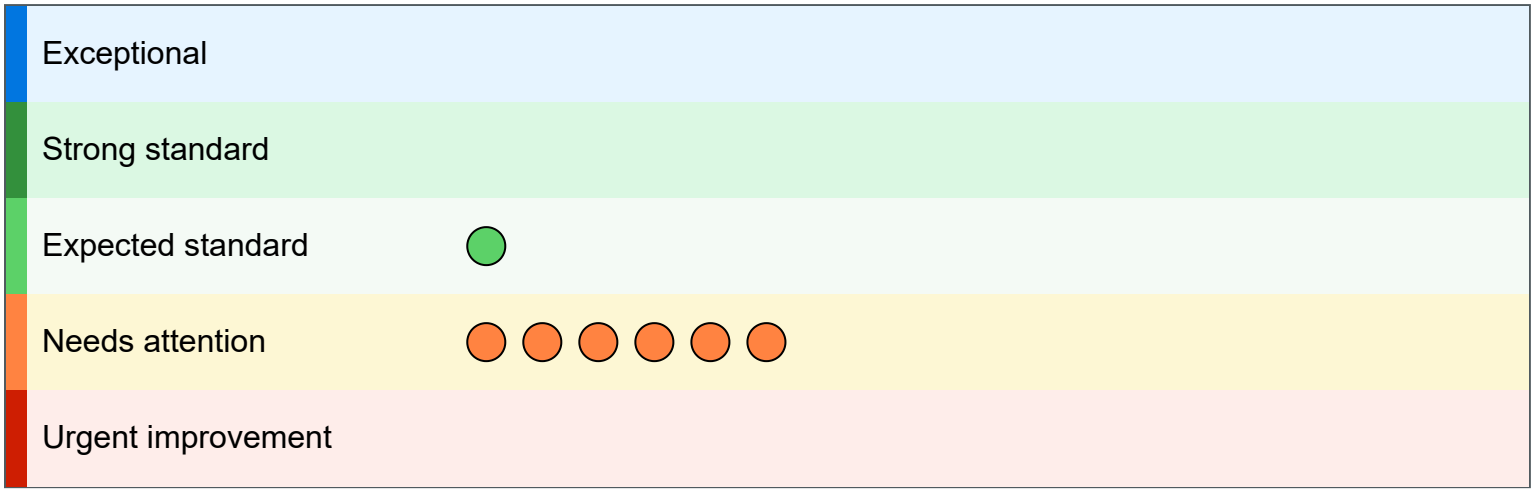
Gateacre School

Address: Hedgefield Road, Belle Vale, Liverpool, Merseyside, L25 2RW

Unique reference number (URN): 150956

Inspection report: 16 June 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.

Expected standard

Post-16 provision

Expected standard

Leaders provide clear strategic direction for the sixth-form provision. They have structured academic and vocational pathways so that students are placed on programmes that match their starting points and ambitions. Admissions processes, resit opportunities and pastoral support ensure that students receive the additional help they need to succeed. Leaders check the quality of the curriculum, and how it is taught, closely. They use the information they gather to make timely and accurate decisions about further improvement.

Students generally achieve well relative to their starting points. Assessment processes, including key assessments and work reviews, help staff identify and resolve gaps in students' learning quickly. A small number of students are limited by weaker knowledge of essential concepts, particularly in English. This affects their access to more demanding subject content. These students are supported to successfully resit GCSE English and mathematics so that they can strengthen these foundations.

Teaching in the sixth form is typically purposeful. Staff have high expectations and use their subject knowledge well. Students engage positively, although in a few lessons teachers are cautious about allowing independent thinking to support pupils to deepen their learning.

Preparation for next steps is a consistent feature of the provision. Careers education, employer encounters, university application support and tailored guidance help students progress to appropriate destinations. Wider opportunities, including enrichment, work experience and extra-curricular activities, broaden students' experiences.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention

Pupils' achievement across the curriculum is variable. This is also true for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In some subjects, pupils learn well, in others they are less successful. Some pupils have gaps in their knowledge, which makes it difficult for them to build a secure understanding across the curriculum. The work in some pupils' books shows that they have limited opportunities to write or to transfer their learning between subjects. Pupils' written work does not accurately reflect their understanding of the subjects they study.

Pupils at the earliest stages of reading and pupils who speak English as an additional language benefit from targeted support. However, older pupils do not overcome the gaps in their reading knowledge swiftly enough. This hinders their access to the curriculum.

