

# The Polygon School

**Address:** Handel Terrace, SO15 2FH

**Unique reference number (URN):** 116624

## Inspection report: 2 December 2025

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.

## **Strong standard** ●

### **Attendance and behaviour**

**Strong standard** ●

Leaders' work to improve attendance is highly effective. Many pupils arrive with very low attendance or a history of non-attendance. The school addresses this swiftly. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance carefully. They use this information to work closely with families to reduce absence. As a result, attendance is consistently high, and above national averages in comparison to similar schools over time. The effective actions of leaders have also reduced persistent absence significantly over time.

Pupils behave very well. They respond positively to teachers' high expectations. This work is built on the school's deeply embedded value of belonging. Pupils know that staff will help them to behave well and to help them manage their emotions. Pupils benefit strongly from the school's pathway approach, which re-engages them effectively. This improves their behaviour and attendance significantly. Pupils are respectful and considerate. This helps to create a purposeful atmosphere throughout the school. Pupils work hard in lessons and listen carefully to their teachers. All pupils know that their views are considered, and this helps them to feel a deep sense of trust. As a result, when staff deal with incidents of behaviour, pupils respond positively and return to learning promptly.

### **Inclusion**

**Strong standard** ●

Historic low attendance and gaps in learning are significant barriers for many pupils when they join the school. Pupils are supported very well. Staff make highly detailed ongoing checks of pupils' needs. They develop an astute understanding of each pupil. This helps staff to adapt many aspects of school life for the benefit of the pupils. Leaders support staff through focused training. Many staff become experts at supporting pupils and their changing needs. The highly considered supportive approach from the school breaks down the barriers that pupils arrive with. The precision with which pupils' needs are met helps them to achieve well from their various starting points. The school works closely with external agencies to develop its expertise effectively. It identifies where pupils may need specialist help swiftly and ensures that pupils receive this. This is very effective for those pupils who join later in their school life. The school uses additional funding, such as pupil premium, very effectively. Leaders ensure that pupils with multiple barriers to learning receive successful additional support, for example through well-designed extra teaching and support in reading and writing. This work means that all pupils in the school achieve well.

### **Personal development and wellbeing**

**Strong standard** ●

The school prioritises pupils' personal development and wellbeing. This helps them to become increasingly confident, resilient and independent. Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain. The school provides all pupils with a rich and ambitious personal development programme. This has been carefully and deliberately constructed to improve pupils' life chances. The school's curriculum connects seamlessly with the wider opportunities provided. For example, pupils learn about a range of world cultures. They then have opportunities to visit these countries. Leaders monitor the programme carefully and

adapt it to ensure it continues to meet the needs of all pupils. The school ensures that pupils develop their own interests in art, music and sport. The school works with families to support engagement with community groups and clubs. This enables pupils to apply what they learn at school in the wider community.

The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education is high quality. Leaders know the pupils very well. This helps them to design a programme matched carefully to their needs. It provides pupils with the essential knowledge to prepare them for adulthood. Pupils understand how to keep safe outside of school. Carefully selected visitors and experts deepen pupils' understanding of empathy and what it means to give back to others.

Pupils develop positive attitudes and learn right from wrong, for example taking part in a video project on how boys can prevent violence against women and girls. They respectfully consider differences and diversity within modern-day Britain. The careers education pupils receive is highly effective. Beginning in Year 7, pupils learn about the world of work. The school enhances this with carefully planned work experience and college visits that help pupils to plan their next steps. Staff skilfully adapt these activities to reduce any concerns pupils may have.

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## Expected standard

### Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils develop the skills and knowledge they need. They learn essential content across the curriculum. Pupils discuss this learning confidently and apply it accurately in their work. Pupils' work shows they progress through the curriculum effectively over time. They become increasingly confident writers and apply mathematical knowledge accurately. Pupils in the early stages of reading catch up well. However, a small number of pupils require support to become consistently fluent and confident readers.

Pupils achieve well in the increasing range of ambitious qualifications the school offers. Many pupils work towards bespoke qualifications matched precisely to their interests and skills. This is particularly effective for pupils who join the school later in their school life. The school's approach means that pupils break down barriers to learning and are well prepared for their next steps. As a result of this work, the vast majority of pupils remain in education or employment when they leave the school.

### Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is well designed. It is carefully matched to the individual needs of pupils. The curriculum is logically sequenced. This helps pupils move from often low starting points to appropriate and ambitious end points. The wide range of qualifications that pupils can achieve reflects this. Pupils have opportunities to build on prior learning in all subjects. Teachers ensure that the curriculum content pupils learn becomes increasingly sophisticated over time.

