

Priestnall School

Address: Priestnall Road, Heaton Mersey, Stockport, Cheshire, SK4 3HP

Unique reference number (URN): 149936

Inspection report: 22 September 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.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Benefitting from a culture of high expectations and their own quiet diligence, pupils are incredibly well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training when they leave the school. Pupils' attainment in national examinations at the end of key stage 4 is consistently above national averages over time. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils, although their achievement is not fully reflected in published results for 2025 because a high proportion of these pupils joined the school towards the end of key stage 4.

Pupils consistently develop a deep understanding of each subject. They readily connect learning together which helps them to accumulate and embed knowledge successfully. For example, pupils converse with accuracy and confidence in modern foreign languages thanks to their impressive knowledge of French or Spanish.

Leaders ensure that any barriers to pupils' achievement are dismantled. This includes prompt remedying of any gaps in pupils' literacy or numeracy knowledge. As a result, pupils make rapid progress through the curriculum, whatever their starting points.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Drawing on a wealth of expertise, trust and school leaders work closely together to ensure that each subject curriculum is ambitious and meticulously designed. Staff credit this collaboration with the trust for revitalising the curriculum. For instance, changes in modern foreign languages mean that, from low numbers previously, almost every pupil studies towards a GCSE in Spanish or French.

Leaders provide staff with a programme of professional learning that ensures that high-quality teaching is embedded across subjects. Staff use their subject expertise to help pupils to understand difficult concepts and to identify and address any misconceptions swiftly. Leaders' emphasis on oracy helps pupils to articulate their understanding clearly and with confidence.

Leaders ensure that inclusive approaches are embedded in teaching so that learning is accessible for all. When appropriate, including for those in the specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, staff expertly adapt their teaching further. As a result, pupils with any barriers to their learning make rapid progress from their starting points.

Leaders take quick and effective action to identify those pupils who risk being held back by deficits in their reading, writing or mathematics knowledge. Expert support is quickly deployed to address these gaps so that pupils learn successfully across the curriculum.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Since the school joined the trust, leaders have refined their approach to inclusion to ensure that all pupils can succeed. This includes those in the school's specially resourced provision

for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (specially resourced provision).

Leaders have a comprehensive understanding of any barriers that might hinder pupils from engaging in school or learning successfully. This informs the support that pupils receive, both in and outside of the classroom. Working with external professionals when appropriate, leaders meticulously review the impact of their actions to reduce these barriers and are adept at adjusting support if needed. The impact of leaders' work is particularly apparent in how successfully pupils in the specially resourced provision learn in the classroom alongside their peers.

The proportion of pupils in the school who are disadvantaged is lower than the national average. Leaders have prioritised ensuring that these pupils have all that they need to be successful, both academically and personally. For example, leaders thoughtfully review the extent to which these pupils engage in the school's enrichment offer and make astute use of additional funding to address any gaps in pupils' experiences through trips or extra-curricular activities.

Leaders use alternative provision sparingly and judiciously to further reduce any barriers that might hinder pupils from being successful.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard 

The extent to which the school has improved since it joined the trust is noteworthy. Trust and school leaders have worked tirelessly together to ensure that pupils have the school that they deserve. As such, pupils have been at the heart of every decision made. The success of leaders' actions is patently clear in all areas. Staff and many parents and carers emphasised the positive difference that the trust has made across all aspects of provision. This work is appreciated by none more than the pupils themselves.

In a time of much change, leaders have re-energised staff. An exceedingly high-quality and effective programme of professional learning has formed the bedrock of school improvement. This has resulted in consistently excellent teaching and expert support for pupils with barriers to their learning or wellbeing. Staff particularly value opportunities to work with, and learn alongside, colleagues within the trust. This partnership works seamlessly to continue to refine the curriculum and the quality of teaching, while also helping to ensure that staff's workload is manageable.

Leaders at all levels have established rigorous systems to ensure that they have comprehensive oversight of the school. As such, they have an astute understanding of what works well and where further refinement would be beneficial. For example, work to increase pupils' attendance so that it exceeds national averages remains a priority. Bolstered by perceptive challenge and unwavering support from trustees and members of the governing body, leaders have a clear vision to ensure that the school offers an education of the highest quality. Their actions have resulted in consistently high standards across all areas of the school's work.

Leaders have carefully crafted a programme of personal development that furnishes pupils with the knowledge, skills and experiences to become confident and compassionate citizens. Leaders' insightful understanding of each pupil is used to inform this offer. For instance, some pupils who struggle to advocate for themselves benefit from bespoke support to be more assertive and resilient. Similarly, leaders closely track participation in enrichment activities to ensure that there is truly something for everyone. Wherever possible, they dismantle barriers to participation to ensure that all pupils benefit.

Leaders prioritise promoting diversity and tolerance. They work closely with pupils to ensure that everyone feels represented and valued, reviewing everything from the curriculum to department displays and the facilities and clubs that are on offer. This is complemented by a notable approach to developing critical empathy which helps pupils to understand difference, be empathetic and challenge otherness. The impact of this work is evident through the way that pupils conduct themselves, with kindness and care for others.

Pupils acquire a detailed understanding of important topics that prepare them well for life in modern society. For instance, they understand democratic processes, including how laws are made, as well as developing a sophisticated understanding of healthy relationships. Leaders ensure that all pupils, including those who attend alternative provision, are supported to learn this vital information.

