

Pinewood School

Address: Hoe Lane, Ware, Hertfordshire, SG12 9PB

Unique reference number (URN): 141251

Inspection report: 12 May 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

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Pupils know that school is a safe space. They enjoy learning. This means that most pupils attend regularly because they want to come to school. Pupils who need help to come to school more often get effective support to improve. Leaders work closely with families to secure these improvements. The safeguarding, attendance and pastoral teams collaborate to remove individual barriers to coming to school, such as anxiety and transport concerns. Additional funding is used appropriately to ensure disadvantaged pupils attend school as often as they should. Leaders ensure that they benefit from the range of experiences the school offers.

The school's high expectations of pupils' behaviour are clear. Pupils respond well to the calm and supportive approaches in place. They build successful relationships with staff and their peers. Effective modelling of positive behaviours and staff's consistent use of positive language underpin this success. Classrooms are purposeful and typically calm. Pupils follow well-established routines. They listen to each other and to their teachers' instructions. Pupils know that it is important to make the right choices. Bullying and unkindness are not accepted. Pupils are taught how to keep safe, including out in the community and online. They socialise well together at break and lunchtimes. Many pupils show considerable confidence and politeness when greeting visitors to their school.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils in the school. They have a sound understanding of what is working well and what needs to improve. Together with governors and other leaders, they continue to sustain the school's improvement journey during a significant period of change. Their work ensured that pupils settled quickly during the recent, well-managed move from temporary accommodation to the new building.

A clear plan of action underpins ongoing improvements. While curriculum and teaching are improving, some changes are still at an early stage. This includes in securing the changes needed to improve the precision of checks on pupils' learning. This work is in progress, but it is too soon to evaluate its success in raising pupils' achievement.

Leaders, including those recently appointed, continue to raise aspirations across the school. Most staff welcome the changes and the focus on positive behaviours. They value leaders' 'open-door' approaches, as well as their mindfulness of workload and wellbeing. Staff benefit from a range of personal learning, such as in gaining professional qualifications, training in phonics and wider specialist skills development. Leaders, staff and governors understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe. Regular safeguarding training keeps them up to date. They know the signs to look out for when a pupil may be at risk of harm. Prompt action is effective, including through external safeguarding partnerships, if there is cause for concern.

Governors and trustees work closely with school leaders. They are appropriately challenging and supportive as the school continues to improve. Relationships with parents and carers

are typically positive. Some parents, however, feel that communication between school and home is not as effective as it should be.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

All pupils benefit from the range of personal development opportunities the school offers. Everyone is encouraged to join in. Experiences such as archery, caving and climbing are broad and ambitious. Well-considered activities, including in regular outdoor learning, support pupils' mental health and wellbeing. Pupils enjoy building independence and confidence. They improve their ability to interact socially, as well as to work productively in teams with others. Taught strategies help pupils to understand how to reduce their anxieties. These include developing skills such as practising breathing techniques or enjoying reading a book for pleasure. The pastoral team, including staff trained in therapeutic approaches, provide pupils with additional support when they need it.

Pupils gain the knowledge and skills to help them to keep safe, including through a stage-appropriate programme of relationships and sex education. They learn about the importance of healthy relationships. Themed assemblies reinforce important messages about staying safe and making sensible choices.

Pupils show character and confidence. They speak enthusiastically about their learning. The school's values, such as kindness, align with fundamental British values. Pupils understand these values, so they show respect for the differences in others. They are clear that it is 'okay to be different' in their school. The school council shares ideas from all pupils to continue to improve the school environment. The council, for example, informed the design of the 'mindfulness' garden. Pupils enjoy joining clubs, such as the lunchtime chess club and sports.

Leaders build links with companies, individuals and the local community to provide opportunities for pupils to experience the world of work. Pupils enjoy taking their turn at running the 'tuck' shop. Wider developments focus on extending the range of opportunities, including the vocational curriculum on offer in school. Older pupils attend careers fairs to help them to shape their future plans. Most gain appropriate college places successfully when they leave at the end of Year 11.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Historic weaknesses in assessment limit pupils' progress. While effective action is leading to improvements, the changes are still at an early stage. Imprecise checks on pupils' learning mean that staff are not always clear about what pupils already know. This restricts the precision of feedback to pupils about what they need to do next to continue to improve. As a result, pupils do not routinely achieve as highly as they could.

Typically, pupils gain awards that provide pathways to further education when they leave school. These include awards linked to literacy, numeracy and life skills. Some pupils gain

functional skills awards in English and mathematics. They build the capacity to learn in different situations and grow in confidence and self-awareness as they develop their skills to interact socially with others. These skills underpin their successful transition to further education when they leave school at the end of Year 11.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Some of leaders' actions to improve the curriculum and the quality of teaching are at an early stage. The important knowledge content needed for staff to make informed and accurate checks on pupils' learning is still being defined. Adaptations to learning are not always matched well enough to individual needs. Work is too easy for some pupils, while other pupils find it hard to keep up. Ongoing professional learning for staff is beginning to build their knowledge, skills and confidence to personalise learning to meet pupils' needs more precisely.

