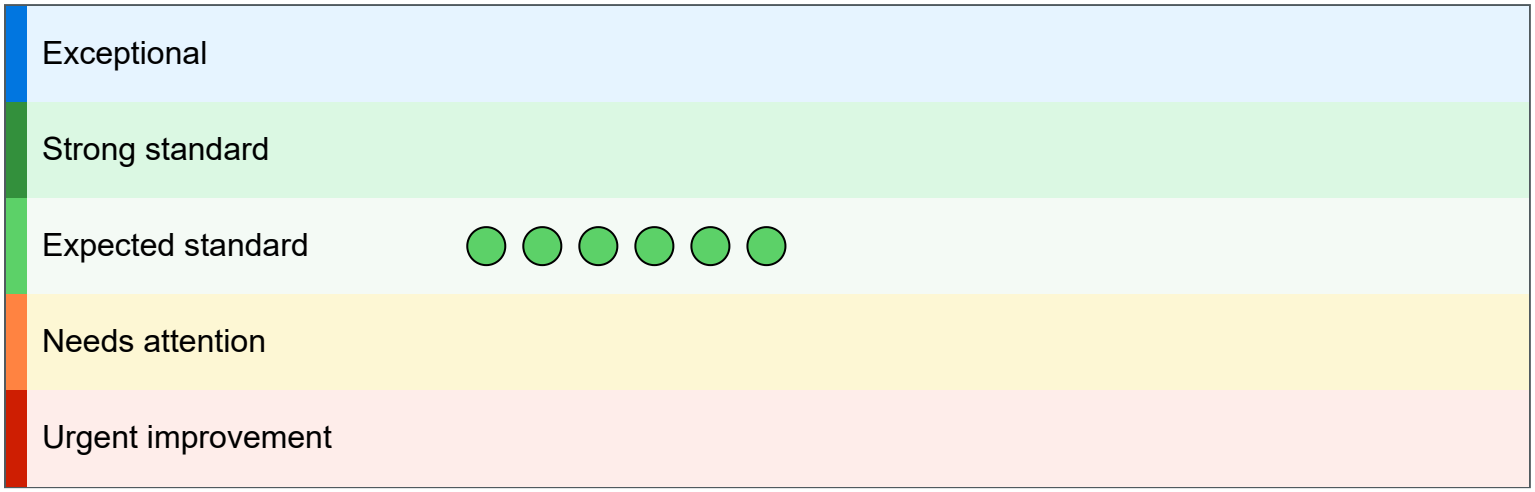
Spruce House School

Address: 114 Milton Road, Sneyd Green, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 6HD

Unique reference number (URN): 151847

Inspection report: 13 October 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 join the school having previously faced barriers to their learning and wellbeing. They have significant gaps in basic skills such as reading and spelling. Leaders have not yet ensured that teachers identify precise next steps for pupils. This means that, sometimes, opportunities are missed to close those gaps quickly.

That said, pupils make meaningful progress from their individual starting points. For example, important achievements include improved attendance, a growing understanding of how to regulate their behaviour and increased readiness for learning. In this sense, pupils are increasingly prepared for their next stages of education.

Where pupils are ready to learn, they build on their knowledge and skills over time. For example, pupils recall learning about gravity and apply it to new situations. Other pupils understand how life in ancient Greece was different to modern day living.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Pupils' attendance is improving and most pupils now attend school every day. Leaders work closely with carers to maintain these improvements. They are now turning their attention to reducing incidents of lateness. Systems to share information that supports timely attendance are robust. This work is paying off.

Pupils' behaviour and readiness for learning is variable. Pupils who are new to the school are beginning to benefit from the school's approach to behaviour management. There are high expectations and all adults in school consistently follow the agreed processes to manage behaviour effectively. That said, sometimes behaviour distracts from learning.

Staff build caring relationships with pupils. They quickly recognise when pupils might need extra support and are effective in their responses. Staff are calm and caring when pupils struggle to manage their emotions. This helps pupils to feel safe and to build self-esteem. Leaders take any concerns about bullying seriously. They respond appropriately and effectively.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have developed a broad and ambitious curriculum for pupils in Year 1 and above. It clearly sets out what pupils are to learn. It is organised so that knowledge and skills are built over time. However, leaders recognise that there is more work to do to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of pupils at the very early stages of learning, including those who need to develop foundational knowledge and skills before accessing more advanced learning.

When pupils arrive at the school, they are not always ready to access the curriculum. Leaders rightly prioritise teaching the skills and confidence pupils need to re-engage with

learning. Teaching these skills is effective. For example, pupils learn to share resources and take turns.

Teachers are adept at adapting support to meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. However, they are not yet skilful enough at adapting academic learning. This means that teaching does not always match pupils' needs and starting points. While teachers assess pupils' learning, they do not use this accurately to identify gaps in learning, including in important skills such as reading and spelling. As a result, staff do not always identify precisely what pupils need to learn next, including where they have gaps in phonics learning.

Inclusion

Expected standard

There is a shared vision that all pupils can and will thrive. As a result, there is a pin-sharp focus on identifying pupils' needs and meeting them by removing and reducing barriers wherever possible. The school's work is particularly effective in meeting pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs.

Pupils at the school have experienced trauma and disjointed previous education. Leaders have prioritised building pupils' confidence in themselves and their trust in the staff and school. Leaders work closely with carers, experts within the proprietor group and external agencies to support pupils. Work with pupils' carers has proven to be particularly successful in improving attendance, for example.

