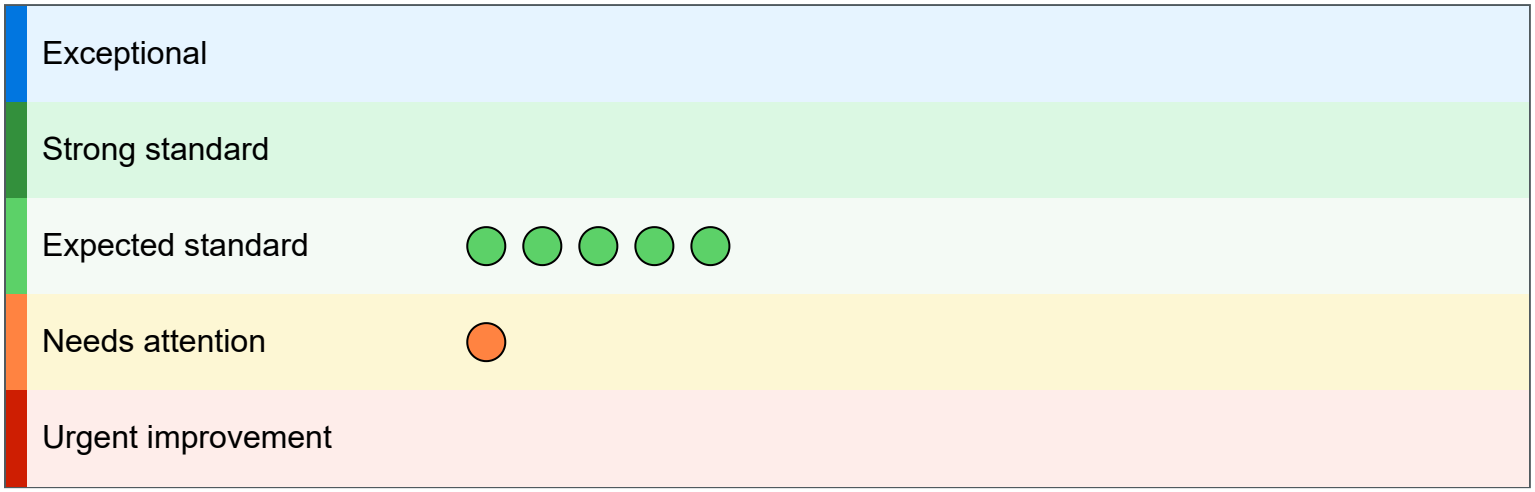
Samuel King's School

Address: Church Road, Alston, Cumbria, CA9 3QU

Unique reference number (URN): 112378

Inspection report: 9 September 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

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Leaders have prioritised improving attendance and behaviour. They track the attendance of all pupils closely, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders' actions have been effective. As a result, pupils rise to leaders' high expectations of behaviour.

Pupils who struggle to attend regularly receive timely and appropriate support. This includes personalising timetables and making regular home visits. Leaders use external support from a mental health specialist when required. This has driven improvements in attendance. Pupils with SEND attend more regularly than their counterparts. Nevertheless, the most recent published information shows that pupils do not attend as often as the national average.

Leaders have communicated rules and routines clearly. This has helped to create a calm and purposeful environment. Pupils display positive attitudes to their learning, and lessons remain uninterrupted. When pupils struggle to manage their behaviour, leaders find creative ways to overcome barriers. For example, they have involved pupils in building a playground cabin to help them remain engaged with learning.

Bullying is rare, and leaders respond effectively to incidents. They do not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment or abuse.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have a clear vision for the curriculum. They overcome logistical challenges to offer a suite of subjects that prepare pupils for their next steps. The curriculum is broad and builds on previous knowledge. This enables pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding over time.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching across all subject areas. They recognise teaching needs to be more effective in a small number of subjects. They have taken appropriate actions in this regard, although this is not yet reflected in examination results at the end of key stage 4.

Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge. They check pupils' learning regularly. This enables them to identify and respond appropriately to gaps in knowledge. Teachers adapt their approach to meet the needs of all pupils. This results in all pupils learning well. In particular, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress in line with their peers.

Leaders have introduced systems to identify pupils who do not read or write as well as they should. They have put in place a range of interventions to enable these pupils to catch up quickly.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders have a clear understanding of pupils' needs. They have embedded effective systems to identify those who face barriers to learning or wellbeing. This includes disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, every pupil receives the support they need to thrive.

Staff use effective strategies to support pupils who struggle with their learning. Targeted training, alongside helpful pupil passports, enables staff to meet the needs of all pupils. Teaching assistants are deployed well. This ensures disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND access the same curriculum as their peers.

Leaders use additional resources to reduce pupils' barriers to learning and wellbeing. This is mainly through the school's pupil premium funding. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from financial support for educational trips. This opens doors to experiences that pupils would not normally access. Creative initiatives, such as the 'learning bus' and 'the place', provide spaces for vulnerable pupils to feel a sense of community and belonging.

Leaders work effectively with the local authority to improve the experiences of children in care. There are no pupils using alternative provision.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders and governors share a clear vision for the school. They are reflective and open. They maintain an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This enables them to prioritise the most important areas for development. Leaders make decisions in the best interests of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, the school continues to progress on its journey of improvement.

Experienced governors fulfil their statutory duties. They shape the strategic direction of the school. Their work is enhanced through honest relationships with leaders. Governors provide a healthy balance of challenge and support. For instance, they help with the school's reading and careers programmes.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They celebrate leaders' caring nature and consideration for wellbeing and workload. Staff appreciate the professional learning opportunities that help them improve their classroom practice.

