



# Brunel School

Address: 170b Torquay Road, Paignton, Devon, TQ3 2AL

Unique reference number (URN): 150616

## Inspection report: 9 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.

## Expected standard

### Achievement

Expected standard 

Achievement for pupils at Brunel School includes academic, social and emotional indicators of success. As leaders establish a more positive learning culture, pupils are beginning to achieve well, academically, from their starting points. The focus, until recently, has had to be on social and emotional learning and development so that pupils are ready for the academic offer. The inclusive provision that leaders are establishing ensures that pupils experience success at a level and regularity that is appropriate for them. It results in pupils successfully completing an increasingly broad suite of qualifications. These range from unit awards through to functional skills and GCSEs.

Across key stage 3 and 4, pupils are now typically securing the foundations needed to prepare them effectively for their next stage in education, with the vast majority moving on to a supported internship.

### Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is ambitious and designed well, providing progression from pupils' varied starting points. Staff support pupils to build important foundational learning, such as reading, writing and mathematics. Staff make the necessary checks on pupils' learning to inform and adapt the curriculum to meet their needs. Leaders have embedded close tracking and monitoring of pupil progress to assure themselves of the quality and impact of teaching in each subject.

On the whole, approaches to teaching are adapted successfully to meet pupils' needs and address barriers to learning. Where needed, pupils get targeted support to secure important knowledge. Reading and writing is rightly prioritised, for example through the school's 'Reading Charter'. Leaders and staff are building pupils' love of reading, many of whom are disaffected with the reading process.

Beyond the core curriculum, leaders have established, and continue to grow, a successful wider curriculum offer. It includes humanities, art and physical education, as well as outdoor learning, cooking and digital skills. It is designed to increase engagement with learning and develop important life skills such as preparing for independent living, understanding of risk, resilience and working with others. The success of the enriched curriculum offer is possible due to the significant progress leaders have made in securing a more positive, safe and settled school culture.

### Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have established a comprehensive and accurate system to identify and assess how well pupils' needs and barriers to learning and wellbeing are addressed. They use the rich information gathered, with pupils' education, health and care plan at the heart, to inform each pupil's bespoke education offer. This offer combines a carefully considered balance between academic, social and emotional provision. Leaders, and staff, are fully committed

to building effective relationships with parents and carers, understanding the importance of involving them in order to meet each pupils' needs successfully.

Leaders support staff to adapt to pupils' changing and emerging needs, and the multiple vulnerabilities that many pupils face. Staff development is targeted increasingly well to give them the level of expertise that they need to support the high levels of need and significant barriers to learning and/or wellbeing that pupils who attend Brunel School typically have.

Additional funding is used with success. It adds to the precise support already in place for pupils. Leaders work closely with external agencies to support barriers to education that pupils face. This is particularly evident in the school's work with cared for children and those at risk of exploitation.

Leaders make appropriate use of alternative provision. It is used well to complement and enhance the school's offer, as well as to maintain important, trusted relationships, that pupils have found to be rare in their previous education experiences.

## **Leadership and governance**

**Expected standard** 

Leaders' tenacity and resilience in improving the school to its current point are notable. In the absence of a local governing body, school leaders have worked closely with the trust, new since the last inspection, to successfully drive forward critical school improvement priorities. These were initially safeguarding, attendance, staff recruitment and wellbeing, as well as re-building a positive school community, including relationships with parents and carers and external agencies. The success of leaders' work in these initial priority areas has resulted in more recent developments. These include establishing an ambitious academic offer and providing a rich, well-considered personal development programme. All of which ensure pupils at Brunel School are prepared well to be able to thrive beyond their time at the school.

Leaders, including the trust, use their thorough and accurate analysis of the school to evaluate the effectiveness of their work around the school's priorities. They closely monitor the impact of their work. Due to the extent and significance of the improvement work that leaders have undertaken, there has had to be a well-considered approach to the pace of improvement and the sequence of actions taken. All of which has held pupils' best interests at its core.

Leaders are moving from a very specific, whole-school, strategic staff development programme to one that is now more bespoke and in tune with individual and group skills and expertise. Staff feel supported and valued, including teachers at the beginning of their careers. Communication across the staff is highly effective in maintaining pupil welfare and wellbeing and meeting the high levels of nurture and caring relationships that pupils need to be successful.

## **Personal development and wellbeing**

**Expected standard** 

The school has a well-designed personal development programme. It is driven by the school's values, and an accurate understanding of what pupils need to be successful in the future. Pupils gain important learning from the programme. This includes understanding

societal expectations and broadening their awareness of what the world around them has to offer, both positively and what might challenge them. Pupils are provided safe opportunities to practise and hone the important life skills of independence, collaboration, risk awareness and perseverance. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is a key part of this offer. The content of PSHE teaching covers statutory requirements. These are sequenced carefully and re-visited appropriately to secure pupils' learning. Pupils are taught respect for others and for difference. They learn about maintaining positive, healthy relationships. PSHE learning is further informed by leaders' knowledge of pertinent contextual issues for pupils around their safety, welfare and wellbeing.

The outdoor education programme is an important part of enriching and strengthening pupils' wider development. Pupils participate in a variety of sporting, musical and cultural opportunities. For example, pupils visit the local beach, engage with lifeguards and swim in the sea. It is in these rich opportunities that pupils demonstrate more positive attitudes to learning and engagement.