Overall, the curriculum is ambitious and is typically taught in a logical sequence. Learning pathways rightly prioritise pupils' communication skills, English, mathematics and their personal development. Leaders know what they need to do to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching is improving as a result of the targeted staff training and leaders' close monitoring. Further refinements are focusing on securing accurate checks on pupils' learning.

Teachers generally have secure subject knowledge. They give clear explanations. Leaders prioritise the importance of reading. Regular training, including in phonics, continues to improve the support for readers who need extra help. A love of reading is well promoted in classrooms and in the school library. Pupils gain independence and confidence over time. Typically, they progress successfully to further education post-16.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

The support to help pupils to build securely on what they know across different aspects of their learning is variable. Ongoing learning targets and the short-term goals linked to pupils' education, health and care plans are too broad. This reduces the accuracy of checks on pupils' learning, as well as the precision of adaptations and support. As a result, leaders do not have the detailed information they need to check that barriers and gaps in pupils' learning reduce quickly enough.

Pupils' wellbeing is deeply rooted in leaders' ongoing decisions for continuous improvement. They ensure that pupils learn to manage their emotions and build self-esteem, independence and confidence during their time in school. While inclusion is at the heart of leaders' ambitious intentions, some improvements are at an early stage. Well-focused professional training for staff and new leaders is beginning to secure the improvements needed. This includes revising systems for identifying pupils' needs at different stages of their learning. Effective partnerships, such as with social care and families, continue to strengthen the school's provision. Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used appropriately to enhance their school experiences. This includes in improving teaching and

pupils' access to a wider range of support. Alternative provision is used sparingly and always planned in pupils' best interests.

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

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities rapidly build a sense of belonging at Pinewood. Positive relationships are woven through every aspect of school life. Pupils feel safe and well cared for in the school's welcoming culture. They learn to stay safe out in the community, including through guidance from special visitors such as the police. Pupils build important life skills, for example, in travel training and cooking. They are excited to explain how outdoor learning encourages them to try new things, such as how to 'survive' in different situations. Pupils enjoy the range of activities on offer, including lunchtime chess club and rehearsing for a whole school performance.

Pupils are interested to learn and proud of the things they know. Typically, effective strategies support their social and emotional wellbeing. While the curriculum is ambitious, some changes are still at an early stage. Pupils' learning targets are often too broad to be easily measurable. This includes some of those linked to their education, health and care plans. As a result, adaptations to meet individual pupils' needs are not yet precise enough to address gaps quickly enough. Pupils who could achieve more are not always moved on promptly.

Pupils grow in confidence and build independence. They know that to learn well, they need to be in school. Most pupils attend regularly. Close working with families helps to remove barriers for those pupils who find it harder to come to school. Typically, pupils behave well. They play sociably together. Bullying is rare. Classrooms are calm spaces to learn. Pupils are taught strategies to manage their feelings. Effective help is on hand for those pupils who need extra support.

Pupils build the knowledge and skills they need to prepare them for their next steps, including in speech, language, literacy and numeracy. They benefit from helpful information to guide their choices, for example, through visits to careers fairs and learning about college courses. Most gain places in further education when they leave school.

Next steps

- Leaders should secure assessment processes providing accurate starting points for pupils, ambitious end points and precise learning targets so that staff can accurately track pupils' progress.
 - Leaders should improve the consistency and quality of teaching so that adaptations address gaps in pupils' knowledge quickly and so that pupils are moved on promptly when they are ready to learn more.
 - Leaders should continue to strengthen relationships with parents and carers so that they have a consistently clear understanding of the impact of the school's work.
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About this inspection

The headteacher is Taney Howarth. The school is part of a single academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees and governors, known as the full governing board (FGB), chaired by Robin Cregan.

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 pupils, leaders, staff, the chair of the FGB and other trust leaders during the inspection. An inspector also spoke with a representative of the virtual 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 school does not currently use alternative providers.

There have been a series of leadership and staff changes since the previous inspection.

Headteacher: Taney Howarth

Lead inspector:

Christine Dick, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspectors:

Nerrissa Bear, His Majesty's Inspector

Nina Marabese, His Majesty's 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 12 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

209

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

192

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)

48.80%

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 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)

SEN unit

What does this mean?

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

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SLCN - Speech, language and Communication, ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, MLD - Moderate 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 (revised)	97%
2022 leavers (revised)	86%
2021 leavers (revised)	97%

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 (3 term)	10.1%
2023/24 (3 term)	9.8%
2022/23 (3 term)	10.0%

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school
2024/25 (3 term)	26.5%
2023/24 (3 term)	25.9%
2022/23 (3 term)	25.9%

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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