Pupils are now ready for the next step in their learning and aiming for more ambitious destinations following their time at the school. This means that more pupils move to education or training when they leave the school.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention

Overall, pupils' attendance rates remain below the national average. Many pupils do not attend school regularly enough. In addition, persistent absence is high, particularly for older pupils. Leaders take a strategic approach to attendance. This is beginning to yield some success. Attendance rates are improving over time. However, this work has not had enough impact because leaders do not evaluate their actions well enough to identify which strategies are the most effective in removing barriers to regular attendance.

Leaders' work to re-engage pupils with the renewed school culture is developing. However, some pupils, particularly older pupils, feel less connected and do not have a genuine sense of belonging to the school community.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally positive. Their behaviour across the school is calm, orderly and respectful. Clear routines, including morning entry and uniform checks, create a positive climate where pupils feel safe. Pupils are polite, mature and willing to engage with their peers, staff and visitors. In lessons, learning is not disrupted because staff generally apply the behaviour policy fairly and consistently.

Leaders address concerns about bullying or discrimination promptly and effectively. Older pupils recognise improvements in behaviour. However, they do not fully understand the rationale for recent changes and, therefore, comply rather than meaningfully engage with the new approach.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention

The delivery of the curriculum is uneven. It is not delivered as well as leaders intend. In some subjects, teachers' use of assessment information is not used consistently well to identify pupils' misconceptions and gaps in their knowledge. At times, teachers do not adapt learning sufficiently well to help pupils overcome these deficits in their knowledge or to ensure that pupils with barriers to learning learn all that they should. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. They do not routinely challenge pupils to think independently.

Leaders have taken action to ensure that pupils who find reading difficult, including some pupils who speak English as an additional language, benefit from effective phonics teaching. They are at an earlier stage in ensuring that teachers are equipped to resolve weaknesses in pupils' basic skills in writing and mathematics swiftly.

Leaders have designed a broad and ambitious curriculum that identifies, in most subjects, the key knowledge that pupils should learn. Most teachers have secure subject knowledge. In some subjects, leaders' strategies to strengthen teaching are bearing fruit. Overall, leaders have an accurate view of teaching. They are taking the right action to bring about positive change.

Inclusion

Needs attention

Leaders accurately identify pupils' needs, but they do not ensure that staff consistently put support in place. As a result, although teachers understand pupils' individual vulnerabilities, some pupils continue to face barriers to their learning.

Leaders' checks on strategies to support pupils are underdeveloped. This means that they do not know enough about which strategies are having the greatest impact. Although there are signs that leaders' work to support disadvantaged is beginning to have some impact, much of this work is at an early stage.

The support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is variable. There has been a shift in the approach that leaders have taken to support pupils with SEND. Leaders have these pupils' best interests at heart. They make decisions that are reliable and informed by relevant evidence. This approach is beginning to help pupils with SEND to access the full curriculum. However, leaders' communication with pupils, parents and carers has not made it clear why these decisions have been made. This has led to concerns and uncertainty about the support that pupils with SEND receive.

Leaders provide a range of nurturing support that helps pupils to build their confidence and resilience. Leaders work well with external agencies to provide appropriate support for pupils known to social care. Leaders use alternative provision appropriately, securing success for pupils who attend.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention

Leaders demonstrate a commitment to improving the school, but there is not a shared understanding of the strategic direction they are taking among some staff, pupils, parents and carers. Leaders understand many of the school's strengths and the challenges it faces, and they have put appropriate plans in place. However, these plans are not consistently realised in practice because leaders do not check whether their actions are having the intended impact well enough. Variability in leadership at different levels means that the school's vision is not fully in place across subject departments.

Those responsible for governance provide oversight at a broad level but lack the detailed understanding needed to evaluate impact effectively. As a result, the challenge they offer often focuses on whether tasks have been completed rather than whether they have improved pupils' experiences and outcomes. Members of the local governing body do not consistently advocate for the school within the community, which limits leaders' efforts to rebuild trust. Relationships between the school, the trust and local authority are strained. This limits the effectiveness of partnership working.

Staff's views on wellbeing and workload are mixed. While some feel valued, others feel decisions prioritise systems over people and want clearer explanations for changes. Professional learning structures are in place, and teachers speak positively about their development, but levels of confidence and engagement among the wider staff body are uneven.

Family and community engagement remains fragile. A small but vocal group of complainants has contributed to a breakdown in trust. Some of these parents and carers do not feel heard. Despite leaders' efforts to open the school to the community, communication is not fostering the confidence needed to strengthen these relationships. As a result, the school and parents are not working together as effectively as they could in the interests of pupils.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention

Although leaders have focused on strengthening the provision for pupils' personal development, the impact of this work is not having a consistently positive impact. Some pupils do not retain or apply key knowledge, including aspects of their learning about fundamental British values. Their understanding is often superficial. Processes to check how well the personal, social, health and economic education programme is delivered are underdeveloped. This means that leaders do not have a clear enough view of how well pupils are learning the intended curriculum.

