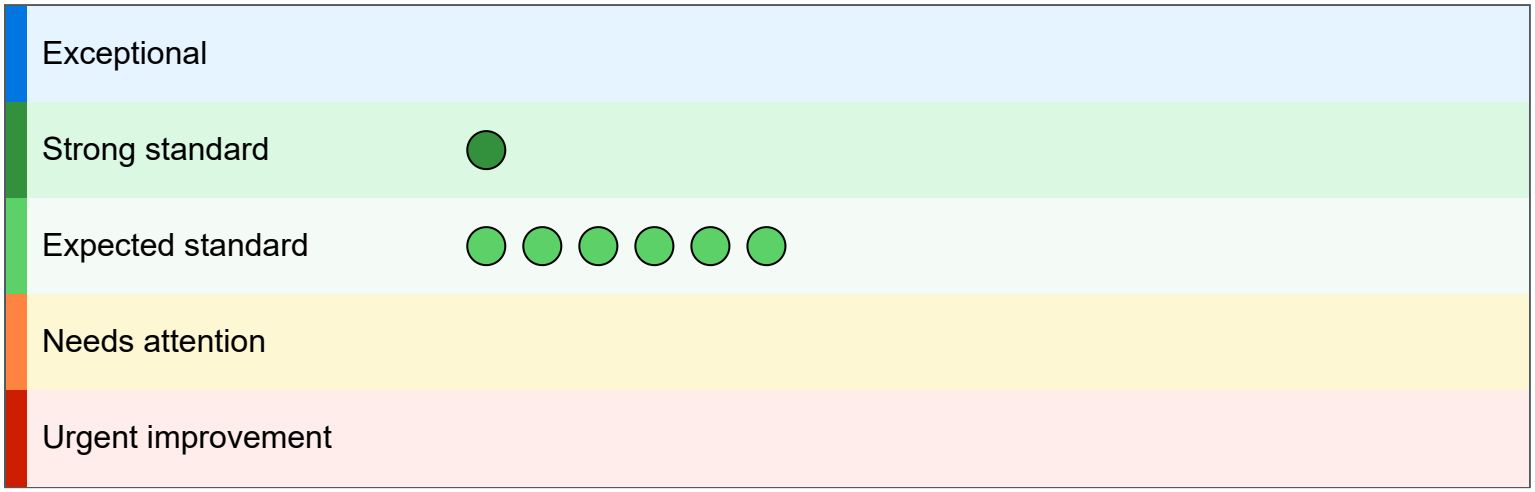
The Sandon School

Address: Molrams Lane, Sandon, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 7AQ

Unique reference number (URN): 137240

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.

Strong standard

Personal development and wellbeing — Strong standard

The school provides highly effective pastoral support. This includes helping pupils to learn how to care for their own mental health and wellbeing. Leaders ensure that pupils receive an effective personal safety and relationships curriculum. This is carefully tailored to the needs of pupils and the context of the school, such as water safety near local rivers. Pupils are knowledgeable about online risks and how to keep safe in the virtual world. They explore the features of healthy relationships and how to set boundaries with others. Pupils are confident that this is a school where you can truly be yourself. They are being prepared very well for their next steps.

'Sandon Beyond' provides a multitude of cultural, arts, volunteering, nature and adventure experiences. Pupils have many opportunities to take on leadership roles as part of the school council. This has led to many opportunities that promote charity support, fundraising and environmental protection. Older pupils can participate in the leadership, mentoring and enrichment programme that allows them to help younger pupils achieve and thrive. Where leaders identify barriers to pupils taking part, such as finances or confidence, they put effective measures in place to overcome them. Leaders keep a detailed oversight of participation.

Pupils gain an understanding of fundamental British values, such as democracy and tolerance. Leaders give pupils a voice in the school, such as voting opportunities to choose their own representatives. Pupils know that differences between people should be respected and celebrated. They understand that discrimination and abusive behaviour are never acceptable. Leaders proactively seek to understand the views of pupils and their parents and carers. They use this information to reflect on pupils' wellbeing and their experiences.

Pupils receive effective careers advice and education. Through work experience and careers fairs, pupils learn about different types of employment and training. Pupils receive impartial guidance about post-16 and post-18 choices, such as further and higher education.

Expected standard

Achievement — Expected standard

Pupils achieve well across the curriculum. Their work demonstrates secure knowledge and understanding. They remember important aspects of previous learning. In most subjects, pupils build their knowledge successfully over time. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also progress through the curriculum well.

However, a few pupils have important gaps in their learning. These hinder their ability to build on what they know and can do. Leaders are ensuring that teachers are more specific in supporting these pupils to keep up with their peers. Leaders have taken steps to improve the achievement of students in the post-16 provision. There is clear evidence in students' learning portfolios that they are progressing very well.

Pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge read with increasing confidence. They are gaining the skills they need to support their learning in a range of subjects. They can communicate their ideas clearly and engage thoughtfully in discussion about the different topics being studied.

Recent published examination data indicates that pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11 is broadly in line with the national averages. Pupils are typically well prepared for their next steps and to meet their individual aspirations.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Leaders have a clear strategy that explicitly connects pupils feeling known, valued and included alongside their improved attendance. Thoughtful adjustments are effective in supporting pupils to attend more frequently. For example, a therapeutic start to the day, involving horticulture in the school garden, is working. However, leaders are aware that there is more to do in this area. Some vulnerable pupils are still absent too often. This is affecting their progress and their ability to engage fully with school life. As a result of this, leaders have prioritised attendance.

Pupils' behaviour is a real strength. Most pupils are mature, considerate and enthusiastic. They display a deep level of respect for themselves, each other, the staff and the school environment. Leaders ensure that there are consistently very high expectations of behaviour. This includes in lessons, around the site and during social times.

Where pupils fall short of these expectations, leaders and staff take effective action. Staff help pupils to reflect thoughtfully on their actions. Pupils are rightly proud of the school's respectful and inclusive community. Bullying and discrimination are rare. When they do happen, the school responds quickly and fairly. Pupils report with confidence that any action taken is effective.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have established an ambitious curriculum that is taught well across the different year groups. They have developed their understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. They continue to improve provision to develop pupils' learning still further. Leaders are determined that all pupils will learn and progress as well as possible.

Leaders and staff understand pupils' needs. Teachers generally adapt learning effectively to enable many pupils to succeed. Typically, teachers use checks on pupils' learning to identify and address important gaps in pupils' knowledge or skills. However, some pupils are not always clear about how to improve their work or deepen their understanding. Adaptations are not consistently in place in all subjects and for all the pupils who need them. As a result, not all pupils, in all subjects, achieve as well as they could.

Leaders are aware of this and are working to address it. Their understanding of teaching quality helps them provide sufficient support to prepare pupils for their next steps. Carefully

thought-out additional activities outside of the classroom, particularly around the important skills in reading, writing and mathematics, have shown a positive impact on pupils' learning.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders have created a dedicated pastoral support team. They are alert to changing pupil needs across the school. Staff generally support pupils who are known to social care very well. For example, through working closely with the virtual school. Young carers receive enhanced pastoral support as well as the appropriate checks and adaptations that they need to be successful. Some pupils access their learning through one or more alternative providers. Staff make regular checks to ensure the safety and suitability of these providers.

Leaders have created the conditions for pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to belong, engage and access effective support. For example, any additional help is appropriate and adaptable, drawing on information leaders already have combined with referrals, pupil voice and family input. Extra tutoring in English and mathematics is effective in helping many pupils catch up and progress well from their various starting points.

Most lessons involve high expectations, purposeful questioning, responsive support and effective checks on pupils' understanding. However, there remains work to do to develop the consistency of adaptations in lessons for disadvantaged pupils. Nonetheless, these pupils generally achieve in line with their peers nationally.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders regularly analyse the progress and achievement of pupils and make the necessary improvements to the curriculum and teaching. As a result, they are successfully ensuring that pupils consistently learn and achieve well. In other areas of the school's work, leaders are now more precise in how they measure the impact of their work and refine their actions. While this work is beginning to have a positive effect, attendance among some vulnerable pupils remains a priority for further improvement.

Leaders act in the best interests of pupils. They ensure that the school is a safe and happy environment where pupils can belong and thrive. Staff are very proud to work in the school. They feel valued and are appreciative of the support they receive. Leaders are considerate of staff wellbeing. They provide highly effective staff training opportunities to improve practice and develop staff expertise. The staff training programme identifies relevant areas to support their continued improvement. Leaders engage well with both staff and parent communities and respond appropriately to their views and experiences. Many parents hold positive views of the school and would recommend it to others.

Those responsible for governance understand and fulfil their statutory responsibilities appropriately. They check and challenge the school's work and provide effective support to leaders.

Post-16 provision

Expected standard

Leaders have established a post-16 provision that reflects the needs and aspirations of students. The curriculum includes a range of appropriate academic, technical and vocational subjects alongside more tailored pathways that help students to bridge gaps in their learning. Teaching is effective. Teachers have expert subject knowledge. They provide students with regular opportunities to explore and deepen their learning. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported in their learning. Students demonstrate positive learning habits and independent study skills.

