

Edstart

Address: EdStart Specialist Education, 5 Gerald Road, Salford, M6 6DW

Unique reference number (URN): 137275

Inspection report: 16 June 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.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Following significant periods of disruption to their education, pupils achieve well overall. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those known, or previously known, to children's social care. Pupils' achievement is reflected in the progress pupils make through the curriculum from their individual starting points. Many pupils leave with a suite of GCSE qualifications and other national accreditations, preparing them successfully for post-16 destinations aligned with their aspirations and interests.

From the outset, staff support pupils to secure important knowledge in reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. Robust checks when pupils arrive identify gaps in this knowledge quickly. Academic support generally helps to address these gaps. However, this support is sometimes imprecise. Teaching in the classroom does not always consolidate the gains that pupils make during extra support sessions. This sometimes hinders their progress through the curriculum.

Pupils show impressive personal and social development. They arrive here often struggling to work alongside their peers effectively and feeling disconnected from learning. The compassionate and skilful pastoral work that takes place has a tangible positive impact on pupils. Pupils work together well and typically show enthusiasm for their learning and the opportunities ahead of them.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Attendance is a constant focus for the school. Leaders have employed a range of successful strategies to improve attendance over time. Pupils develop a sense of belonging towards the provision, and their attendance often improves. When concerns arise, leaders put in place appropriate and timely action plans. These include forging effective relationships with parents and carers to build trust. In many cases, this work is successful and pupils' attendance improves over time. This is particularly notable given that many pupils have experienced disrupted attendance at their previous schools.

Pupils feel lifted by the confidence teachers place in them. They appreciate the consistent, calm and positive approach to behaviour that staff provide. Typically, the school environment is settled and harmonious. Staff recognise what may cause upset or difficulty for pupils and make thoughtful adjustments so pupils can increasingly thrive in school. Pupils who may have struggled to manage their behaviour in previous settings generally present as calm, self-controlled and respectful young people. Leaders identify patterns in pupils' conduct carefully so they can act where needed to help pupils to behave well. Unkind behaviour is not accepted, and any concerns are addressed promptly and sensitively. Bullying is uncommon.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the curriculum. They have rightly adjusted its design so that it is tightly matched to the needs and interests of pupils. The curriculum

prioritises pupils' social and personal development needs alongside a suitable balance of academic learning. It is organised in a logical way that helps pupils to learn and connect knowledge over time.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge and explain new ideas and concepts clearly. They adapt their approaches so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities can access the curriculum successfully. Teachers use questioning well to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge or misconceptions that pupils may have. Typically, these are addressed effectively in the moment. As a result, pupils generally make steady progress through the curriculum.

Many pupils join the school with significant gaps in their reading, writing and mathematics knowledge. The school has effective systems in place to pinpoint carefully the gaps that pupils have in these aspects of their foundational knowledge. Staff use this information to put in place additional academic support. However, the academic support pupils receive is sometimes not precisely matched to their specific gaps in foundational knowledge. This means that some gaps do not close as quickly as they could.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

All pupils have had a disrupted education prior to starting here. Additionally, some pupils have an education, health and care plan for their social, emotional and mental health needs. Leaders collect valuable information about each pupil before they join the school. Thoughtfully planned transition helps pupils to settle. Staff assess pupils' starting points quickly, carefully checking what pupils already know and can do and where gaps exist in their learning.

Leaders understand the different groups of pupils they work with, pinpointing pupils' specific barriers. They use this information to organise appropriate support. For example, pupils benefit from movement breaks, 'soft landings' to start the day or short bursts in the school gym before engaging in learning in the classroom. Daily briefings ensure any changes to pupils' needs are swiftly addressed. More recently, professional development for staff has further strengthened the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leaders review individual pupils' progress often. They work with staff to adjust support when needed. Leaders link closely with families, social workers and the local authority to keep support consistent. For example, the school's work with the virtual school to support pupils who are looked after is impactful. A very small number of pupils attend alternative provision, which is precisely matched to their interests and future aspirations.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

The proprietor, together with leaders at Edstart, care deeply about pupils and want every pupil to succeed. They have high expectations for what pupils can achieve and are committed to giving each pupil a chance to start afresh. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that require further sharpening. They prioritise the right actions and make decisions that are firmly in pupils' best interests. Pupils

now achieve more highly than they once did. Current school improvement priorities are well considered.

Staff feel valued and a part of a team. Their workload is well managed and their wellbeing is given appropriate priority. The professional learning programme for staff is broad and relevant. They access a wide range of evidence informed training. This includes clear induction and ongoing training that continually strengthens staff's practice. For example, recent training is improving understanding of how trauma shapes a child's experiences, as well as improving the ways that staff support learning in the classroom. Relationships with parents and carers, commissioning schools and local authorities are highly constructive. Leaders work in partnership with other agencies to secure the support that pupils need.