Parents value the close-knit and nurturing environment. They note that the relationships between pupils and staff are an important feature. As a result, many pupils travel from outside the local area to attend.

Leaders work effectively with external agencies and school improvement partners to enhance pupil experiences and improve the quality of education. They go over and above for the benefit of the local community. For example, the school serves as a hub where leaders welcome professional services to the site to meet community needs.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders have established a personal development programme that makes a positive difference to pupils. The personal, social, health and economic curriculum and the citizenship programme are carefully designed and taught in an age-appropriate manner. Themes from the personal development programme are delivered across different subject areas. For example, in English, pupils study texts exploring issues around diversity and acceptance.

Leaders reshape the curriculum to respond to local and national issues. Pupils benefit from workshops on vaping and knife crime delivered in partnership with external agencies. Pupils learn how to respond to unhealthy relationships, keep safe online and manage money responsibly. They develop an understanding of fundamental British values and protected characteristics. This fosters an environment of mutual respect and courtesy where everybody is accepted regardless of differences.

To counter the school's isolated geographical location, leaders have identified enhancing pupils' broader experiences as a key priority. Pupils access a range of clubs and trips. This includes residential trips to Edinburgh and international trips to theme parks and Berlin. Leaders monitor participation to ensure all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are involved in character-building activities. Leaders are swift in removing barriers for the most vulnerable pupils.

A wide range of opportunities, coupled with a well-embedded careers programme, builds pupils' aspirations. Pupils access useful information about employers and universities. As a result, all pupils progress to appropriate next steps in education, training or employment.

Pupils benefit from effective pastoral support. Every pupil is known personally by staff. Successful strategies ensure support is provided at the earliest opportunity. Leaders have invested in a dedicated and trained member of staff to support pupils with their changing needs. This equips pupils with the resilience and confidence to succeed.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention

In national examinations at the end of key stage 4, pupils' achievement is generally below the national average. This means some pupils are not well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

Leaders have made changes to the curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 to address weaknesses. These changes have had a positive impact. As a result, pupils build knowledge over time. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this work in published exam results.

Leaders identify pupils who require support with reading, writing and mathematics. Interventions are in place to address these gaps. However, leaders are at the early stages of

monitoring the impact of this work. This means some pupils do not develop basic skills as quickly as they could.

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

Pupils are happy and feel safe at Samuel King's School. The small nature of the school means pupils and staff know each other well and hold positive relationships. Pupils can speak to adults about their concerns or report them online. They know leaders will respond to issues swiftly. They regularly access support from external agencies if required. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from local risks. For example, workshops on smoking and drug misuse help them make the right choices outside of school.

Pupils enjoy school. This is contributing to rising attendance, including for those who may face barriers to regular attendance. Behaviour has improved significantly. Pupils learn in a calm, quiet and purposeful environment supported by clear routines. This ensures there is little disruption in classrooms. Pupils are courteous during social times. Bullying is rare, and staff respond quickly to any reports of bullying, harassment or abuse.

Pupils access a carefully designed curriculum that prepares them for their next steps. Although improved teaching means pupils make appropriate progress in classrooms, not all pupils achieve as well as they should in examinations.

Leaders ensure pupils access all areas of the school's provision. Teaching is adapted appropriately to overcome barriers in the classroom, and adjustments are made so all pupils take part in extra-curricular offers. For example, leaders made personalised arrangements during a recent trip to Berlin to ensure that all pupils could attend. As a result, all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit from unique experiences.

Pupils participate in a wide range of experiences, including clubs and trips that introduce them to new encounters. Leaders use creative methods to encourage pupils to pursue their interests. For instance, pupils have helped staff build a playground cabin and restore an off-road buggy, which enables them to remain motivated across the curriculum.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that all pupils develop appropriate knowledge and skills across the curriculum so that they achieve as well as they should in national examinations.
- Leaders should ensure that they remove barriers for vulnerable pupils in attending school so their attendance continues to increase.

About this inspection

This school is part of the Alston Moor Federation. The chair of the board of governors in this school is Jim McCarry.

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

This inspection took place on 9 and 10 September 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, other senior leaders, staff and pupils.

The lead inspector spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. They also spoke with representatives from the local authority during the inspection.

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 does not use alternative provision.

Headteacher: Rob Dawson

Lead inspector:
Usman Kothia, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Melissa Relph, 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 9 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

113
Well below 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

235
Well below 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)

25.66%
Close to 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

6.19%
Well 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: 3.53%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

16.81%
Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 14.0%

Location deprivation

Close to 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)	23.1%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	23.1%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	26.3%	45.3%	Below

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)	30.2	46.1	Below
2023/24 (final)	36.4	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	44.4	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)	-0.24	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.55	-0.03	Above
2021/22 (final)	-0.34	-0.03	Below

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)	S	25.8%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	25.8%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	25.2%	S

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)	S	34.9	S
2023/24 (final)	S	34.6	S
2022/23 (final)	S	35.0	S

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)	S	-0.57	S
2022/23 (final)	S	-0.57	S
2021/22 (final)	S	-0.55	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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)	S	53.1%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	53.1%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	52.4%	S

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)	S	50.4	S
2023/24 (final)	S	50.0	S
2022/23 (final)	S	50.3	S

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)	S	0.16	S
2022/23 (final)	S	0.17	S
2021/22 (final)	S	0.15	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been

mirrored and applied in the report card.

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)	89%	92%	Not available
2022 leavers (revised)	96%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers (revised)	100%	94%	Not available

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)	11.6%	8.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	11.9%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	9.9%	9.0%	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
2024/25 (3 term)	32.1%	23.4%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	38.5%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	38.6%	26.5%	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.

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