

Alpha Learning Staffordshire

Address: Hobson Street, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 2AW

Unique reference number (URN): 149601

Inspection report: 23 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

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Some pupils arrive at this school having rarely attended their previous setting. Attendance has been poor for some because of the complexity of their needs. Leaders understand pupils well. They have put in place effective systems to monitor attendance and respond quickly when pupils are absent. Staff track pupils closely and work with families and external agencies to improve from low starting points. They take a proactive approach to reducing barriers to attendance and maintain high expectations for all pupils. Many pupils now attend more regularly than they did and enjoy receiving rewards for doing so. This positive relationships in the school, act as motivation for some to attend.

Behaviour is managed effectively. Clear routines and consistent approaches support pupils to regulate their behaviour. In lessons, most pupils meet these expectations and take part in their learning. Staff respond calmly when issues arise and help pupils return to learning quickly. Leaders continually model to staff how to support pupils, demonstrating how expectations should be applied. Staff in turn are willing to learn and be the best role models they can be. Tutorial time offers moments of reflection and celebration. Here, pupils self-assess their performance using their behaviour for learning scales. They review with staff how to improve and they start each day with a fresh start.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Pupils now study an ambitious curriculum that is designed to meet their needs. They follow clear qualification pathways and are supported to understand what they are working towards. Leaders assess pupils carefully when they join the school. Staff use this information well to plan work and interventions that address gaps in their learning. When needed, additional interventions are provided to close gaps in their basic skills.

In the most effective lessons, staff explain learning clearly. They use questioning well and model what is expected to help pupils understand. Pupils study a broad range of subjects and work towards appropriate qualifications. The development of pupils' basic skills, particularly reading and writing are identified as key to future success. Where this is applied well, pupils use these skills to communicate their understanding effectively. While some pupils are supported to improve their writing over time, others are not. This impacts on their ability to demonstrate what they understand. This causes pupils to feel frustrated and less likely to engage with learning.

Leaders are continuing to strengthen how well staff deliver the curriculum across all subjects. This includes supporting them to adapt learning for the wide range of needs that pupils have. Where implementation is most effective, pupils are supported to build knowledge securely over time.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have successfully created a culture where all pupils feel included. They understand pupils' needs well, including their social, emotional and mental health needs and wider

vulnerabilities. Staff use detailed pupil profile plans, to adapt support effectively. These plans are highly personalised. Pupils benefit from small group teaching, one-to-one support and targeted interventions. Relationships are central to this approach and help pupils feel unthreatened and able to express themselves. This helps pupils to settle and take part in lessons.

Leaders work well with external partners, including the local authority and the virtual school. These partnerships reflect a shared commitment to supporting the most vulnerable pupils in Stoke-on-Trent. Leaders work closely with these services to ensure that pupils receive timely and appropriate support. This includes advocating for pupils where needed to get access to additional resources to help them. The school uses extra funding where needed to remove any barriers to learning or attendance.

Clear daily systems, including individual learning and behaviour targets, help pupils stay focused on learning. Staff review these regularly and communicate regularly with parents and carers. This supports families to reinforce positive message to keep pupils motivated. The school's approach to inclusion enables many pupils to access education successfully for the first time.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils benefit from a broad personal development programme that is designed to develop their tolerance, respect and equality. The curriculum reflects pupils experiences and the challenges they face. Pupils learn about important topics such as relationships, safety, exploitation and healthy lifestyles. Learning is supported by visits to places or external speakers, who bring challenging topics to life. This helps pupils understand risk and make informed choices. Pupils learn about knife crime and online safety. Over time, they learn to talk about these topics and show growing awareness of how to keep themselves safe.

Developing pupils' practical wisdom is key. Supporting them to make the right choices for the right reasons, is central to this school's purpose. Leaders understand that to do so, such behaviour has to be modelled by staff. A significant amount of time is invested in developing relationships and understanding pupils' past experiences. Information gathered, helps shape activities that successfully develop pupils sense of belonging and identity.

Pupils are more willing to take part in school life and engage with others, once they learn to trust adults and each other. Many improve their behaviour, confidence and ability to manage their emotions. Activities such as supporting food banks and taking part in local projects help pupils' develop a sense of responsibility and contribution to the community. Pupils show respect for others and learn the importance of fitness and discipline in the boxing gym. They understand ideas such as equality and protected characteristics. They celebrate diversity and difference through cultural food days. Pupils enjoy these events.

Pupils also benefit from impartial careers guidance. They visit colleges and learn about different career pathways. This helps them begin to think about their future and possible next steps. Leaders are further developing this programme to ensure that what pupils are offered is closely matched to their interests.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils begin to make progress from their starting points when they join the school. Many have not achieved their potential in their past school placements. At Alpha, they engage better in lessons and are increasingly willing to take part. This is a significant achievement for some. Some pupils' work shows improvement. For some, clearer organisation and legible handwriting make demonstrating their understanding easier.