Typically, students achieve well. In national examinations, outcomes are broadly in line with national figures but have varied over time. Leaders have taken effective and decisive steps to address areas where achievement has been less positive. As a result, students are beginning to achieve more highly across the range of qualifications offered.

Students have positive attitudes to learning. They attend regularly and behave well. Students are positive role models to younger pupils. Many embrace opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities. They engage positively in wider enrichment opportunities alongside their learning. Students, including those with SEND and those who are disadvantaged, are well prepared to progress to the next stages of their learning, training or employment.

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

Pupils are well known and cared for. They develop positive relationships with staff and their peers as soon as they join the school. Pupils are safe and feel safe. They know that bullying is uncommon. They are confident that staff will swiftly and fairly address any incidents. Pupils behave consistently well in lessons and during social times. This is helped by the rich variety of broader experiences they are exposed to, such as peer mentoring and the opportunities to participate in sports, school productions and pupil leadership activities. These events develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

Pupils are proud of their work. They value the way the school celebrates their learning. This helps pupils to be connected to a wider community of learners. For example, displays of pupils' artwork celebrate their learning and contribute to a vibrant and positive learning environment.

Most pupils attend school every day. However, attendance is lower for some disadvantaged pupils. These pupils miss too much school. Leaders have strengthened their work to improve these pupils' attendance. There is now an enhanced transition group for Year 7 and morning routines that help to break down pupils' barriers to attending school. These actions have contributed to a rapid improvement in pupils' attendance

Post-16 students learn and achieve through courses that reflect their needs and aspirations. The post-16 curriculum includes a range of academic and vocational subjects alongside more tailored pathways. These help students address gaps in their learning and prepare well for their next steps.

Pupils achieve well throughout their time at school and progress well from their various starting points. They enjoy the different experiences that bring learning alive for them, such as residential trips that help them learn languages and practical activities in science. They are well prepared for the next stages of their lives.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that rates of absence and persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, reduce further still so that pupils maximise their opportunities for learning and benefit from the school's wider opportunities.
- Leaders should ensure that improvements to teaching, including the checks made on what pupils know and remember, are embedded across all subjects.
- Leaders should ensure that the identification of needs and relevant adaptations for vulnerable pupils, including those pupils with SEND, are embedded consistently in all lessons.

About this inspection

This school is part of the Sandon School Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jonathan Pead, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Christine Fitzsimmons.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This inspection took place on 13 October and 14 October 2026.

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, governors and other leaders, staff, parents and pupils. Inspectors reviewed the findings of Ofsted's online surveys of parents, staff and pupils.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently uses 5 alternative provisions, including 2 that are unregistered.

The headteacher took up post on 1 September 2026.

Headteacher: Jonathan Pead

Lead inspector:
Mike McKeaveney, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Kay Leach, Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Fowler, Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Celano, Ofsted Inspector
Peter Petrou, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from different sources. More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 13 October 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,218
Close to 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: 1,063

School capacity

1,253
Close to 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: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

16.94%
Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 30.4%

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

2.71%
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: 3.53%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

7.55%
Well below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 14.0%

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)

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 (final)	42.3%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	52.5%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	39.0%	45.3%	Close to average

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 (final)	46.6	46.1	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	49.3	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	44.8	46.3	Close to average

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)	0.15	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.14	-0.03	Close to average
2021/22 (final)	-0.08	-0.03	Close to average

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 (final)	23.1%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	10.3%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	18.2%	25.2%	Close to average

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 (final)	32.4	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	32.6	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	36.3	35.0	Close to average

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)	-0.68	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.52	-0.57	Close to average
2021/22 (final)	-1.14	-0.55	Below

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 (final)	23.1%	53.1%	-30.1 pp
2023/24 (final)	10.3%	53.1%	-42.8 pp
2022/23 (final)	18.2%	52.4%	-34.3 pp

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 (final)	32.4	50.4	-18.0
2023/24 (final)	32.6	50.0	-17.4
2022/23 (final)	36.3	50.3	-14.0

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 non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.68	0.16	-0.85
2022/23 (final)	-0.52	0.17	-0.68
2021/22 (final)	-1.14	0.15	-1.30

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 (revised)	91%	92%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	97%	93%	Above
2021 leavers (revised)	97%	94%	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 (final)	30.54	35.00	Below
2023/24 (final)	27.41	34.38	Below
2022/23 (final)	29.01	34.16	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 (final)	0.0	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
2025/26 (1 term)	8.0%	7.8%	Close to average
2024/25 (3 term)	9.0%	8.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	9.0%	8.9%	Close to average

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
2025/26 (1 term)	21.8%	21.5%	Close to average
2024/25 (3 term)	23.7%	23.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	24.7%	25.6%	Close to average

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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