

Mary Elliot Academy

Address: Leamore Lane, Walsall, WS2 7DQ

Unique reference number (URN): 149678

Inspection report: 24 February 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

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils at Mary Elliot make steady progress because staff understand the small steps each pupil needs to take. Pupils with complex needs learn to notice more of the world around them. They respond increasingly purposefully to sounds, lights and movement. They also learn to communicate in simple ways, using gestures, sounds or symbols to make their views known.

Pupils who take part in more structured learning build the early skills they need for reading and number. They begin to recognise sounds, letters and simple words. They learn to count each day. Pupils who are ready for more formal activities develop practical skills that help them take part in daily life at school and in the community.

Older pupils become increasingly confident and independent. They learn routines, complete practical tasks and take part in community visits. Some achieve entry-level qualifications, supporting them to be ready for continued learning when they leave the school.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders check pupils' attendance every day and understand the reasons why some pupils may find it difficult to attend regularly. They review attendance often and use this information to spot patterns and take action quickly. Leaders work with families, social care, health services and transport teams to remove barriers that make attending school harder. Their approach supports pupils who have had long periods out of education to return successfully. Persistent absence is reducing over time because leaders stay in close contact with parents and carers and offer practical help. This personalised approach helps pupils and their families feel positive about coming into school.

Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and during social times. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes and enjoy taking part in activities that help them to succeed. The school is calm and orderly. Lunchtimes and assemblies provide purposeful opportunities for the community to come together. Familiar routines are a comfort to pupils. Staff deal with any concerns, including rare incidents of bullying, quickly. Pupils feel safe and trust staff to help them. Staff apply behaviour expectations consistently and with care. Leaders continue to develop strategies to support pupils to feel ready for, and cope with, the demands of learning.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed a curriculum that meets pupils' needs well. They understand the quality of teaching across the school and check regularly that staff are teaching the curriculum as intended. Their decisions help teachers plan learning that is clear, manageable and meaningful for pupils.

The school's different curriculum pathways are appropriately ambitious. They guide staff to choose approaches that match pupils' stages of development. This helps teachers decide

when pupils need sensory learning, short, structured tasks or more formal activities. As a result, teaching is matched carefully to pupils' needs and helps them build knowledge in sensible steps.

Teachers have the subject knowledge they need. They use clear explanations and carefully model their teaching so that pupils understand what is being taught. Leaders make sure that early reading, communication and number are taught in consistent ways. Pupils who need it receive focused teaching that helps them secure the essential early skills they need before moving on to more complex learning.

Staff adapt their teaching well. They use visual prompts and personalised communication systems and establish calm routines so pupils can stay engaged and calm. These approaches help most pupils take part in lessons and gain the knowledge they need for future learning.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders take the time to understand each pupil's educational needs. They gather clear information when pupils join the school and talk to families about what helps their child learn and feel secure. Leaders work with therapists, health teams and other professionals effectively. This helps staff to develop appropriate strategies to support pupils to overcome the significant challenges that they face.

Staff put simple, practical support in place so that pupils can take part in learning. This includes communication books, symbols, sensory tools and personalised routines that help pupils to stay calm and focused. Staff provide additional, personalised help when pupils need it. Leaders check how well this support is working and change it when pupils need something different.

Staff training provides clear and practical ways to help pupils to communicate, manage their emotions and build independence. This means staff understand how to support pupils with a wide range of needs. Leaders also work well with social care teams, therapists and the virtual school so that pupils with additional challenges receive joined-up support.

Pupil premium funding is used well. It helps pupils to improve their communication, confidence and attendance. The school works with the local authority effectively to ensure that pupils who require places at this school are offered them.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and the trust have worked closely together to strengthen the school. They share a clear vision that focuses on pupils' wellbeing, independence and sense of belonging. This shared direction is understood by staff and guides the decisions leaders make each day. Trust leaders visit the school often, offering calm and practical advice. They check that leaders have the support that they need. This partnership has helped the school make steady and meaningful improvements over time.

Leaders are consistent in how they implement changes. They do so with compassion, building trust and clarity so that staff feel supported and accountable for driving sustained

improvement. Leaders introduce new ideas carefully and revisit staff learning to make sure it is understood and embedded. Staff feel well supported. They know that leaders care about, and take action to support, their workload and wellbeing. This helps create a positive working culture where staff feel confident to ask questions and develop their practice. Leaders model respectful and trusting relationships. This helps to build the school's inclusive ethos purposefully.

Leaders know the school well. They check the quality of teaching, the curriculum and pupils' wider experiences to understand what is working and what needs further development. They use this information to plan next steps and make improvements in sensible stages. Leaders work closely with therapists, health professionals and the local authority so that pupils receive appropriate and timely support. The school actively seeks to engage families in their children's education. Leaders recognise, however, that higher levels of engagement will enable parents and carers to better support their children's future ambitions and independence.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils at Mary Elliot benefit from a positive and supportive culture that helps them feel they belong. Staff know pupils well and build warm, trusting relationships with them. These relationships help pupils feel safe, valued and ready to take part in school life. Pupils learn how to share their feelings, make choices and build respectful relationships with adults and their friends. They also learn the importance of tolerance and the rule of law.

