

Merstone School

Address: Windward Way, Smith's Wood, Birmingham, West Midlands, B36 0UE

Unique reference number (URN): 104133

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.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

All pupils, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, achieve very well because their education is shaped and steered by well-focused education, health and care plans. They make important gains in developing the communication skills they need to listen and express themselves.

Pupils make strong progress from their starting points throughout the curriculum, producing work of a consistently high quality. They do so because staff identify pupils' needs accurately and precisely target support. As a result of careful selection and adaptation, pupils make positive gains in knowledge and skills across a range of nationally recognised, suitably ambitious and meaningful qualifications. Pupils, including those with more extensive needs, achieve well across these qualifications.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders analyse rates of pupils' attendance carefully. They promote high expectations for attendance while supporting unavoidable reasons for absence, such as those related to pupils' health or medical needs. Leaders have put in place well-established pastoral support, which is highly effective in working with pupils and their families to reduce absence. Pupils' rates of attendance are in line with what is typical in schools that provide education for pupils with similar needs. The school environment strongly supports pupil's enjoyment of school and helps them to feel a strong sense of belonging. Pupils speak proudly about their achievements.

The school has a deep understanding of factors affecting pupils' behaviour. Staff know that behaviour is often a communication of need. As such, they are highly skilled at supporting pupils to regulate their emotions, feelings and behaviour. This leads to a calm and happy environment in which pupils demonstrate highly positive attitudes and want to do well. Skilled staff act quickly to offer effective support should a pupil becomes anxious or struggle to manage their behaviour. As a result, disruption in classes is rare.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have successfully implemented a carefully ordered curriculum across all subjects and pathways from the early years to post-16 classes. There is a strong focus on selecting content that is most crucial for future learning, which promotes independence. Leaders know precisely how effectively the curriculum is taught because they check this regularly. They provide timely, targeted support for teachers. The curriculum benefits from regular enhancement. For example, after identifying pupils' difficulties with developing a conceptual understanding of number, leaders have carefully designed the mathematics curriculum for early-stage mathematicians to be practical and firmly rooted in real life experiences.

Staff use highly focused assessment to oversee pupils' academic, social and physical progress in meticulous detail. This gives teachers a clear picture of each pupil's development and informs their planning of pupils' next steps. In addition to the planned

curriculum, the school proactively provides an extensive range of interventions, therapies and other services that enable pupils to succeed.

During lessons, staff communicate clearly and skilfully. They explain tasks thoroughly so that pupils understand what is expected of them. Staff demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge. They are expert at supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with more extensive needs.

Early years

Strong standard 

Children in the nursery benefit from a joyful, nurturing environment, where provision is carefully planned around each child's needs. Staff prioritise early social development and communication skills. They provide a rich offer which stimulates and develops children's senses. Staff are highly ambitious for the children in their care. They provide well-planned activities in an inclusive setting, where children are visibly happy and settled. Staff's use of care practices and interactions are consistently strong, reflecting their expertise and a deep understanding of the way in which individual children communicate. Throughout the early years, staff use effective interaction strategies, including symbols, signing and speech.

Leaders are highly knowledgeable about early years practice in a special school context. They ensure provision is thoughtfully adapted to children's needs and abilities. Staff's use of well-developed assessment systems underpins teachers' planning. Children are assessed carefully on entry and smoothly embark on to one of the school's well-matched pathways. Staff make effective use of information from parents, specialist agencies and observations to precisely identify and address children's wellbeing and previous learning. Staff prioritise reading through the teaching of early phonics. For children who are not ready to learn phonics, staff expertly use recognition of, and response to, environmental sounds as a suitable initial step.

Parents are valued partners in the work of the early years. They contribute to formal review meetings and are supported to contribute to high-quality ongoing communication with the school through the well-established online platform.

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Every pupil at this highly inclusive special school is a valued individual. Leaders and staff regularly checks on pupils' needs and sustain strong partnerships with pupils, their families and other professionals. They check pupils' progress closely against personalised targets and act swiftly to make adjustments. The school's use of assessment is precise. Staff acknowledge even the smallest steps pupils make in their academic, physical and social development to build a holistic view of pupils' requirements and accomplishments.

The high standards of care, supervision and interaction mean that pupils are included in school life and are looked after well. Staff use their precise knowledge of pupils to make intelligent, bespoke adaptations. Staff are skilled in helping pupils to overcome barriers to communication. Staff receive well-targeted training that helps them to fully understand pupils' individual communication needs. Staff use this knowledge to make necessary adaptations to support pupils to communicate successfully. Staff confidently and consistently

use signing, symbols, objects of reference and other well-matched tools or strategies to support communication.

The school uses additional funding effectively so that disadvantaged pupils benefit fully from all that the school offers. Staff ensure there are no barriers to participation or support so disadvantaged pupils achieve and thrive alongside their peers. The same is true for pupils known or previously known to children's social care and for those who are looked after. There is a palpable sense that all pupils thrive and develop.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard 

Leaders and governors know the school's strengths and next steps well. Their ambition, rooted in inclusion, for pupils to thrive and flourish is clear. They place pupils' education, development and well being at the heart of all decisions. The school's culture of continuous improvement underpins leaders' and staff's success.

