

Sturminster Newton High School

Address: Bath Road, Bath Road, Sturminster Newton, Dorset, DT10 1DT

Unique reference number (URN): 149657

Inspection report: 21 April 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.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Generally, pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve well. They have a secure understanding of reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils typically achieve in line with national averages at GCSE and post-16. On the whole, any gaps in pupils' knowledge are closed quickly. Disadvantaged pupils progress steadily through the curriculum. They achieve well compared with others nationally.

Pupils routinely recall what they have learned previously. They become adept at using this existing knowledge to help them to learn new content. Consequently, pupils' knowledge builds step by step. Over time, pupils use subject-specific language with increasing accuracy. However, sometimes, teaching does not ensure pupils' written work is of a consistently high quality. Where this occurs, some pupils' written work lacks depth and detail.

Pupils are prepared well for their next steps in education, employment or training. Post-16 students progress to appropriate destinations.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Although pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), do not attend as regularly as others nationally, leaders are taking effective action. They have high expectations of pupils' attendance and pupils understand the importance of coming to school. Leaders understand the patterns of absence and the reasons that pupils miss school. Reasonable adjustments are made to remove barriers for pupils with SEND, enabling them to improve their rates of attendance. Leaders also create a sense of belonging for pupils which has led to improving rates of attendance over time.

The school has high expectations of behaviour. Behaviour is positive. Pupils understand the school rules and follow clear routines. They are courteous and respectful to each other and to staff. This contributes to a calm and orderly atmosphere around the school, including social times and lesson change-overs. Pupils display positive attitudes and generally remain focused on learning. When pupils need additional help to improve their behaviour, leaders act effectively. Leaders use alternative provision appropriately to support pupils. This has contributed to low levels of suspensions. Leaders address any instances of bullying, discrimination or harassment promptly.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is broad and ambitious. Leaders have carefully set out what pupils will learn so that they build their knowledge and understanding. Leaders review how well teachers implement the curriculum and make improvements when required. Leaders prioritise professional learning for staff. As a result, the curriculum is generally taught well across the school. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to explain concepts clearly. They typically adapt activities effectively to meet pupils' needs, including for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff usually check what pupils have retained in their

memory and change learning activities to address any misconceptions. However, this is not consistent across some subjects across the key stages. Leaders have a broadly accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. They use this understanding to provide additional oversight and support where it is needed.

Leaders have prioritised developing pupils' literacy skills and core mathematics skills. They identify pupils who have not developed the foundations of reading. Well-trained staff provide support that helps these pupils to catch up with their peers.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear commitment for all pupils to feel part of the Sturminster Newton High School community. Staff identify the individual educational and pastoral needs of pupils when they join the school. They plan support for pupils in partnership with other agencies. For example, the school has a wide range of support available for pupils experiencing mental health challenges. This includes in the 'hub', where pupils are supported with their mental health or to improve their reading. As a result, pupils receive the right help they need. Leaders use additional funding appropriately to make a positive difference to disadvantaged pupils' learning and wider experiences. The alternative provision used by the school is selected in the best interests of pupils. Leaders carefully review the impact of the additional support provided to pupils. This helps the school to identify when changes need to be made to further improve pupils' experiences.

Staff use their training to identify and support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers typically support pupils with SEND effectively to learn as well as their peers. When this support isn't fully in place, it makes it harder for these pupils to learn as well. Students in the sixth form particularly appreciate how well teachers adapt their teaching to meet their needs.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

In the last 2 years, the leadership of the school has stabilised. Leaders' high expectations have developed the culture of the school. They ensure the interests of pupils and their families are at the forefront of their actions. Leaders act in the best interests of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. Leaders, including those responsible for governance, have developed a strong sense of community in this small school.

Trustees and local governors are committed to the ethos of the school. They fulfil their statutory duties effectively. They support and challenge leaders effectively and prioritise staff wellbeing. Trustees and governors, together with leaders, have an accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and areas of development. They take largely effective action to bring about sustainable improvements in all areas of the school's provision, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. Trustees and governors ensure there are robust checks to ensure pupils are safe and cared for.

Staff, including those who are at the start of their careers, benefit from high-quality, research-informed professional learning that supports leaders' aims. Leaders focus staff on important, small improvement ideas and actions that enable the quality of teaching to

improve. Leaders' effective support helps staff's sense of wellbeing. Their workload is carefully considered. Staff are very positive about the leadership of the school and feel valued.

Leaders, including trustees and governors, engage constructively with parents and carers. The large majority of parents are positive about the support the school provides for their children.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The conduct of pupils reflects the school's values of respect, responsibility and resilience. These values help pupils make positive decisions about their behaviour. Pupils understand that these are important elements of being a positive citizen in modern Britain. Pupils are respectful of others and learn about people who have characteristics that are protected by law. Pupils feel part of the school community, with older pupils acting as role models for younger ones.

Leaders ensure that the personal development of pupils is well planned. Age-appropriate coverage of topics such as relationships and personal safety helps pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe online and in the wider community. In addition, the wider curriculum helps pupils look after their physical and mental health. The range of careers events planned for each year group means that pupils are well informed about the possible routes available for their next steps. This includes opportunities to work with employers to experience the world of work.

