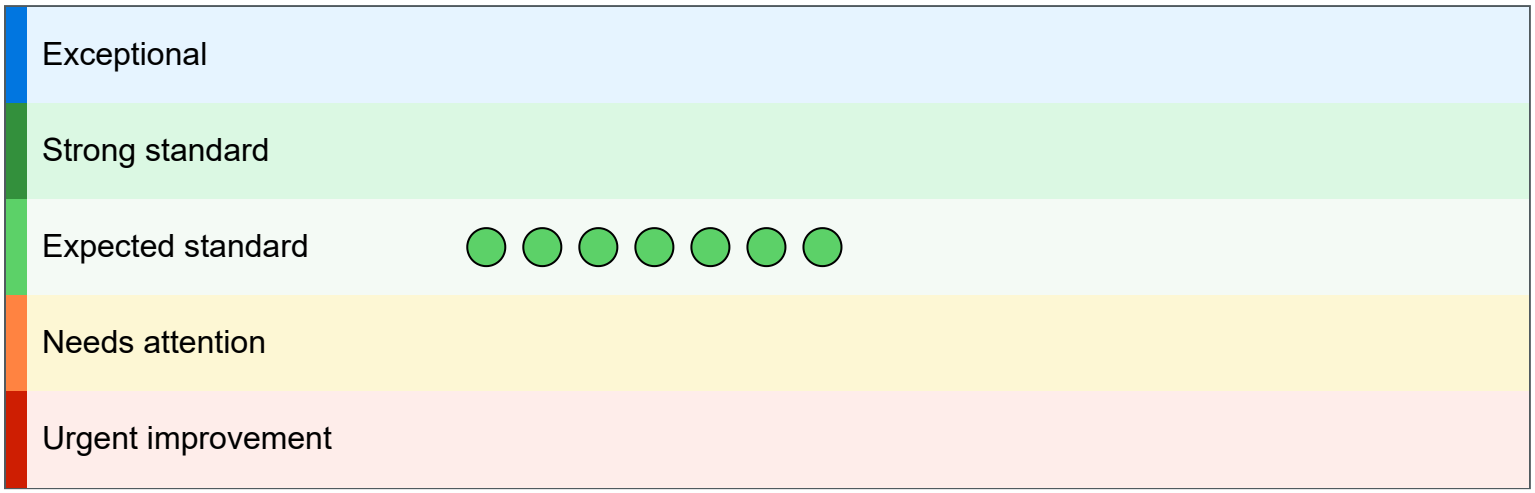
Heaton School

Address: St James Road, Heaton Moor, Stockport, Cheshire, SK4 4RE

Unique reference number (URN): 106173

Inspection report: 22 September 2026



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

The way in which the school prepares pupils for the future is a strength. Pupils make suitable progress towards the targets in their education, health and care plans. This is particularly positive in communication and physical development, emotional regulation and readiness to learn. For example, staff help pupils who are non-verbal to express needs and feelings, make everyday choices and engage in familiar routines. Additionally, information from the school's 'POP' assessments shows that pupils typically achieve positively from their individual starting points.

Leaders understand the importance of ensuring that pupils with complex needs engage purposefully in learning and develop the skills required for greater independence in adult life. As part of this work, leaders have rightly prioritised the development of pupils' essential knowledge and skills. However, teaching, particularly in the semi-formal pathway, lacks a sharp focus on reinforcing and consolidating learning. In these instances, pupils sometimes miss opportunities to strengthen and embed the core literacy and numeracy skills they need to progress confidently.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Leaders have a clear understanding of the factors that affect pupils' attendance. For some pupils, their attendance reflects the complexity of their individual medical needs and family circumstances. Some pupils miss school due to prolonged stays in hospital. Leaders and staff work closely with pupils, families and external professionals to improve attendance when needed. This approach supports a smooth return when pupils are ready. Leaders check pupils' attendance every day and review patterns carefully so that they can act quickly when concerns arise. Most pupils attend well and enjoy coming to school.

Pupils know that staff value them. Relationships between staff and pupils are founded on promoting a sense of belonging and celebrating pupils as individuals. Clear and consistent routines help pupils understand what is expected and settle quickly into learning. When pupils become distressed, staff respond calmly and respectfully while maintaining clear expectations. Pupils typically engage well in lessons and school activities. They are welcoming to visitors and naturally curious. Lunchtimes offer another purposeful opportunity for pupils to come together as a community. Praise is frequent and helps pupils build confidence and self-esteem. Bullying and any incidents of unkind behaviour are dealt with promptly.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have driven improvements to the curriculum since the last inspection. The curriculum is now well matched to the varied needs of pupils. It is organised through 3 distinct learning pathways that balance academic learning with communication, independence and preparation for adulthood. These pathways meet pupils' sensory and communication needs effectively. Learning builds step by step over time. Leaders continually review and refine the curriculum to ensure it remains responsive to pupils' needs.

