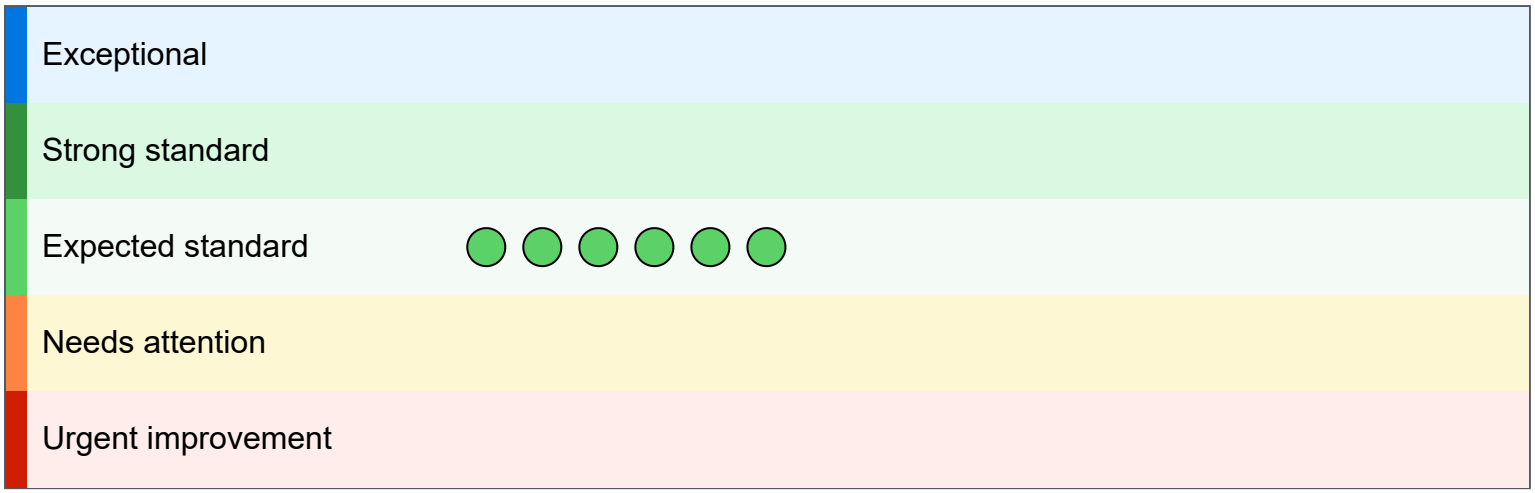
EdStart Schools Oldham and Rochdale

Address: 276 Maygate, Off Chadderton Way, Oldham, Greater Manchester, OL9 6TR

Unique reference number (URN): 151393

Inspection report: 10 March 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.
- Insufficient evidence: Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Pupils achieve well from their starting points. In key stage 4, pupils gain qualifications, including GCSEs. These help to broaden the opportunities that are available to pupils, when they leave the school. In addition, leaders ensure that pupils have the information that they need to make informed decisions about their next steps. Leaders' work to ensure that pupils successfully move into further education, employment or training is a real strength.

Pupils typically progress well through the curriculum in each subject. Staff understand pupils' needs and take appropriate action to help them to access the curriculum successfully. Leaders recognise that many pupils have gaps in their reading, writing and mathematical understanding. In the main, pupils benefit from support to close these gaps quickly. However, in a few subjects, checks on pupils' understanding are less precise. Some gaps in pupils' knowledge are not closed as swiftly as they could be.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

The school offers placements for pupils, who have struggled to access education in mainstream settings. Typically, they are sceptical about the value of education, when they join. Leaders prioritise building positive relationships with pupils and their families. This helps leaders to gain a thorough understanding of the barriers that prevent pupils from engaging with learning. The effectiveness of leaders' actions to reduce these barriers is particularly evident in pupils' increased willingness to attend school. Usually from very low starting points, most pupils' rates of attendance increase considerably over time.

Staff know pupils as individuals and understand their needs well. Staff use this knowledge expertly to inform how they manage pupils' behaviour. This helps to create a calm and orderly environment. Pupils understand leaders' expectations of their conduct and, in the main, comply with these. Over time, pupils' attitudes to learning become more positive. In lessons, they typically settle well to the task in hand.

The school is a safe haven for pupils. Taking their cue from staff, pupils learn the importance of being respectful towards others. Pupils do not worry about bullying or discrimination because they rightly trust that leaders will swiftly resolve any issues that might arise.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders take a measured approach to re-engaging pupils in their education, when they join the school. This includes building pupils' ability to concentrate on learning for sustained periods. Careful thought has been given to establishing morning routines that help pupils to get ready to learn. Over time, pupils access a suitably broad range of subjects.

The curriculum is ambitious and logically ordered. Pupils in key stage 4 study towards qualifications, including GCSEs, which enable them to access next steps in training, employment or education. However, in a few subjects, leaders do not ensure that some

younger pupils access the curriculum in the intended order. This hinders them in building knowledge securely over time.

Staff have suitable knowledge and expertise to teach their subjects well. They carefully adapt learning to meet pupils' needs. Staff prioritise understanding pupils' starting points, including in literacy and numeracy. In the main, staff identify accurately and address quickly any missed or misunderstood learning. However, on occasion, staff do not design learning opportunities that match closely to what pupils already know. In addition, some gaps in pupils' reading knowledge are not identified or addressed as precisely and quickly as they could be.

Inclusion

Expected standard

All pupils have barriers to their learning, when they join the school. They have had disrupted, and often negative, experiences of education in the past. Leaders recognise that establishing pupils' trust is a necessary first step to re-engaging them in their education. To that end, staff prioritise getting to know pupils and building positive relationships with them and their families. Parents and carers particularly appreciate regular communication with staff, which encourages them to work in partnership with the school.

