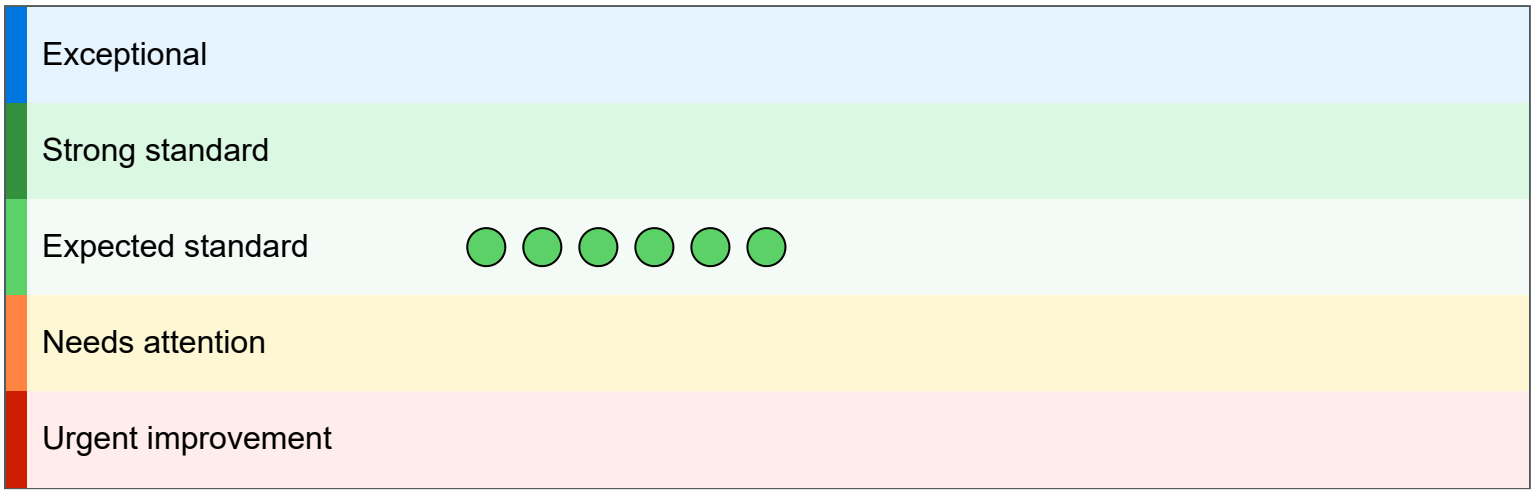
Wonder Star School

Address: Young People's Community Centre, Chapel Lane, Rode Heath, Stoke-on-Trent, ST7 3SD

Unique reference number (URN): 151438

Inspection report: 19 May 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

Considering how difficult pupils have found their education before starting at this school, pupils are achieving well. Parents and carers recognise the positive impact the school has made in the relatively short time their children have been attending. Pupils are attending more regularly and are growing in confidence. Over time, they improve their communication skills, become better at expressing their needs and develop greater independence, including managing their emotions more effectively.

When they join the school, pupils have significant gaps in their learning and many struggle to engage in learning. The foundations of mathematics and English, including early reading, are central to the curriculum. Staff address these through targeted, individualised support. This support is proving successful, particularly the degree to which the school encourages previously disengaged learners to want to succeed. However, the slight variability in delivery of the curriculum means the impact on pupils' learning in some interventions are not as effective as they could be.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Attendance is an emerging strength of the school, particularly given pupils' inconsistent engagement in education before coming here. For example, a number of pupils who only attended previous settings on a part-time basis, readily attend here full time. Leaders have a clear understanding of the reasons behind pupils' absence and work closely with parents and carers to minimise this. While no direct national comparator exists for schools with a similar cohort, attendance compares well with mainstream primary schools. The proprietor analyses attendance data meticulously, to identify patterns and use this information to address absences.