Typically, the curriculum is taught well. In lessons, staff present information in ways that suit pupils' individual needs, ensuring that learning is accessible and engaging. For example, by using visual prompts and communication boards, pupils access learning meaningfully whatever their special educational needs and/or disabilities are. Pupils learn in small groups and benefit from consistent staff support and activities that help them manage their emotions. Staff generally check what pupils know, understand and can do well.

Leaders prioritise pupils' acquisition of essential knowledge and skills. In the pre-formal pathway, this includes skills such as eye gaze and recognising environmental sounds. Pupils in the semi-formal pathway, who access the school's phonics programme, develop confidence in decoding unfamiliar words. However, staff sometimes miss opportunities to extend or consolidate pupils' foundational knowledge, including literacy and numeracy. At times, this is because some staff lack sufficient knowledge and guidance needed to intervene effectively.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

The school's inclusive approach is a strength. Leaders understand the often complex barriers pupils face. They have effective systems to identify needs when pupils join the school. Tailored transition arrangements help leaders establish pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities and starting points accurately. Staff work closely with families and external professionals to ensure pupils receive appropriate support.

Leaders have woven therapeutic support throughout the curriculum alongside academic learning. This ensures that pupils receive the personalised support they need to engage successfully in learning and make progress. Recent refinements to 'pupil passports' have improved the precision of information shared with staff and other external professionals. This detailed information enables staff to adapt learning activities appropriately and identify changing or emerging needs promptly.

Leaders use additional funding to make sure all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those known to or previously known to social care, have everything they need to access the curriculum and participate in wider school life. For example, interventions such as 'liquid listening' hydrotherapy, rebound therapy and music therapy help to develop pupils' confidence, communication skills and engagement. Pupils who are visually impaired benefit from 'coloured tent' therapy. Over time, this helps pupils to access learning more successfully. Leaders use alternative provision appropriately to support pupils in achieving their aspirations.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Since the previous inspection, including a period of change in leadership and governance, leaders and governors have worked to raise expectations of what all pupils can achieve. Their decisions reflect a clear vision for higher standards. While many staff have risen to this, not all staff have consistently high ambitions for all pupils.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. They have implemented well-considered plans that are driving improvement across the school. This is reflected in a sharper focus on key priorities, including curriculum

development, the growth of middle leadership and a more coherent approach to literacy and numeracy.

Governors provide experience, expertise and support. They ensure that they fulfil their statutory duties. They question leaders well on a range of matters to gain an accurate understanding of the school. They provide informed challenge and demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's complexities. This has helped the school to improve quickly in areas where leaders have identified priorities.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Typically, their workload and wellbeing are considered well by leaders as they have navigated strategic changes to the school. Leaders provide staff with professional development that enables them to fulfil their roles effectively and meet pupils' needs well.

Close partnerships with families help ensure that pupils' needs remain central to the school's work. Parents and carers speak positively about the care and pastoral support that their children receive.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Pupils' personal development and the pastoral support that they receive are at the heart of the school's work. Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities that support their personal development and wellbeing. These opportunities are threaded through daily routines and reflect leaders' clear understanding of pupils' needs, interests and aspirations.

Through the curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education, staff help pupils learn about key topics that prepare them for life in modern Britain. Pupils learn about different faiths and cultures through meaningful events, such as visits to a local mosque and participating in the school's Christingle service. Staff help pupils understand how to stay physically and mentally healthy, how to stay safe online and the importance of tolerance and mutual respect. For example, pupils learn about equality and diversity through high-quality texts that represent different ethnicities and perspectives. Staff use real-life experiences to deepen pupils' understanding of fundamental British values.

Leaders ensure that pupils access meaningful and enriching experiences. Pupils and students in the post-16 provision develop practical skills such as handling money, learning to cook and participating in community events. Pupils with complex needs take part in opportunities they might not otherwise encounter, including climbing, skiing and overnight residential visits. Pupils with physical needs particularly enjoy opportunities such as trips to the beach, where adapted equipment, including submersible wheelchairs, helps them to take a dip in the sea alongside their peers. Pupils also take part in a variety of extra-curricular activities, including sports such as table cricket and golf. Together, these experiences strengthen pupils' character, wellbeing and resilience.

