

Courtlands School

Address: Widey Lane, Crownhill, Plymouth, Devon, PL6 5JS

Unique reference number (URN): 144009

Inspection report: 10 February 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

Inclusion

Expected standard

The support for pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities is carefully considered. When pupils join the school, staff check that their needs have been fully identified. Leaders recognise that many pupils are from disadvantaged backgrounds. They ensure that the provision addresses any gaps in pupils' learning and experiences.

Leaders are proactive in their use of advice from specialists. Their guidance is used to shape the provision for each pupil. Staff access training from experts in occupational therapy and educational psychology. As a result, they are able to support groups of pupils with needs in common.

The school works in partnership with parents and carers. For example, parents are included when plans are created to support pupils' developing skills in personal care and hygiene. This helps to ensure that pupils feel safe and their wishes are respected. Careful record-keeping means that staff are alert to and celebrate any signs of growing independence with pupils and their families.

Leaders collaborate with the virtual school to ensure that looked after children and others known to children's social care can experience success in school. The school makes alternative provision for a small number of pupils. Leaders work with staff in these settings to ensure that pupils have the same opportunities to learn and make progress there, as they would in school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

The school prioritises communication and preparation for adulthood. Pupils at the earliest stages of communication are encouraged to use a range of non-verbal approaches and resources. Pupils have a voice in their learning and see that they can influence the world around them. Where appropriate, learning is organised to support pupils' physical development and sensory needs. Staff create interesting opportunities for pupils to interact with stories and objects, developing the sustained attention needed for more formal learning.

Visits to places of interest are a routine feature of school life. Pupils learn to travel safely. They develop confidence in the use of shops, transport and money. Pupils are eager to go on school trips and participate in school events. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from the breadth of experiences that the school provides. At the time of the inspection, the school was celebrating the success of a recent nativity performance. Staff and parents are rightly proud of pupils' growing confidence and achievements.

The school teaches pupils about democracy through its work with the school council. Pupils learn that their vote can make a difference, for example, to the resources and equipment that they can enjoy, or to the food that they are served by the school's kitchen. School clubs are designed to engage different pupils, such as 'Girls' Club'. This club recognises that girls are in a minority at the school and gives them a space to talk about their development and any concerns.

The curriculum includes all of the information that pupils need to lead safe, healthy and happy lives. Pupils learn about different relationships and how to respect each other's boundaries. Some pupils can explain their families' spiritual beliefs. The curriculum introduces pupils to different religions and cultural traditions, although pupils do not always remember this learning well.

Needs attention ●

Achievement

Needs attention ●

Although the curriculum now supports pupils to learn and develop, many are still working to overcome significant gaps in their knowledge and skills. It is too soon to see the full impact of leaders' recent work to strengthen the curriculum across the school. Pupils are only just beginning to build the secure grounding in communication and literacy that they need to open the door to a wider range of learning.

Every pupil has the opportunity to make progress in reading. Early writing skills are developing through practise. Some pupils apply their growing knowledge of numbers accurately. Those at the earliest stages of communication are increasingly able to make their preferences and interests known. The provision is adapted so that each pupil can make progress towards the targets contained in their education, health and care plan. Pupils are building readiness for the next stage of learning and life.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention ●

In recent years, the school has seen a steady increase in the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent. Attendance across the whole school is generally better than the national average for other pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, this is beginning to weaken. While leaders' knowledge of pupils' individual circumstances is clear, their strategy for reducing persistent absence across the school is not shaped by a focused analysis of the absence patterns of different groups of pupils.

Leaders have brought about significant improvements to pupils' behaviour. The atmosphere in school is typically calm. Well-considered routines support each class to get ready for learning at the start of each day. Any episodes of heightened behaviour are managed safely and pass quickly. Leaders pay close attention to any pupils who are struggling to manage their emotions. They adapt pupils' support in light of incidents. Risks are identified and safety guidance is put in place to help staff to keep pupils safe. There is a growing confidence among staff to provide pupils with a broader range of opportunities. Pupils' personal development is flourishing as a result.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention ●

Leaders' work to assure themselves that the curriculum is having the impact that they intend is in its infancy. Individual learning is informed by regular checks on pupils' progress towards targets in their educational, health and care plans. However, as curriculum development is

at an early stage, leaders do not have enough information to identify where they need to bring about further improvement. The curriculum does not yet fully meet the needs of pupils who are ready for more formal learning in subjects, such as English, history, geography and science.