Since opening, leaders have established a positive and supportive culture for both pupils and staff. Pupils treat one another with care and respect. Any instances of unkind behaviour are rare. Staff maintain vigilant supervision and respond promptly and sensitively to any issues that arise. Well-established routines help pupils settle quickly, ensuring that the start of the day and transitions between activities are calm and orderly. The effective use of key workers and personalised resources supports pupils in engaging with these routines. Staff are attentive and responsive, offering timely support when pupils find it hard to cope with strong emotions or with busy or stimulating environments. Strong relationships underpin effective behaviour support, enabling pupils to develop greater independence and increasing confidence in managing their own behaviour.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Despite opening only in September 2025, leaders have an accurate understanding of how well the curriculum is being implemented. In general, teachers have secure subject knowledge and make effective use of well-resourced classrooms to deliver engaging lessons that pupils enjoy. There is some slight inconsistency in how well the curriculum is

taught in different subjects, but leaders understand this and have put in place a suite of training and support to address this.

The school offers 2 distinct curriculum pathways, an engagement pathway and a semi-formal pathway. Across both pathways, the curriculum is broad and ambitious and is sequenced so that lessons build on what has been taught before. However, the curriculum does not always clearly identify the fundamental and most important knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn in each subject and lesson.

A strong focus on communication underpins the curriculum and supports pupils' wider development. The curriculum is also designed to enable pupils to build secure foundations in English and mathematics. Staff make informed adaptations to lessons to take account of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff are becoming experts at understanding how pupils' life experiences and trauma impact on their learning; they make sensitive content choices with this understanding in mind.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Senior leaders have considerable expertise in educating pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and staff have a wide range of experience of working with such pupils. They understand pupils' needs well and through careful observation and assessment, identify their additional needs accurately. This enables staff to make ongoing adaptations of provision responsively.

Pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs are a key focus of staff training. Leaders recognise these as significant barriers to learning and are committed to continually refining practice and driving innovation in this area. Through a reflective and open approach, staff are increasingly effective in making adaptations that help pupils manage their emotions and engage successfully in learning, despite many having a history of non-engagement in other settings.

All pupils have education, health and care (EHC) plans that outline pupils' targets. The school breaks down targets into achievable steps that staff translate into activities in classrooms. This results in bespoke provision for each pupil. The school works closely with parents, carers and other agencies to review EHC plans. Leaders are cognisant of the additional vulnerabilities of pupils who are known or previously known to social care. Understanding the whole child, including their lived experiences, is a fundamental thread throughout the work of Wonder Star School.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

The proprietor has been effective in appointing skilled and knowledgeable staff to key roles. This has been complemented by an approach that is outward facing that welcomes professional dialogue, challenge and collaboration. Leaders know the school's strengths and areas for development well, undertaking regular quality assurance work as well as engaging the services of external advisors. Partnerships with local authorities and external providers are well established and contribute positively to the school's ongoing development. Of particular note are the positive relationships the school enjoys with parents and carers,

which begin before pupils start at the school. Leaders recognise that working in partnership with parents is key to securing the best outcomes for pupils.

The proprietor has successfully established a supportive staff culture. Staff wellbeing is central to the school's ethos, ensuring that staff are well placed to achieve the best outcomes for pupils. Leaders have made a significant investment in staff training, recognising the importance of valuing and developing staff. As a result, staff feel well supported and share the school's clear moral purpose of improving outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They value the thoughtful approach leaders take to workload, including explicitly limiting on-site hours and enabling flexible working.

The proprietor is in the early stages of establishing a governing body to strengthen oversight and accountability. Although still developing, the board includes highly experienced and expert members, who show strong potential to provide robust challenge and quality assurance. This is likely to further support leaders in maintaining high standards, including ensuring continued compliance with the independent school standards.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders have established an ambitious and wide-ranging personal development programme from which pupils benefit greatly. Despite the size of the school, the provision is extensive. Pupils take part in regular, well-considered activities that provide purposeful experiences, supporting their self-confidence, social skills and cultural awareness. This enriching programme is a consistent feature of school life, with pupils accessing several off-site visits each week. Whether visiting places of worship, a supermarket or the local library, pupils are frequently engaged in meaningful activities within the community. They loved a 'magical' Christmas boating trip across a local lake which boosted their self-confidence as well as cooperative skills.