Leaders ensure that staff are experts through carefully focused training and support. This has created a deep and wide-ranging body of expertise that is well equipped to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Governors demonstrate that they are truly committed to securing the best outcomes for pupils through the effective challenge and support they provide.

Leaders are mindful of staff workload and wellbeing. Innovative ways of considering staff and learner's mental health feed into a well-established culture of mutual respect and support. Staff feel highly valued and involved in the work of the school, through regular opportunities to talk about and share their views. Staff are highly committed to their roles.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

The school places a strong emphasis on developing pupils' independence, confidence and personal behaviours. Pupils' personal development and wellbeing are woven through the curriculum as a result of a well-structured and responsive programme. Leaders are hugely passionate about ensuring every pupil feels safe, valued and able to communicate freely to trusted adults.

The pastoral support that staff provide for pupils is highly effective because it is carefully planned and tailored to individual needs. It encourages resilience, even when pupils face significant challenges. Pupils demonstrate an awareness of their physical and emotional wellbeing and how this affects their learning. Older pupils are articulate, reflective and supportive of one another.

Staff nurture pupils' interests through sport, performing arts or other opportunities. This encouragement supports pupils to take part in performances at major venues and enjoy partnerships with numerous external organisations, including football clubs and theatres.

The personal development programme is highly individualised. Pupils benefit from rich opportunities, such as sensory experiences, therapeutic support and life skills development through the Duke of Edinburgh Award. They take part in a vast array of community visits.

Staff ensure pupils learn about personal safety, relationships and online behaviour. Staff take account of pupils' age and readiness to learn about healthy and safe choices, both now and in later life. The school's nursing team is fully integrated into school life and supports pupils to understand issues important to their stage of development.

Pupils are well prepared for adulthood. They benefit from opportunities to learn about self-care and how to live independently. Pupils are supported with appropriate careers guidance to plan their next steps.

Post 16 provision

Strong standard 

Post-16 provision is characterised by a highly individualised curriculum, which has been designed with preparation for adulthood at its heart. Staff make extensive adaptations so that students' needs are met. This means that provision is skilfully aligned to students' previous learning and provides an appropriate pathway. Leaders have an accurate and informed understanding of how well the curriculum is taught through regular quality assurance. This ensures a highly reflective culture of continual improvement.

Students gain further knowledge and skills in the subjects they study. They achieve well from their starting points because of how well tailored provision is to their specific needs. Students achieve qualifications that are meaningful and stand them in good stead for their next steps. The school provides effective support for students so that their transfer to college is smooth and successful.

Preparation for adulthood is a significant strength and begins long before students reach post-16 provision. Leaders have high aspirations for students' independence, self-care and ability to self-advocate. Leaders work closely with families to explain and demonstrate what students are capable of achieving.

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

Pupils at Merstone School thrive as part of a caring learning community. Pupils arrive with a smile and are greeted warmly by adults, who have their best interests at heart in everything they do and every decision they make.

Staff are vigilant in ensuring that pupils feel safe and are kept safe. Staff know pupils extremely well. They understand pupils' needs and how they best communicate. They are responsive to pupils' wishes. They understand pupils' worries and respond to them consistently well. As a result, relationships are a real strength throughout this vibrant and happy school.

Teachers plan lessons that meet pupils' needs and build carefully on what they have learned before. Pupils work hard to succeed in the work they are asked to complete. Older pupils benefit from a variety of qualifications that they can work towards. These carefully chosen opportunities help pupils to be well prepared for their next stages in education or care.

Pupils behave well. They learn explicitly about how to behave around one another and in society. Staff supervise pupils closely to support them to independently take actions and make decisions. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and at social times is usually harmonious. Incidents of unkindness or bullying are extremely rare. Furthermore, when behaviour falls short of expectations, staff help pupils to understand social situations, their emotions and feelings.

Next steps

- Leaders should work to share effective practice through the establishment and re-establishment of wider relationships with special and mainstream schools. In so doing, the school will support its own improvement journey and that of other settings.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Antoinette Fisher.

The school is part of a federation called Forest Oak School and Merstone School Federation.

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 executive headteacher and other leaders. They also spoke with the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority during the inspection.

Inspectors spoke with staff and visited lessons across the full age range of the school. They looked at samples of work and spoke with pupils in lessons and around the school.

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:

A new executive headteacher has taken up post since the previous inspection.

The school is an all-through community special school that caters for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties and pupils with complex autism.

The school has provision for 2-year-olds in its nursery. The nursery is sited just outside the school campus in a separate building.

The school does not use alternative provision.

Lead inspector:

Gareth Morgan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Johanne Clifton, Ofsted Inspector

Pete Hines OBE, Ofsted Inspector

Dawn White, 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**

171

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.

School capacity

166

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.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

60.29%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

100.00%

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.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

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)

SLD - Severe Learning Difficulty, PMLD - Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

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
2023 leavers (provisional)	S
2022 leavers (revised)	100%
2021 leavers (revised)	100%

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
2024/25 (2 term)	12.4%
2023/24 (3 term)	11.2%
2022/23 (3 term)	12.2%

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school
2024/25 (2 term)	43.5%
2023/24 (3 term)	40.0%
2022/23 (3 term)	41.2%

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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