Governors and the proprietor know the school's work in detail. They receive comprehensive information from leaders and validate this effectively, for example through regular visits, discussions and scrutiny of evidence. School leaders, including the proprietor, understand their statutory duties well. The proprietor ensures that the independent school standards are met consistently.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

A guiding principle of the school's 'Edstart Way' is to enable pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, to move forward from their individual starting points and grow into confident, mature and capable young adults. This aim is threaded through all aspects of the school's work.

The personal development programme comprehensively covers personal, social and health education, relationships and sex education, citizenship and financial literacy. Key topics such as healthy relationships, online safety, and staying safe in the community are revisited regularly. Importantly, leaders ensure that pupils receive learning that is responsive to their needs. This learning evolves throughout the year to reflect emerging themes relevant to pupils, such as knife crime and misogyny.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well considered. Regular opportunities to discuss current events help pupils to reflect on a range of beliefs, perspectives and opinions different to their own. They learn about democracy, human rights and cultural diversity. Fundamental British values and the rights of different people are taught in meaningful ways. Pupils develop a sense of civic responsibility and community through initiatives such as litter-picking, donating food parcels to a local food bank and working with a homeless shelter. Such experiences help pupils become responsible, tolerant and well-prepared members of society.

Leaders use pupils' interests to increase engagement, for example, through trips to museums, the soccer dome and to participate in outdoor learning. Pupils develop confidence, resilience and social skills. Pupils relish these different experiences.

Leaders recognise that some pupils have extra vulnerabilities which place them at increased risk of not being in education, employment or training. As a result, they have prioritised ensuring that pupils receive high-quality careers advice and guidance, helping them to think carefully about their future options and plan accordingly. This work has been notably

successful, with most pupils progressing to destinations that align well with their interests and aspirations.

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

Pupils at Edstart arrive having experienced significant disruption to their education and wellbeing. They often join the school carrying negative feelings about their learning and sometimes struggle to engage. Pupils meet staff who offer steady, reassuring support, helping them recognise that this school gives them a genuine fresh start. Here, staff quickly understand and reduce the barriers linked to pupils' social and emotional needs, which helps pupils to attend school more frequently than before. Pupils feel safe, cared for and valued here. They are confident that staff help them explain their feelings and deal quickly with bullying or unkind behaviour.

Pupils achieve well from often low starting points. This includes for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils experience an ambitious curriculum shaped around their social, academic and personal development needs. This enables them to achieve meaningful accreditations, including in a range of GCSEs and AQA awards. Many pupils successfully move on to further education, training or employment.

Pupils are calm and respectful throughout the school. They settle into school well due to the predictable routines and effective personalised support in place for them. Typically, classrooms are purposeful spaces. Pupils see value in what they are studying and most enjoy their learning. Staff have high expectations for behaviour and pupils respond well to them. Staff celebrate each pupil's individual successes, helping them to build self belief and a hopeful sense of what their future can hold.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of broader experiences on offer. For example, pupils relish activities such as cookery, padel, football tournaments with other schools and samba music days. These opportunities help pupils to discover new interests and talents.

Next steps

- Leaders should make sure that the targeted academic support pupils receive is matched precisely to the gaps that they have identified in pupils' foundational knowledge.
 - Leaders should ensure that teachers across the whole curriculum provide opportunities for pupils to reinforce their reading, writing, spelling and mathematical knowledge. This is to consolidate the gains that pupils make through targeted academic support.
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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 (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

The school caters for a significant number of pupils with an education, health and care plan with social, emotional and mental health identified as their primary need.

The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision for a very small number of pupils.

The school operates across three sites, including sites located at 13-15 Broad Street, Bury, BL9 0DA and 130 Sale Road, Northern Moor, M23 0BX.

The name of the proprietor is EdStart Specialist Education Ltd. 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

Since the previous inspection by Ofsted in June 2023, there have been some significant changes to leadership and governance, including the appointment of a new executive headteacher, a new head of school and a change to the chair of governors. In this time, there has also been significant staffing changes.

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 spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority, the headteacher of the virtual school, the chair of the proprietor body and the chair of governors.

Executive Headteacher: James Bradley

Independent school standards

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

All standards have been met.

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

Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

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:

Kate Bowker, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Maria McGarry, Ofsted Inspector

Ben Hill, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

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

 This data is from 16 June 2026

Total pupils

106

School capacity

170

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

38

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

68

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.

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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