An extensive personal, social and health education programme is in place. Units of work for this are chosen carefully to match the needs of pupils and they are adapted to make them relevant, accessible and meaningful for pupils. Pupils learn about how to stay safe in public and online. They learn about healthy relationships and about keeping themselves safe by sharing anything they are worried about. They learn about making healthy choices and benefit from a range of therapeutic experiences the school provides, including spending time with horses on a regular basis.

Pupils have a voice and are encouraged to contribute to the school and wider community. For instance, they are all invited to be part of a school council, take part in a range of charity events and get the opportunity to volunteer at a local community farm. This range of experiences gives them a better understanding of the world and supports their preparation for life in modern Britain.

Pastoral care for pupils is a real strength because staff know pupils very well and have their best interests at the heart of everything they do. Leaders recognise that moving to secondary education can be a significant challenge for pupils. Preparation begins early, with transition planning starting in Year 5, when staff work closely with parents and carers to explore options and provide support.

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

Pupils have typically not had positive experiences of education before finding Wonder Star. Many have missed a great deal of school, meaning they have significant gaps in their learning. Here they find a small school with a big heart, a calm atmosphere and caring staff. Pupils settle quickly because of how well staff get to know them, their interests and their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils have their voices heard and the space to be themselves.

Pupils enjoy learning because staff provide them with meaningful, engaging lessons. The work in pupils' books shows how hard they work and the care they take to do their best. From their starting points, pupils progress well. To enhance the curriculum and pupils' wellbeing, pupils regularly participate in a wide range of broader experiences. These include community walks, visiting museums, swimming lessons and even being visited in school by therapy animals.

Pupils show kindness and respect towards one another, offering support and encouragement. Pupils behave well and incidents of bullying are rare. There is a genuine family feel evident throughout the school because relationships are positive and nurturing, creating an atmosphere filled with smiles and laughter. This warm and supportive environment helps pupils to feel settled, confident and able to achieve their best.

Staff provide careful supervision and are trained well to recognise any safeguarding or health risks to pupils. As a result, pupils feel safe because trusted adults are always on hand to help. Parents and carers were keen to tell inspectors how their children have grown in confidence since starting here.

Pupils are at an early stage of communicating with one another, although they show respect and thoughtfulness towards one another, as these qualities are consistently modelled by staff. This results in Wonder Star being a happy place that pupils genuinely enjoy attending.

Next steps

- Leaders should further refine the curriculum so that it more clearly identifies the fundamental and most important knowledge and skills within each subject and lesson that pupils must master.
- Leaders should continue to strengthen the consistency of curriculum delivery to ensure all pupils experience consistently high-quality teaching across all curriculum areas, so that they can achieve their full potential.

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 proprietor, the head of school and other leaders during the inspection.

The name of the proprietor is Kirsty Woolridge.

The fees the school currently charges are £40,000 to £65,000.

The school's email address is: office@wonderstarschool.co.uk

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is a small special school, primarily catering for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs and autism.

The school uses no alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection: A new head of school took up post on 27 April 2026.

This is the school's first standard inspection. The school was registered by the Department for Education on 25 April 2025 and opened to pupils on 1 September 2025.

Head of school: Lauren Pierpoint

Independent school standards

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

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1. Quality of education provided — Standards met

All standards have been met.

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2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils — Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils Standards met

All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools Standards met

All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled Standards met

All standards have been met.

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

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:
Gareth Morgan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Kirsty Foulkes, 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 19 May 2026

Total pupils

13

School capacity

20

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

13

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0

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.

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