Leaders ensure that pupils broaden their horizons, social skills and interests during their time at the school. This includes community activities, such as volunteering at the local cheese festival, or personal challenges such as the Ten Tors Challenge. Leaders remove any barriers to participation for disadvantaged pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. In spite of the small size of the school, there are a range of clubs and groups to develop pupils' talents and interests. For example, there are a number of sport clubs and a group for pupils to learn to crochet. Trips and the 'key stage 3 activities week' bring enrichment opportunities to life. The whole-school drama productions engage pupils across the year groups in a range of performance and backstage roles.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Students follow a well-designed study programme. This includes a range of vocational and academic courses that are well matched to students' individual needs and aspirations. Students generally achieve in line with national averages across both types of courses. Subject curriculums are thoughtfully structured and mostly staff deliver these effectively. In a small number of subjects, some teaching is less well developed, leading to lower attainment by students in national tests.

The sixth form has an above-average proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers use effective strategies to support these students and other pupils who face disadvantages. Students produce work which is typically of high quality. They appreciate the smaller class sizes that enable teachers to provide individual

support. Leaders are refining the delivery of a small number of academic subjects, to ensure all pupils receive the support they need in every subject lesson.

Students receive a structured personal development programme. They feel this prepares them well for adult life. Students enjoy leadership opportunities, such as to be head students or to take part in the school council. Students contribute to school life, such as running clubs for younger pupils.

All students, including those with SEND, benefit from high-quality careers education. They appreciate the support from the school with university applications. A wide range of activities prepare students well for their next steps. This includes work experience, meeting employers and university outreach programmes.

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

Pupils enjoy being part of the Sturminster Newton High School community. Pupils feel safe in school. They receive support from staff when they need it and are well cared for. Pupils know who to turn to if they need help. Pupils behave well in lessons and are generally keen to learn.

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, appreciate the small school community where they have respectful working relationships with staff. Older pupils take pride in helping and giving advice to their younger friends. Sixth-form students act as positive role models for younger pupils, showing self-discipline and maturity.

Pupils embrace the school's values of respect, responsibility and resilience. They display these in their behaviour. Pupils respect differences between people. They typically get along well with each other and bullying is uncommon. On the rare occasions it does occur, pupils are confident that staff take it seriously and resolve it quickly.

Not all pupils attend regularly. However, increasingly, they understand that it is important to do so. They feel a sense of belonging, and as a result more pupils are starting to attend school regularly.

Most pupils enjoy their learning. They study a curriculum that meets their needs, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Overall, pupils achieve in line with their peers nationally. Pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils are supported effectively to progress well through the curriculum.

Pupils develop their confidence through a wide variety of activities. They go on a range of educational visits. These include trips to residential centres, theatres, museums and universities and visits overseas. Pupils enjoy taking part in experiences such as drama productions, sports and the Ten Tors Challenge. They relish taking on leadership roles, such as on the school council, and taking part in charity work to support the local community. Sixth-form students enjoy volunteering and work experience. These activities foster their sense of responsibility. Pupils leave school well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teaching consistently identifies and removes barriers to learning for all pupils, so they know more and remember more over time.
 - Leaders should ensure highly effective teaching is consistently embedded across all subjects, including post-16, so that all pupils achieve very well.
 - Leaders should continue to foster a sense of belonging for pupils and remove barriers so that all pupils attend well.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Sherborne Area School's Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, David Watson OBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Middleton.

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 school leaders, teachers, trust leaders, trustees and local governors during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

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 school uses 7 alternative providers, including 2 that are unregistered.

There have been significant changes in governance and leadership since the last inspection.

Headteacher: Michael Motteram

Lead inspector:

Sarah Wilson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Matthew Collins, Ofsted Inspector

Helen Kerr, Ofsted Inspector

Matthew Barnes, His Majesty's 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 21 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

617

Well below average

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.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

900

Below average

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.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

29.64%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 28.9%

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

3.73%

Close to average

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.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

22.04%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

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).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	49.0%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	45.8%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23		45.3%	

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	46.1	46.0	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	42.2	45.9	Close to average
2022/23		46.3	

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.39	-0.03	Below
2022/23		-0.03	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	27.3%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	21.4%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23		25.2%	

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	32.7	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	32.5	34.6	Close to average
2022/23		35.0	

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.57	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23		-0.57	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	27.3%	53.1%	-25.9 pp
2023/24 (final)	21.4%	53.1%	-31.7 pp
2022/23		52.4%	

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	32.7	50.4	-17.8
2023/24 (final)	32.5	50.0	-17.5
2022/23		50.3	

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.57	0.16	-0.73
2022/23		0.17	

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	National average	Compared with national average
2022 leavers (revised)	94%	93%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	28.51	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	30.34	34.38	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.2	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	-0.1	0.0	Close to average

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	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	10.6%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	11.5%	8.9%	Above

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	25.9%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	33.2%	25.6%	Above

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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