The programme to promote pupils' personal development is coherent, carefully sequenced and mapped out across wider opportunities. The Gateacre Leadership Foundations, made up of Gateacre Citizens, Gateacre Creatives, Gateacre Futures and Gateacre Sports, offers pupils a rich range of experiences. These opportunities help to develop pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding as well as fostering their individual talents and interests.

Careers education is effective. Pupils benefit from meaningful employer encounters, work experience and impartial guidance. Sixth-form students are supported by a tailored programme that prepares them for higher education, apprenticeships or employment. Leaders track engagement closely to ensure that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are able to access the full range of opportunities. Leaders use data intelligently to help guide them in removing barriers to pupils' engagement in these opportunities. Staff actively promote higher aspirations for all pupils.

Pastoral support is a notable strength of the school. Pupils speak positively about their relationships with staff and the support available to them, including wellbeing spaces and targeted support. Leaders work productively with external agencies to strengthen safeguarding and online safety education. Relationship and sex education content is age-appropriate and reflects local needs and risks.

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

Pupils' day-to-day experiences reflect a school that is safer, calmer and more orderly than in the past. However, not all pupils fully appreciate these improvements. Most pupils report that they feel safe in school and that staff respond appropriately when they raise concerns. Instances of bullying are relatively infrequent and staff address such issues promptly and effectively. A minority of pupils, particularly in key stage 4, perceive the school's strengthened approach to behaviour and attendance as too rigid. This is despite the approach contributing to a more purposeful and focused learning environment.

Behaviour around the school is generally calm. Pupils move sensibly between lessons and most respond appropriately to staff's expectations. Morning routines are positive and set an appropriate tone to the start of the day. Relationships between pupils and staff are warm and supportive.

Pupils feel secure and supported. Programmes such as the cadets and the scholars' pathway are highly valued by those who take part, helping them to develop confidence and a clear sense of belonging. This helps support pupils preparation for their next steps. The range of additional opportunities, such as the debating club and educational trips, broaden pupils' horizons at this school. Additionally, the peer mentor approach and the buddy group system between Year 7 and Year 8 foster a sense of responsibility among pupils. Students in the sixth form benefit from a comprehensive programme to support their next steps beyond school.

Pupils' enjoyment of learning varies. While many appreciate the clear routines and the ambitious curriculum that are now in place, others are less enthusiastic about learning. Nevertheless, there are clear examples of individual pupils who are overcoming their barriers to learning. Inconsistencies in teaching, staffing and expectations mean that some pupils experience learning that is as not engaging or ambitious enough. This means that some pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that assessment information is used effectively to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and to adapt teaching, so that barriers to learning are reduced and pupils progress well through the curriculum.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers enable pupils, including students in the sixth form, to work with increasing independence and to apply their knowledge with greater depth across the curriculum.
- Leaders should further improve pupils' attendance, including reducing persistent absence, by identifying and strengthening the strategies that work so that more pupils attend school regularly.
- Leaders should strengthen relationships with the wider community by developing suitable approaches that build trust and ensure parents and carers, as well as local partners, feel part of the school's improvement journey.
- Leaders should sustain the quality of the sixth-form provision as it grows by ensuring that systems, staffing and curriculum structures are scalable and continue to secure high expectations and high-quality experiences for all students.
- Leaders should strengthen their approach to quality assurance by evaluating the impact of their actions more precisely and using this information to make decisions based on what is working well.

About this inspection

This school is part of Northern Schools Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Nigel Ward, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Geoff Wainwright.

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

This inspection took place from 16 to 17 June 2026.

This inspection was carried out following concerns raised about the school, brought to our attention through qualifying complaints.

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 and other senior leaders during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority, the chair of the trust, the CEO and representatives of the local governing body, including the chair of this group.

Inspectors spoke to a wide range of pupils

The inspectors confirmed the following information about 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 school makes use of one registered alternative provision.

A large number of leaders and staff have joined the school since the last inspection. The current headteacher took up post in January 2024.

Principal: Nabil Jamil

Lead inspector:
Elaine Mawson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Ben Hill, His Majesty's Inspector
Jenny Jones, His Majesty's Inspector
Aly Spencer, Ofsted Inspector
David Marchant, 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 16 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,202
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: 1,067

School capacity

1,400
Above 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)

46.86%
Well above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 28.9%

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

4.91%
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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

15.56%
Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

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)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced provision or SEND unit (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	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	14.2%	8.4%	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 (3 term)	40.8%	23.4%	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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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