Pupils' experiences are greatly enriched by an abundance of opportunities to discover new activities, visit different countries, assume meaningful leadership roles and contribute to charitable endeavours. Pupils embrace these opportunities wholeheartedly. They recognise the rewards that can be reaped when they step outside of their comfort zone.

Leaders ensure that pupils receive a wealth of information about the opportunities that are available to them in education, employment or training when they leave the school. Pupils' aspirations are served well by their thorough understanding of the qualifications and skills that they need to access their chosen next steps.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Leaders have prioritised increasing pupils' attendance. Rigorous systems enable leaders to carefully track patterns of absence and intervene swiftly when they spot concerns. As a result, pupils' overall rate of attendance is broadly in line with the national average and continues to increase. Even so, some pupils with long-standing irregular attendance are taking longer to improve. This includes some pupils who are disadvantaged. Staff work closely with these pupils and their families, seeking additional support when appropriate, to continue to reduce the barriers that prevent regular attendance.

Leaders ensure that staff manage behaviour calmly and consistently. Pupils adhere to well-established routines with little prompting. On the rare occasions when this is not the case,

staff reinforce their expectations with warmth and humour. Staff are quick to acknowledge pupils' diligence and positive attitudes to learning. This helps to create an environment in which pupils prize trying their best and take pride in their achievements.

Pupils value the friendships that they forge during their time in the school. They feel comfortable being themselves because they learn the importance of treating everyone with respect. In this atmosphere, bullying or discrimination are rare. Such incidents are resolutely resolved by staff. Pupils blossom into confident, considerate, friendly and polite young people.

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

Pupils are highly appreciative of the improvements that leaders have made to the school since it joined the trust. These changes have resulted in pupils' experiences being transformed for the better. For example, leaders have invested in sports facilities, strengthened teaching and established a culture where pupils behave well and try their best. As a result, pupils feel happy in school. They attend regularly, keen to make the most of the wealth of opportunities on offer.

The school's harmonious ethos is founded on positive relationships and mutual respect. Staff consistently model polite and respectful behaviour and pupils emulate these attributes in turn. For instance, it is usual for pupils to hold doors open and to interact maturely with one another. In this safe, calm environment, pupils are unencumbered by worries about bullying. They develop the confidence to step outside their comfort zone, both in lessons and by making the most of a vast array of extra-curricular 'electives'. Be it climbing, knitting, chess, baking or a plethora of sporting activities, pupils embrace opportunities to nurture existing interests or discover previously hidden talents.

Pupils benefit from a highly ambitious curriculum that is expertly taught. They strive to achieve highly, which is reflected in their quietly conscientious approach in lessons. Across subjects, pupils' attainment in examinations at the end of Year 11 is consistently above national averages. This reflects the deep, rich knowledge that pupils of all ages acquire.

Pupils who face barriers to their learning or wellbeing are quickly identified. Precisely focused support helps these pupils, including those in the specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to engage fully in school life. They make rapid progress through the curriculum from their starting points. Regardless of any such barriers, pupils are exceedingly well prepared for life beyond school, both personally and academically.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to refine their strategies to reduce pupils' absences, including for those disadvantaged pupils with the largest barriers to attendance, so that these pupils

benefit fully from all that the school has to offer.

About this inspection

This school is part of the Laurus 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), Martin Vevers, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Anthony Little.

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

This inspection took place on Tuesday 22 and Wednesday 23 September 2026.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) 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 the CEO and representatives of the board of trustees and the local academy committee. An inspector also spoke to a representative of the local authority.

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 opened as a new school when it joined the Laurus Trust in September 2023. The current headteacher was appointed at that time.

The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (specially resourced provision). This supports pupils with cognition and learning needs or social, emotional and mental health needs. The specially resourced provision caters for 37 pupils.

The school currently makes use of three alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

Headteacher: Rachel Howarth

Lead inspector:

Sally Rix, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Sally Kenyon, Ofsted Inspector

Chris Meldrum, Ofsted Inspector

Christopher Beard, Ofsted Inspector

Andy Cunningham, His Majesty's 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 22 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,312

Above 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

1,275

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)

14.48%

Well 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

6.63%

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

19.82%

Above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 14.0%

Location deprivation

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)

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)	56.7%	45.4%	Above
2023/24 (final)	64.4%	45.9%	Above
2022/23		45.3%	

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)	52.6	46.1	Above
2023/24 (final)	56.8	45.9	Above
2022/23		46.3	

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)	0.40	-0.03	Above
2022/23		-0.03	
2021/22		-0.03	

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)	23.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	29.0%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23		25.2%	

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)	35.8	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	41.3	34.6	Above
2022/23		35.0	

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 average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.22	-0.57	Above
2022/23		-0.57	
2021/22		-0.55	

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)	23.7%	53.1%	-29.5 pp
2023/24 (final)	29.0%	53.1%	-24.1 pp
2022/23		52.4%	

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)	35.8	50.4	-14.6

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	41.3	50.0	-8.7
2022/23		50.3	

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)	-0.22	0.16	-0.38
2022/23		0.17	
2021/22		0.15	

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
2022 leavers (revised)	98%	93%	Above

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)	8.5%	8.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	8.3%	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
2024/25 (3 term)	20.9%	23.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	21.4%	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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