Most pupils follow a curriculum that reflects their starting points. Pupils who are not yet ready to begin learning to read through phonics are encouraged to develop their attention and awareness of the sounds that make up spoken language. Where appropriate, pupils follow a sequence of learning in mathematics that helps them to build confidence with numbers, including addition and multiplication. Most pupils receive effective teaching that supports them to read and write with phonics. They also learn about the wider world. However, the school needs to do more to help pupils to remember the most useful knowledge so that this can be built upon over time.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention ●

Although governors play a central role in school improvement, they do not have a precise picture of the impact that the school has for different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. This reduces their ability to hold leaders to account for improvements in attendance, behaviour and achievement. The trust does not manage the schools' resources well enough or help leaders to offset potential challenges in a timely way. This impacts on the workload of leaders and staff as they struggle to manage day-to-day practicalities, such as staff absence.

Nonetheless, leaders at all levels have worked effectively together to bring about significant improvements to this school. Pupils, staff and parents very often agree that the school is making a positive difference in pupils' lives. The school meets the needs of the pupils it sets out to cater for increasingly well. As pupils' learning and emotional and behavioural needs are met, they are able to find enjoyment in attending school and the wider opportunities that come with this. Staff welcome the clear direction and effective support that the school's senior leadership team provides. They value opportunities to develop their practice and are rightly proud of their own role in improving pupils' education and life chances.

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

Being a pupil at this school means learning in an environment, where safety, trust and positive relationships are central. Pupils feel secure with the staff who work with them. Pupils are comfortable initiating social and personal interactions. They show good manners when meeting visitors, reflecting the school's welcoming atmosphere.

Behaviour across the school is typically positive. This allows pupils to focus on activities they enjoy, such as being read to or preparing food. When behaviour escalates, it is managed quickly and safely. Pupils usually return to learning without too much disruption. Pupils know that bullying and unkindness are wrong. They are comfortable telling staff about any examples that they see. Pupils know their voices matter. The newly established school council helps pupils to learn that their ideas can lead to meaningful change.

The school meets the needs of most pupils well. Pupils are encouraged to use a range of communication methods to express themselves. Many develop their social and academic skills over time. All have the opportunity to learn to read, write and develop mathematical understanding. Learning is adapted to pupils' different starting points. For example, some practise mark making while others follow phonics daily. This personalised approach helps most pupils to make progress at a pace suited to them, although this is made more difficult when their attendance is low. Some aspects of the curriculum are still developing, so that pupils who are ready to learn a wider range of national curriculum subjects in key stage 2 can do so.

Developing independence is an important part of school life. Pupils learn to navigate the local community safely and purposefully. They build confidence when visiting local supermarkets and specialist shops. They practise applying their learning in real-life situations. The experience of being part of a club is built into the school day. Pupils compete in local sports events and enjoy creative outlets, such as construction challenges.

Next steps

- Leaders should monitor the impact of the curriculum as it continues to embed across the school. They should maintain a detailed picture of the quality of the curriculum and teaching and use this to target further improvements.
 - Leaders should be clear what they want pupils to know and remember about the wider world and the different types of people that they will meet. They should develop teaching approaches to help pupils to retain and build on this knowledge.
 - Leaders should develop a more strategic approach to reducing persistent absence. This should be informed by a detailed analysis of the trends affecting pupils with different barriers and disadvantages.
 - Governors should gain a detailed understanding of the impact of the school's work upon the attendance, behaviour and achievement of different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. They should use this knowledge to direct their improvement priorities.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Transforming Futures Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Sandra Harris, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Carole Burgoyne.

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We decided to treat the inspection as a full inspection under section 5 of the same Act.

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.

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

The school is a specialist provider of education for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and/or emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. All pupils have education, health and care plans.

The school makes use of 3 alternative provisions, including 2 that are unregistered.

Executive Headteacher: Mark Ruffett

Lead inspector:

Lydia Pride, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Stephen Lee, 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 10 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

108

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

100

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)

52.78%

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

Well 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)

SEN unit

What does this mean?

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

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health, MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty

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 (2 term)	8.5%
2023/24 (3 term)	8.7%
2022/23 (3 term)	8.2%

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school
2024/25 (2 term)	26.6%
2023/24 (3 term)	26.3%
2022/23 (3 term)	23.7%

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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