Leaders make sure pupils develop the skills needed for their next steps, including when moving on to college. Increasingly, students take part in work experience linked to their interests and receive independent careers advice. This helps them make informed decisions about their future.

Post-16 provision **Expected standard**

Students in the post-16 provision follow a study programme that reflects their individual needs. Leaders ensure that learning is closely aligned to students' education, health and care plan outcomes. This helps them develop greater independence and the skills needed in readiness for their next steps in education, training or employment. Most students transition successfully to local colleges, where they pursue accreditations and progression routes aligned with their future aspirations.

Teaching in the post-16 provision supports students to develop confidence, independence and practical skills. Functional English and mathematics are embedded in the curriculum. Staff tailor learning to pupils' next steps. For example, students develop practical skills through running classroom cafés and undertaking voluntary roles, such as garden maintenance at a local park. Students have positive relationships with staff. They value the more adult environment, which helps them feel prepared for life beyond school.

Leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of students' progress in all areas of their learning. Additionally, they ensure that students benefit from a broad range of enrichment activities, including participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and a wide range of community-based activities. Over time, students develop useful skills and make progress towards appropriate outcomes.

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

All pupils at Heaton School have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many pupils have complex needs, including significant medical needs, communication difficulties or emotional challenges. Pupils know that staff understand these individual needs well. The start of the school day is typically calm and flexible, allowing pupils time to settle before learning begins. Pupils develop warm and trusting relationships with caring staff. This helps them feel safe and happy.

Behaviour is typically calm and purposeful across the school. Pupils treat each other with kindness and respect. Pupils are supported to manage their emotions and develop positive attitudes to learning. Skilled staff respond sensitively and kindly when pupils feel overwhelmed. On the rare occasion that bullying occurs, it is dealt with swiftly by the staff. Pupils develop a keen sense of belonging and typically attend school well.

Pupils enjoy learning. They access tailored curriculum pathways that are designed to meet their needs. They make positive steps towards achieving their education, health and care plan outcomes. Pupils take part in lessons and activities that reflect their needs and interests. Across pathways, pupils receive support to communicate effectively. For instance, pupils learn to use and understand communication methods such as symbols, signing and assistive technology. This helps pupils to express their choices and share their feelings. Pupils feel valued and know their voice matters.

At the heart of the school's work is the continual focus on equipping pupils with the skills they need in preparation for adulthood and to be active citizens in their communities. This is

also true for students in the post-16 provision. Right from the start, the wider experiences offered to pupils focus on developing their independence and social skills. This offer includes activities such as swimming, puppetry workshops and local trips to the park and shops.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that staff, including teaching assistants, have the guidance and training needed to help pupils to consolidate and practise foundational knowledge, including numeracy and literacy.
- Leaders should ensure that the high expectations for what all pupils can achieve are firmly embedded across the school.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Alice Heywood.

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.

This inspection took place on 22 and 23 September 2026.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding lead, during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority, the headteacher of the virtual school and members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.

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 has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. There have been new senior leader appointments, including the headteacher and deputy headteacher. In addition, there has been a change to the chair of the board of governors, and several new members of the governing body have been appointed.

The school caters for pupils and students with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, autism, moderate learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.

The school makes use of one registered alternative provider for a very small number of pupils.

The school operates across 2 sites in Stockport. This includes a base for post-16 provision at Cheadle Heath Campus, Edgely Road, Stockport SK3 0RJ and the main school site at St James Road, Stockport SK4 4RE.

Headteacher: Andrew Ruddick

Lead inspector:
Kate Bowker, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Sacha Schofield, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from different sources. More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 22 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

94

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.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

48.21%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

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

98.94%

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

1.06%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational needs support 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.

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SLD - Severe learning difficulty, PMLD - Profound and multiple learning difficulty, SLCN - Speech, language and communication, MSI - Multi-sensory impairment, ASD - Autistic spectrum disorder

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)	100%
2022 leavers (revised)	100%

Year	This school
2021 leavers (revised)	81%

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)	10.6%
2023/24 (3 term)	9.2%
2022/23 (3 term)	8.8%

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school
2024/25 (3 term)	34.0%
2023/24 (3 term)	29.1%
2022/23 (3 term)	31.1%

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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