Leaders and staff use pupils' education, health and care plans and other important information to identify specific support. They regularly check the impact of their work and adapt their individual approaches, when needed.

All of the school's work is based on the warm, nurturing and trusting relationships staff build with pupils. Every pupil is fully included in all that the school has to offer, and every pupil has a voice in important decision-making.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

At the heart of Spruce House School sits the firm belief that all pupils will thrive. This strong, shared vision is threaded through every aspect of the school's work.

The proprietor body, directors, leaders and staff care deeply about each individual pupil. They have high expectations and everybody is committed to giving every pupil the best possible chance of success in their next stages of education. Leaders have established a robust system of checks and processes to help them accurately understand the school's work and areas that require further sharpening. Leaders use this information to prioritise the right actions and to take decisions based firmly in pupils' best interests.

Staff feel supported as valued members of the school and wider team. They appreciate that their workload is considered and they value the many ways in which their wellbeing is supported. New staff particularly value the training they receive through induction. This is effective in helping them to understand the group's therapeutic approach to parenting and education.

Leaders and staff forge constructive and effective relationships with carers, local authorities and external professionals. This means that they are successful in securing the support that pupils need.

The proprietor body understands its statutory duties well. Senior leaders ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders have developed a comprehensive programme to support pupils' wider development. They have carefully set out a calendar of events and opportunities to meet the needs of pupils who have significant gaps in their social and emotional skills. The personal development programme is rooted in the proprietor group's therapeutic parenting approach.

The curriculum is enhanced through a purposeful range of trips. For example, pupils recently enjoyed pond dipping and a visit to a local animal attraction. These events support pupils' engagement in curriculum content while building character, resilience and trust. This prepares pupils well to face new challenges. Pupils visit places of worship and learn about different belief systems. For example, they contribute to food parcels at a local church during harvest festival.

Leaders know local risks and pupils' vulnerabilities very well. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and to make good choices. They learn respect for others and how to form healthy relationships. As a result of the school's work, pupils learn to be accepting of difference. Pupils also learn that they can make a difference. Every pupil's voice is heard through membership of the school council. Pupils learn about the world of work and their ambitions and interests are fostered. Through opportunities such as these, pupils are being prepared for life and careers in modern Britain.

The school's pastoral offer is a strength. Caring, bespoke provision enables pupils to move forward from individual starting points. Leaders' work helps to prepare pupils for their next steps and increases their opportunities for future success.

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

Spruce House School has high aspirations and expectations for every pupil, whatever their starting points or barriers they face. Pupils who attend the school have experienced trauma and disruption to their education in the past. As a result, they find being in school challenging.

Pupils now attend school regularly and are beginning to flourish because of the highly personalised support they receive from their teachers. Pupils enjoy spending time with staff. Warm and nurturing relationships enable pupils to feel safe and well cared for. This means that pupils are beginning to rekindle an interest in education.

Pupils' behaviour improves as they settle into school life and as the school's work to develop confidence and self-esteem begins to have an impact. Staff know pupils extremely well and

adapt their approaches to managing behaviour in a very bespoke way. Bullying is not tolerated.

Pupils enjoy and benefit from a range of opportunities and experiences. For example, they contribute to the local community by helping at a local allotment. Pupils learn about other faiths and cultures, and about people who are less fortunate than themselves. Pupils know that their voices are heard in school, for example through being members of the school council. These opportunities, and many more, help pupils to understand life in modern Britain and the difference they can make.

A strength of Spruce House is the way in which pupils' personal and social skills are developed. Pupils learn how to share, use kind words and socialise with their peers. These skills have a positive impact on behaviour and engagement with school life. This means that, as pupils become ready to learn, they are increasingly able to access the broad curriculum and develop the knowledge and skills needed for their next stages in education.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is appropriately planned, particularly where pupils are at the very early stages of learning.
- Leaders should develop staff expertise in adapting academic learning so that teaching more closely meet pupils' individual needs.
- Leaders should refine how assessment is used so that gaps in knowledge and skills are identified and addressed quickly.

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, senior leader, staff, the chair of the proprietor board another director, pupils and carers.

Inspectors undertook activities to ascertain if the school continued to meet the independent school standards. These included checks on the school premises and checks on the arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is an independent special school catering for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils have education, health and care plans.

The school does not use any alternative provision.

The school currently has 3 pupils on roll, with a capacity of 5 pupils.

The school is registered to take pupils aged between 5 and 14. Currently, there are no pupils on roll in the early years.

This is the first standard inspection of the school since it was registered by the Department for Education in November 2025.

This inspection took place from 13 to 15 October 2026.

The name of the proprietor is Halliwell Homes. The chair of the proprietor body is Mathew Hargreaves.

The fees currently charged are £72,250

The email address of the school is contact@halliwellhomes.co.uk

Headteacher: Nicola Baddeley

Independent school standards

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

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1. Quality of education provided — Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether the following standards are met:

Paragraph 2(2)

For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are–

(f) where the school has pupils below compulsory school age, a programme of activities which is appropriate to their educational needs in relation to personal, social, emotional and physical development and communication and language skills;

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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.

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5. Premises of and accommodation at schools Standards met

All standards have been met.

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6. Provision of information Standards met

All standards have been met.

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7. Manner in which complaints are handled Standards met

All standards have been met.

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

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:
Rachel Henrick, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Andrew Washbourne, 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 13 October 2026

Total pupils

3

School capacity

5

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

3

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

3

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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