and balanced curriculum. Many pupils achieve well. However, sometimes, teachers do not check that pupils have the knowledge they need before they move learning on. Teachers make highly effective adaptations to lessons to ensure any barriers to learning are removed. Where necessary, pupils receive timely, targeted interventions to help them catch up with their peers.

At the end of key stage 4, pupils achieve broadly in line with national averages. However, a minority of pupils could achieve at a higher level than they do. Pupils who are disadvantaged and those with SEND achieve well from their starting points. At the end of post-16 provision, most students achieve in line with national averages.

Everyone is part of a community at this school. Pupils take part in a range of clubs tailored to their interests, such as comic book club or outdoor education. They are encouraged to take part in competitive sports, such as football or netball. Pupils visit local museums, art galleries and theatres. They benefit from being part of local heritage projects. Pupils take pride in their town's history. They care about their local community. Pupils deliver Christmas cards to the local nursing home and host picnics for local nursery children. Pupils, including students in post-16 provision, are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers check what pupils know and remember so that they do not move learning on before pupils are ready.
- Leaders should ensure that improvements made to the curriculum and teaching lead to pupils achieving at the highest level they can, particularly in the core subjects.

- Leaders should ensure that all pupils, at all stages, are supported to fully embed their learning in order to secure detailed knowledge of personal, social, health and economic education.
 - Leaders should ensure that the professional learning programme is precisely matched to priority areas to embed improvements across the school.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Eden Learning 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), Kevin Brennan, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Garry Stout.

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, senior leaders, the CEO, trustees and governors 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 makes use of 4 alternative provisions, including 3 that are unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection as it joined Eden Learning Trust in December 2023.

Headteacher: Mr Simon Whitehead

Lead inspector:

Nikki Heron, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Philip Wheatley, Ofsted Inspector

Nicola Reed, Ofsted Inspector

Katie Spurr, Ofsted Inspector

Jayne Gaunt, 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 17 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

926

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

956

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)

51.15%

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

2.27%

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

21.06%

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

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).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

PD - Physical Disability

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)	28.7%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	28.9%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	32.0%	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)	43.9	46.0	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	41.6	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	45.4	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)	-0.21	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.16	-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)	25.0%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	25.0%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	24.0%	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)	39.4	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	38.2	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	39.7	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)	-0.41	-0.57	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23 (final)	-0.35	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	25.0%	53.1%	-28.1 pp
2023/24 (final)	25.0%	53.1%	-28.1 pp
2022/23 (final)	24.0%	52.4%	-28.4 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)	39.4	50.4	-11.0
2023/24 (final)	38.2	50.0	-11.8
2022/23 (final)	39.7	50.3	-10.6

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.41	0.16	-0.58
2022/23 (final)	-0.35	0.17	-0.52

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)	93%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	93%	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)	32.09	34.99	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	34.61	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	30.00	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)	-0.2	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	0.0	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)	8.7%	8.1%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	9.3%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	9.4%	9.0%	Close to average

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)	26.0%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	33.1%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	25.6%	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.

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