Leaders recognise that many pupils arrive with significant gaps in their mathematics and English knowledge. The work to support this is typically successful in helping pupils to close these gaps in learning. The focus on helping pupils improve their confidence in reading and speaking is more recent. Typically, pupils receive the support they need. However, there remain some limited occasions when this is not as consistent as it could be.

Teachers deliver the curriculum effectively. They explain learning clearly and model vocabulary accurately. Teachers design engaging activities that help pupils to learn the skills and knowledge they need. They undertake careful checks on pupils' understanding. This helps staff to accurately match the tasks they select to the needs of pupils. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They use this to ensure that pupils learn the curriculum content they need.

## **Leadership and governance**

**Expected standard** 

Leaders know their pupils and context very well. This helps them to adapt and amend the work of the school to better meet pupils' varied needs. This work is well embedded in some areas but is newer in others. Leaders have an understanding of the school's strengths. They select appropriate priorities to improve key areas such as attendance or pupils' reading. Leaders and governors know the way in which their work benefits individual pupils. However, their understanding lacks some strategic detail that would better inform their work. For example, not all leaders and governors are clear about the school's use of phonics. Governors have the same high expectations and pride in the school's work as leaders. They work positively with leaders and meet their statutory duties well. For example, they have a clear understanding of the school's effective use of pupil premium funding. They know the school equally well, and this drives their work effectively.

Leaders ensure that staff are well prepared to carry out their jobs. They provide a well-designed programme of training. This gives staff the expertise to deliver the well-designed curriculum and to meet the changing needs of pupils. Staff feel very well supported by the range of training they receive. All stakeholders are very positive about the school. Leaders prioritise the welfare of staff. Staff enjoy the culture of trust and support that leaders have developed. Parents are also very positive about the school. A number of parents discussed the 'life-changing' work of the school. The dedicated staff, leaders and governors work hard to improve pupils' life chances. The best interests of pupils are always at the heart of the school's work.

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

Pupils are highly valued at this caring school. They develop a deep sense of belonging due to the warm relationships they form with staff. Pupils trust staff and know they will support them in any challenges they face. This helps pupils, many of whom have had a previously negative experience of school, to re-engage with learning very effectively. As a result, they enjoy learning the deeply personalised curriculum they follow. Pupils know that their voice matters and that staff will listen carefully to any concerns they have. This helps pupils to feel happy and safe in school.

Pupils have significantly improved life chances due to the work of the school. This is built on the high ambition staff have for pupils. They help them to achieve this through the personalised support they receive in class. This helps them to achieve a broad range of qualifications. As a result, pupils are prepared for their next steps.

Pupils who need extra support benefit from a bespoke programme. This helps pupils to break down the multiple barriers to learning they face. For example, many pupils arrive with very low levels of attendance. The support of staff means this improves rapidly.

Pupils behave very well. This contributes to the deep sense of calm that pervades the school. Staff act as excellent role models for pupils. As a result, pupils learn how to regulate their emotions very effectively. This helps them to manage challenging situations confidently. Pupils become increasingly confident and resilient in school. This gives them essential skills for adulthood. This is evident in their work alongside members of the public in the school allotment and their volunteer work. The care and ambition staff show means that pupils thrive during their time at the school.

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## Next steps

- Leaders and governors should refine and deepen their strategic overview in key areas of the school such as reading to support them in improving the work of the school with even greater precision.
  - Leaders should ensure that the teaching of reading and oracy are consistent so that gaps in pupils' knowledge are addressed as quickly as possible.
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## About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors is Andrea Faustino.

The school is part of the Southampton Cooperative Learning Trust.

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.

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 met with the headteacher and other leaders during the inspection. The lead inspector also met with a group of governors. The inspection team also spoke to indicative groups of staff and pupils during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The headteacher and senior leadership team have changed since the last inspection.

Headteacher: Ben Penfold

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### Lead inspector:

Gavin Thomas, His Majesty's Inspector

### Team inspector:

Simon Graydon, 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 2 December 2025

## School and pupil context

### Total pupils

**76**

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

**76**

Well 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: 1,152

## Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

**82.89%**

Well above 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

**100.00%**

Well above 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: 3.1%

## Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

**0.00%**

Well below average

### What does this mean?

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

National average: 13%

### Location deprivation

Well above 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)

SpLD - Specific Learning Difficulty, OTH - Other Difficulty/Disability, SLCN - Speech, language and Communication, ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health, MSI - Multi-Sensory Impairment, MLD - Moderate 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	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers	71%	91%	Not available
2022 leavers	60%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers	50%	94%	Not available

## 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 (1 term)	16.1%	7.7%	Above
2023/24	20.5%	8.9%	Above
2022/23	19.4%	9.0%	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 (1 term)	50.6%	21.1%	Above
2023/24	59.5%	25.6%	Above
2022/23	53.4%	26.5%	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.

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
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T: 0300 123 1231

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