Leaders draw on a range of information to help them understand barriers to pupils' learning and wellbeing. In addition, they identify any previously unrecognised special educational needs and/or disabilities. A determination to successfully reduce these barriers informs every decision that leaders make, from the structure of the school day to the design of classrooms. Staff benefit from a suitable training programme. This helps to ensure that pupils typically receive the help that they need to access the curriculum successfully. Leaders monitor pupils' learning and wellbeing and, where appropriate, adapt the support that is in place.

Leaders work closely with external professionals to enhance pupils' experiences. This includes judicious use of alternative provision, which enables some pupils to access qualifications relevant to their next steps in education, employment or training.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

The proprietor and school leaders are determined that the school will provide a lifeline to pupils who have struggled to access education elsewhere. As such, pupils' best interests are at the heart of everything that leaders do. Close monitoring of pupils' wellbeing, attendance and progress through the curriculum enables leaders to intervene swiftly when needed. This helps to ensure that pupils receive the support that they need to successfully re-engage with their education and with all that the school offers.

Leaders have a secure understanding of what the school does well and where further refinement is needed. They provide a suitable programme of professional learning, so that staff are well equipped to support and teach pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff are particularly proud to work in the school. They share leaders' vision for improving pupils' life chances through education. Staff appreciate the actions that leaders take to increase their expertise and reduce their workload. For example, staff are given time

to collaborate and consult with other subject teachers across the schools in the proprietor group.

The proprietor has established suitable processes for ensuring that all statutory duties, including the independent school standards, are met consistently over time. It has sought external scrutiny by appointing a governing body to offer additional support and challenge to school leaders. This reflects the proprietor's ongoing commitment to continually improving the quality of the school's provision.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders place great emphasis on raising pupils' aspirations. This provides a firm foundation for pupils to begin to value education. To this end, pupils benefit from a wealth of careers information, which is complemented by personalised guidance linked to their individual interests and needs. Pupils successfully progress to appropriate next steps in education, employment or training.

During the school day, pupils engage in a range of enrichment opportunities that broaden their experiences and encourage them to explore new interests. Pupils relish these. Some delight in becoming skilled at baking, while others enjoy participating in different sports or engaging in art activities. Pupils are particularly proud of the mural on the wall of the school's common room, which they helped to design and create. Leaders track pupils' engagement across the enrichment offer. Leaders are in the process of ensuring that this information is used appropriately to encourage all pupils to access a broad range of activities.

Leaders provide a suitable curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education. For instance, pupils develop an understanding of the rule of law and how this is relevant to their own lives. They learn about healthy relationships and the meaning of consent. Pupils are taught about how to minimise risks to their wellbeing when online. Learning about world religions helps pupils to appreciate and respect difference. Most pupils develop a suitable understanding of this important information, in readiness for life in modern Britain.

Leaders take thoughtful action to help pupils to develop their social skills. For instance, pupils engage in a range of games and activities during social times. During these sessions, staff engage alongside pupils and model respect, cooperation and conflict resolution. This helps to equip pupils with the skills that they need to get along well with others.

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

Pupils in this school have struggled to access mainstream education. They have often had negative experiences of school in the past and, when they first join, many do not believe that education has anything to offer them. As soon as pupils arrive in the school, leaders and staff begin to dismantle this perception. Leaders place great emphasis on raising pupils' aspirations and ensuring that they understand the role that education will play in helping them to achieve their goals. Over time, pupils' behaviour and attendance markedly improve as they develop an appreciation of the value in engaging with all that the school offers.

The positive, trusting relationships between pupils and staff are one of the school's biggest assets. Nowhere are these more evident than during social times, when staff and pupils play games together, such as chess or pool. The warmth and enjoyment that shine through these interactions reflect the extent to which pupils feel safe, happy and understood. In turn, pupils treat each other with consideration. Bullying is rare and dealt with quickly.

Pupils are encouraged to contribute to, and become a positive part of the local community. For instance, they participated in an initiative to provide food to homeless people. Pupils also join nature walks, which help them to become immersed in the local area while promoting physical and mental wellbeing.

Pupils benefit from an ambitious curriculum that is typically taught well. Staff have a thorough understanding of the barriers to pupils' learning and wellbeing. They take suitable action to reduce these barriers. This helps pupils to engage in their learning and, over time, begin to enjoy it. Classrooms are calm and pupils are usually attentive to staff. Pupils achieve well from their starting points.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that pupils in key stage 3 encounter the curriculum in the intended order in all subjects, so that they can connect their learning together securely over time.
- Leaders should ensure that staff use assessment effectively in each subject, so that gaps in knowledge are precisely identified and swiftly addressed, and learning activities are closely matched to pupils' starting points.

About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school’s compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

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, the chair of the proprietor body, other leaders and staff.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is part of the EdStart Schools Oldham and Rochdale Limited group of schools.

The school offers short- and long-term alternative provision placements for pupils who have been permanently excluded, or are at risk of exclusion, from their mainstream schools.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs.

The school currently uses one unregistered alternative provision.

The school was registered by the Department for Education on 13 March 2025. This was the school's first standard inspection.

The chair of the proprietor body is James Lowe.

The fees currently charged are £18,000 to £65,000.

The school's email address is admin@edstartschools.com

Headteacher: Kevin Buchanan

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

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1. Quality of education provided Standards met

All standards have been met.

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2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils Standards met

All standards have been met.

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3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils Standards met

All standards have been met.

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4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools Standards met

All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled Standards met

All standards have been met.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools Standards met

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:
Sally Rix, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Pauline Rowland, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

This data is from 10 March 2026

Total pupils

17

School capacity

35

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

5

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

17

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.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

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