However, such progress is not consistent for all pupils. For some, persistent absence means they miss important learning. Too often, pupils' work is incomplete or not presented clearly. In some cases, handwriting is difficult to read and letter formation inaccurate. This makes it harder for pupils to record their ideas accurately and affects their writing fluency. When this happens, pupils cannot demonstrate what they know or express themselves clearly. As a result, pupils do not develop knowledge and skills as securely as they should or make the progress they are capable of.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the improvements that still need to be made. They understand that pupils' achievement varies and some do not achieve as well as they should. Their ambition is for all pupils to achieve their full potential. However, this ambition is not fully realised for some pupils. The current systems for monitoring the impact of the school's provision have not ensured that practice and outcomes are consistent across the school.

Leaders have improved the school since the previous inspection. Pupils now benefit from a clear curriculum and effective support for their individual needs. The school's inclusive culture helps pupils feel safe and reengage with learning. Leaders and staff work tirelessly in the best interests of pupils, many of whom have experienced significant disruption to their education.

External partners, including the local authority and the virtual school, speak positively about the support pupils receive. They recognise leaders' moral purpose and their focus on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable pupils in the city. Positive relationships with these partners ensure pupils receive coordinated support. The proprietor provides appropriate oversight and supports school leaders on the journey of continued improvement.

Staff feel valued and supported. They understand expectations and share leaders' commitment to helping pupils succeed. Parents and carers are extremely positive about the school and appreciate the difference it has made to their children. Pupils speak warmly about the support they receive and show increasing confidence in their learning.

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

Alpha is a place where pupils reconnect with learning and develop hope for their futures. Many arrive having struggled in previous settings and often feel let down or misunderstood. Here, they are given time and support to rebuild confidence. Pupils begin to trust adults and feel able to share their anxieties and learning challenges. Relationships are key to this feeling of security. This is because staff are calm and always willing to do extra to support them. As a result, they invest in their relationships which serves to motivate them to want to do well. This has an impact of pupils' conduct. In time, their behaviour settles. In lessons, pupils follow routines and engage with their work. Learning continues even when issues arise. Pupils appreciate being given opportunities to take time out when needed. This provides time for the to self-regulate their emotions. Pupils feel safe and happy at this school. Harassment and unkindness are never accepted.

Pupils benefit from small classes and individualised support. When learning is most effective, staff break learning into manageable steps so pupils feel able to complete it. Pupils are increasingly willing to contribute and talk about their work. They enjoy trips and wider activities that help them develop confidence, independence and social skills. Over time, pupils develop their ambitions and begin to think about life after school. They recognise that to be successful they need qualifications. For some, reengaging with education is a small but significant achievement. While others are able to access GCSE qualifications. The school understand that not all pupils do not achieve as well as they could in their daily learning.

Parents and carers are extremely positive about the difference the school makes to their children's lives. Many celebrate their children feeling part of the school community. Seeing their child succeed in school for the first time makes them immensely proud.

Next steps

- Leaders should strengthen their processes for how they check on the impact of the curriculum, so that they have an accurate view of how well pupils are learning and ensure school development targets are delivered as intended.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff apply agreed teaching approaches to adapt learning across subjects, so that all pupils are supported build their knowledge securely over time.
 - Leaders should strengthen the teaching of writing, including handwriting, presentation and basic transcription skills, so that pupils can record and communicate their understanding accurately and fluently.
 - Leaders should develop pupils' future aspirations and future destinations, so that all pupils are clear about their next steps and feel well prepared for the next stage of education, training or employment.
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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 (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the centre manager, the school business manager and other staff. They also spoke with the proprietor.

The lead inspector spoke with several parents and carers, the local authority placement lead and the head of the virtual school for Stoke-on-Trent.

Inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

All pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum disorder. The age-range of the pupils who attend are between 11 and 16.

The school does not use alternative provision.

The name of the proprietor is Lindon Newbon.

The fees currently charged at a daily rate of £168.

The school's email address is: info@alphalearningstaffordshire.co.uk

Headteacher: Nadine Wedgwood

Independent school standards

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

1. Quality of education provided

Standards not met

The following standards have not been met:

Paragraph 3

The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school—

(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;

(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;

(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;

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.

The following standards have not been met:

Paragraph 34(1)

The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–

- (a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
- (b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and

Lead inspector:

Antony Bradshaw, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Antony Edkins, 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 23 June 2026

Total pupils

25

School capacity

35

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

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.

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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