Personal development is part of everyday learning. Staff help pupils understand right and wrong, listen to others and express their own views confidently. Pupils take part in music, stories, celebrations and cultural events that broaden their experiences. Staff use creative ways to teach pupils how to stay safe, including with regard to online safety and about their bodies and consent. These lessons help pupils understand the world around them and how to keep themselves safe.

The school's inclusive ethos means that all pupils take part in a wide range of enjoyable experiences. Pupils enjoy visiting different places in Walsall and Birmingham. These visits help them build confidence and learn how to communicate and how to conduct themselves in different situations. Pupils take part in sessions that support their wellbeing, including therapy sessions, and enjoy their time in the sensory room because it helps them feel calm.

Older pupils practise important life skills regularly and with increasing independence. They learn how to travel safely, complete work-related tasks and are increasingly making choices about their own futures. Annual careers events provide pupils and their families with clear information about colleges, training providers and support services. Leaders understand, however, that this is an important area to develop further. Their plans to increase employer encounters and offer more personalised opportunities that match pupils' interests, ambitions and talents are necessary. They understand that such experiences help pupils feel ownership, identity and hope.

Students in the post-16 provision are supported appropriately to develop the skills they need for adult life. Staff know students well and build trusting relationships that help them feel confident and secure as they move towards greater independence. Whatever curriculum pathway they are on, students take part in the same core activities that prepare them for adult living and help them to take responsibility for themselves.

Learning focuses on communication, independence and practical life skills. Students practise tasks such as preparing simple meals, looking after their belongings and travelling safely. They also visit places in the community. This helps them to use the skills they have learned in real situations. Personal care sessions are handled with dignity. They help students become increasingly independent and in control of their day.

Teachers break learning into small, manageable steps. This, along with the well-established routines that are in place, enables students to learn. It helps students to understand what is expected of them and gives them confidence to try new things. Staff support students appropriately to take increasing ownership of their learning and share their ideas with their peers. Leaders have widened the range of accreditation options available to students. As a result, students typically leave the school feeling confident, capable and ready for adult life.

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

Mary Elliot is an inclusive, caring and welcoming school community. Positive relationships are part of what makes this school a special place to be. Staff welcome pupils each morning with a smile, which helps pupils to feel settled. Parents and carers recognise that this approach helps their children feel understood and safe. Over time, pupils develop a strong sense of belonging and develop their resilience.

Every pupil communicates in their own unique way. For those who need it, staff use pictures, symbols and signing so pupils can share what they want, how they feel and what they need. This personalised support helps pupils take part in learning and express themselves. Learning is shaped around each pupil's needs. Some pupils learn through sensory activities and movement. Others enjoy short tasks that build their early reading, number and communication skills. Some follow more structured learning, linked to managing everyday life tasks. Staff understand pupils well and plan activities that help them grow both academically and personally.

Pupils achieve significant milestones both academically and socially. They develop their communication, increase their confidence and increasingly enjoy showing their learning to staff and friends. Those who are ready to read make gradual progress. Others begin to apply number skills in real-life situations using real money. Older pupils talk proudly about their future goals and want to do jobs that are linked to their interests.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of experiences that celebrate their individuality. Music, outdoor learning and sessions that support wellbeing are part of daily life. Pupils visit shops, cafés and community venues to build confidence in new places. Older pupils learn how to travel

safely and take part in personal care sessions designed to help them become more independent. Pupils are happy at Mary Elliot and proud of what they achieve each day. Bullying is rare. Pupils know adults will help them if they are worried.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to develop strategies to support pupils to feel calm, confident and ready to learn throughout the school day.
 - Leaders should further strengthen the quality and range of employer encounters so that each pupil benefits from experiences that match their interests, ambitions and talents.
 - Leaders should further develop their work to engage all parents and carers to enable them to support their children to realise their future ambitions.
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About this inspection

Mary Elliot Academy is part of Thrive Education Partnership trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is led by the chief executive officer (CEO), Richard Chapman, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Lucy Bennett.

This is the first inspection since the school joined the trust in April 2023.

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.

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 all senior leaders, including the CEO, the deputy CEOs and a range of central staff. They also met with the chair of trustees.

Inspectors spoke to the head of special educational needs and/or disabilities and inclusion from Walsall local authority.

Inspectors also spoke with the headteacher of the virtual school for Walsall.

Inspectors spoke with pupils and staff about their experiences and looked at work when visiting classrooms and wider provision.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

Mary Elliot is a special school that provides education for pupils aged 11 to 18 years.

The school caters for pupils with profound and multiple special educational needs, those with specific learning difficulties and others with more moderate learning needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.

The school does not use alternative provision.

Rebecca Davies: Headteacher

Lead inspector:

Antony Bradshaw, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Sarahjane Cuncannon Edwards, Ofsted Inspector

Jo Evans, 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 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

142

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

140

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)

55.77%

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

Well 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).

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)	10.7%
2023/24 (3 term)	13.4%
2022/23 (3 term)	13.0%

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school
2024/25 (2 term)	29.8%
2023/24 (3 term)	37.3%
2022/23 (3 term)	32.4%

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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