



Fox Wood Special School

Address: Holes Lane, Woolston, Warrington, Cheshire, WA1 4LS

Unique reference number (URN): 111496

Inspection report: 19 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.

Exceptional ●

Attendance and behaviour

Exceptional ●

The school's focus on attendance is resolute. A large proportion of pupils have high levels of medical needs. Leaders have gone to great lengths to ensure that these pupils' needs can be supported on the school site. Pupils enjoy coming to school and do not want to miss out. As a result, the school has maintained high levels of attendance over several years. Despite the complexity of pupils' needs, the school's attendance compares very favourably to other special schools as well as to that of all pupils with an education, health and care plan nationally. The proportion of pupils who regularly miss school is low.

Leaders have developed highly effective systems to support pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs. Staff are attuned to pupils' sensory needs and swiftly intervene to help pupils remain focused and calm. Consequently, learning time is not lost. Over time, pupils are helped to develop the tools they need to manage their own behaviour and emotions. Pupils make great strides with their communication, which means they become less reliant on behaviour as a method of communication. Pupils' behaviour transforms during their time at the school because the school's personalised approaches enable them to flourish.

Inclusion

Exceptional ●

A shared commitment to true inclusion is the lifeblood of the school. It underpins the school's transformational impact on pupils learning and development. Education, health and care professionals work together seamlessly to support pupils. They apply leaders' high-quality systems and strategies expertly well. This ensures that changes in pupils' needs are swiftly identified, assessed and supported. The school's dynamic and individualised approaches are well established and very effective. They consistently reduce multiple and complex barriers to pupils' learning and well-being.

Leaders' systems to reduce additional vulnerabilities are highly effective. For example, leaders' use of extra funding to support disadvantaged pupils is thoughtful and highly impactful. The school provides excellent support for pupils known or previously known to children's social care. This is helped by the close joint working between staff and parents and carers. Staff listen carefully to families and pupils. They ensure that their voice is central to the review and planning of support.

Leaders have expertly built every aspect of the school's work around pupils' diverse needs. Their systems, such as the 'ready to learn' routine at the start of the day, are designed meticulously to ensure that all pupils receive the bespoke help they need to thrive.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils achieve consistently well from their varied starting points. They make noteworthy progress in their communication, language and social skills relative to their age and stage of development. Pupils also make strong gains in other areas. The relatively small proportion of pupils who study a subject-based curriculum gain detailed knowledge and skills in the different subjects that they study.

All pupils make giant strides in their preparation for adulthood. For example, they learn about the world of work and how to manage money. Pupils achieve well in relation to the targets in their education, health and care plans. Pupils produce high-quality work, of which they are rightly proud. For example, pupils produce excellent artwork based on the work of professional artists. Pupils also demonstrate their knowledge and skills through a number of enterprise challenges that provide opportunities for them to apply their learning to real-world situations.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have designed ambitious curriculum pathways for all pupils. They have used their knowledge of pupils and relevant research to design cutting-edge and progressive curriculums. Leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the quality of curriculum and teaching. They use this understanding to inform their plans for improvement.

Staff focus on developing pupils' core knowledge in reading, writing, speaking and mathematics. They use a range of assessment systems with precision. This ensures that teaching is matched carefully to pupils' needs and that barriers to learning reduce. Staff are very skilled at tailoring the curriculum to each pupil's needs. For example, the school has devised a comprehensive approach to the teaching of early reading for pupils who are not ready to formally recognise different letters and sounds.

Leaders have ensured that staff have the knowledge and expertise to teach effectively across the curriculum and for pupils with very different needs. Staff use a varied range of communication systems to communicate effectively with all pupils. Staff deliberately revisit key learning on many occasions. This helps pupils to be secure in their learning of things that are important for independent living, such as being able to count accurately.

Early years

Strong standard ●

Leaders have ensured that children get off to a strong start at 'fox cubs'. Most children join the school at the start of the Reception Year. Staff take great care to ensure that each child has a careful transition plan that supports a seamless start to the early years. Staff work in close partnership with parents and carers to ensure that each child's needs are known and planned for before they start and as they settle in.

Staff interact purposefully with children. They use a range of communication strategies that are well suited to children's developmental and sensory needs. Staff use many different

approaches that help children to understand or use more words. They are highly skilled at matching activities to children's individual needs.

The provision at 'fox cubs' mirrors that of the main school. Many of the routines, such as 'ready to learn' at the start of the day, are similar to those on the main site. This helps to create a predictable environment that supports children's transition to the main school. Children also benefit from similar resources to those in the main school, such as a sensory room, to support their wider needs. Children are well prepared for key stage 1.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders and governors have high expectations of pupils, staff and families. They advocate for pupils and their families passionately and their commitment to improving the life chances of every pupil is relentless. Leaders have refined their systems over many years to develop high-quality packages of education and support. The school's approaches have been mature and highly impactful for several years.

Staff are positive about working at the school. They feel empowered by the school's ethos and their high-quality training. They share leaders' commitment to pupils and feel well supported. Leaders and staff model the professional, respectful and ambitious behaviours that are hallmarks of the school.