Pupil voice plays an important role in the school's improvement journey. Leaders have responded to pupils' requests to experience an offer that feels more like that of their mainstream peers. A noted success from this is the school's 'Prosper Points' system. These have been motivational for some pupils towards more positive engagement and behaviours for learning. Careers education informs pupils successfully about their future options. The offer provides work experience opportunities to build towards sustainable post-16 placements. The life skills programme successfully builds pupils' knowledge and skills to live independently. Leaders monitor and track the personal development provision and the impact it has on pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs, as well as more widely to prepare them for the demands of adult life.

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## Needs attention

### Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Many pupils start at the school with low attendance, long periods of non-attendance or refusal to attend. Leaders understand that it is not always a pupil's identified special educational needs and/or disability that is the barrier to regular attendance. Priority has been given to working with families, as well as pupils, to understand barriers and put in place the most appropriate approach to re-engaging a pupil with their education. Leaders work sensitively to adapt and adjust pupils' provision. This has led to a rapid improvement in attendance overall. It has been particularly successful with those pupils where support has been swift and at the earliest opportunity.

While leaders have made significant progress in establishing an inclusive and safe school, the next stage in developing a wholly positive environment for learning remains inconsistent and less effective as a result. This can, and does, limit the impact the school has on pupils' learning and respectful interactions with others. Leaders take any form of bullying and discriminatory behaviour seriously. They act quickly, consistently and effectively. This can be hindered by the lack of consistency in approach more widely. While pupils say they do experience some of these behaviours in school, they also reflect that it is becoming less common. They have confidence in their trusted adults to manage this.

The school has effective systems for tracking attendance and behaviour, and responding to patterns and trends to support early intervention.

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

Pupils at Brunel School describe an inclusive school culture where they feel safe and are understood well by the staff who teach and support them. Pupils have a true sense of belonging and their voice is important. For the majority of them, this has not been their experience of education prior to joining the school. It provides the foundations pupils need to achieve well from their starting points and equip them for their next steps in education, employment or training.

Pupils are positive about how staff support them to develop the skills to become more adept at managing the challenges, which can often be significant and traumatic, they face in day-to-day life. Pupils value the school's individualised approaches to help them recognise, and overcome, their barriers to learning and wellbeing. Pupils acknowledge that this work means the school is a more settled and positive place to learn. As a result, pupils' education offer has been enhanced and enriched beyond the classroom. All of which impacts positively on attendance because pupils increasingly want to be in school.

Leaders promote high expectations of pupils' learning and their conduct. As a result, there has been a significant decrease in serious behaviour incidents. Pupils now experience greater emphasis on strategies to help them regulate without the need for physical intervention. However, pupils do not experience a consistent enough approach from all staff to secure wholly positive attitudes to learning. For some pupils, staff response, challenge or setting of clear boundaries is not swift or effective enough. Consequently, learning behaviours and respectful attitudes, including some discriminatory behaviours, do not always meet leaders' high standards and, at times, can disrupt pupils' education.

The school's values of integrity, love, availability, inclusion, compassion, safeguarding and aspiration genuinely underpin pupils' experiences at Brunel School. Pupils demonstrate these in their acknowledgement and acceptance that each one of them may need, and is entitled to, something different and bespoke, in order to flourish and prepare for life beyond school.

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## **Next steps**

- Leaders should develop staff understanding of, and expertise in, securing positive attitudes to learning from pupils, embedding this more widely, so that the curriculum can be implemented with greater success and pupil interactions are typically positive.
  - Leaders should continue to develop staff consistency and skills across the school's education and pastoral offer, embedding this into typical staff practice, so that it has the most impact on pupils' learning, development and wellbeing.
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## About this inspection

This school is part of Special Partnership Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Guy Chappell, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alison Cook.

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 (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMI.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the school's senior leadership team, staff and pupils during the inspection. In addition, inspectors spoke with the CEO, the trust's SEND director, the trust's SEND adviser, the school's link trustee, the director of education from the local authority and the school's improvement partner. An inspector spoke with 1 of the unregistered alternative providers used by 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 inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school provides education for pupils with an education, health and care plan. The majority have a primary social, emotional and mental health need. Many have further special educational needs and/or disabilities or barriers to their learning and wellbeing.

The local authority commissions a satellite provision, the Prosper Hub, at a local primary school site. 2 pupils currently attend this provision. They join the main school site for lessons and social times throughout the week.

The school currently makes use of 7 alternative provisions, including 6 that are unregistered.

The number of pupils on roll at the school can fluctuate. At the time of the inspection, there were 60 pupils on roll.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The headteacher joined the school in April 2023. The school joined Special Partnership Trust in September 2023. The leadership team has undergone extensive change and re-structuring. The staff team has increased in size and permanency since the school joined the trust.

Headteacher: Vikki Alden

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**Lead inspector:**

Leanne Thirlby, His Majesty's Inspector

**Team inspector:**

Malcolm Willis, 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 9 June 2026

**School and pupil context****Total pupils**

**48**

**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**

**63**

**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)**

**87.50%**

**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**

**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)**

**SEN unit**

### **What does this mean?**

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

## **Type of specialist provision (if applicable)**

**ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health**

### **What does this mean?**

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

# 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
2024/25 (3 term)	42.8%
2023/24 (3 term)	50.7%

## Persistent absence

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

Year	This school
2024/25 (3 term)	87.5%
2023/24 (3 term)	93.2%

## 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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