Leaders' commitment to helping pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities extends beyond the school gates. They play an active and valued role across the local authority to support a range of settings.

Governors know the school incredibly well. They provide thoughtful support and challenge to leaders across all aspects of the school's work. On occasion, the work of governors is not as systematic as it could be. For example, the scrutiny from governors linked to key aspects of the school's work is not always fed back to the rest of the governing body.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders have established a holistic and personalised approach to pupils' personal development. Pupils benefit from high levels of pastoral care. Leaders have placed the maintenance of pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing at the heart of the school's work. Pupils know that they and their peers matter because they are listened to and cared for. The school's culture breeds respect and compassion. Over time, pupils develop resilience and confidence. They find their voice and feel proud of their achievements.

Leaders are steadfast in their commitment to broadening pupils' horizons. Pupils benefit from a range of clubs, such as cooking and science club. They enjoy many trips, from visiting a local park to space-themed exploration days. Pupils learn about a variety of risks, including those that are online. They develop a stage-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships, including the notion of consent. The school provides well-planned opportunities for pupils to learn about the beauty of diversity as well as the things that we have in common.

Preparing pupils for adulthood is a golden thread that runs throughout the school. Staff are adept at helping each pupil to become more independent. Pupils develop skills towards independence and learn valuable lessons about the world of work. Many pupils develop their own enterprises within school, such as making crafts and running a sandwich delivery service. Pupils benefit from a highly structured careers programme and personalised action plans.

The school promotes pupils' understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils deepen their understanding of democracy by voting for their peers in school council elections. They learn to respect themselves and others. Pupils relish the opportunity to assume leadership roles such as wellbeing champions and members of the eco council.

Post 16 provision

Strong standard ●

Leaders have carefully planned the study programmes so they are well matched to students' developmental needs and aspirations. Teachers deliver these study programmes in a way that is consistently effective. Students continue to develop their basic skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics from their different starting points. Most students gain appropriate qualifications.

Staff focus on preparing students for life after Fox Wood. Students develop independent living skills, such as self-care, how to manage money and those relating to employment. Students take part in valuable work experience at the school or with external businesses. Students choose which jobs they are most interested in, such as catering or maintenance. Where relevant, students study for relevant qualifications, such as certificates in food hygiene, alongside their work experience.

Students talk confidently about their learning and the value they attach to being part of the sixth form community. They are clear about their ambitions and what they want the future to look like. Students are very well prepared for their futures. Some enter supported living arrangements, whereas others proceed to other colleges of further education or paid employment.

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

Pupils are welcomed to Fox Wood by staff with big smiles and open hearts. Daily, positive interactions help staff and pupils build remarkably strong bonds. This ensures that pupils' experience of school is happy and frequently joyful.

Pupils flourish during their time at Fox Wood. From their varied starting points, pupils make small and consistent gains in their learning that amount to giant leaps over time. The progress that they make in their ability to communicate with others is often astonishing. Pupils learn to express their thoughts, wants and needs, which is the bedrock of the school's success. This enables pupils to shine and underpins the transformational impact of the school's work.

Staff have created a culture of belonging. Pupils feel safe and know that they matter. Conflict between pupils, including bullying, is exceedingly rare. Pupils' behaviour reflects the school's emphasis on kindness and respect. Some pupils are 'kindness champions' and act as role models to others.

Pupils' participation in learning develops impressively over time. High-quality teaching ensures that pupils become absorbed in learning. Pupils are eager to share the things they enjoy most about school, such as reading, drama and swimming.

The school's support for pupils' holistic needs is exemplary. Pupils benefit from highly individualised packages of support that meet their educational, health and care needs. Pupils begin preparing for adulthood from the moment they join the school. They gain the skills to be increasingly independent and to advocate for themselves.

Pupils value the school's extensive enrichment offer. They enjoy sporting and creative clubs, as well as frequent opportunities to be active within the local community. Pupils are proud to hold positions of responsibility, such as being members of the school council and eco committee.

Next steps

- Leaders and governors should ensure that governors' systems for supporting and challenging leaders are systematic to support further improvement across all aspects of the school's work.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Trish Chapman.

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 the headteacher, senior leaders and other staff, pupils and students, governors, a representative from Warrington local authority and the school's improvement partners.

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:

All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan. The school predominantly caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

The school also, under the same registration, runs a provision for children in the early years and pupils in Year 1. This provision is located at Sandy Lane, Orford, Warrington, WA2 9HY. This provision opened after the previous inspection.

Headteacher: Lucinda Duffy

Lead inspector:


Will Smith, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspector:

Gary Anders, Ofsted 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 19 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

138

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

78

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)

50.42%

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

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)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

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

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SLD - Severe 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
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2023 leavers (revised)	100%
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2022 leavers (revised)	
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2021 leavers (revised)	
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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
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2024/25 (3 term)	9.6%
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2023/24 (3 term)	9.3%
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2022/23 (3 term)	10.1%
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Persistent absence

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

Year	This school
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2024/25 (3 term)	25.4%
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Year	This school
2023/24 (3 term)	31.8%
2022/23 (3 term)	34.6%

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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