

Martha H School

Address: Downall Green Road, Wigan, Greater Manchester, WN4 0LZ

Unique reference number (URN): 151794

Inspection report: 12 May 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.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders are establishing high expectations for pupils' attendance. Leaders monitor absence closely to analyse trends and identify underlying causes. Although attendance is currently below national averages, leaders are doing all they can to secure improvement. They work closely with pupils' families to create individualised plans for pupils with high levels of absence. Staff make regular home visits to pupils who struggle to attend. Many pupils were previously not accessing school at all. Hence, improvements have been made from their low starting points.

Staff know pupils well and build warm relationships with them. Pupils appear happy coming into school, and routines for the start of the day are embedded. Due to pupils' needs, there are frequent incidents of pupils having difficulty managing their feelings, but agreed rules and expectations are applied effectively by staff.

Staff act as role models, reinforcing the school's expectations consistently. Pupils are appropriately supervised, both in lessons and at social times. Pupils strive to behave well. They are friendly and sociable. They learn about the importance of treating each other with respect. Most pupils approach learning with curiosity and a positive attitude. Any incidents of bullying, discrimination or violence are dealt with swiftly and effectively, helping to maintain a safe atmosphere across the school.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are understood quickly when they arrive. Parents and carers are fully involved in the transition process. This early engagement helps leaders to take a proactive approach to reducing barriers and supporting pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

Leaders act swiftly to put appropriate plans in place to help pupils to settle in. There is a clear approach to identifying any new needs that arise. Staff receive appropriate training and support to implement approaches related to SEMH, autism spectrum condition and pupils' emotional management. For example, staff have received training in de-escalation and safe restrictive physical intervention. Support is informed by specialist advice where necessary. Staff are skilled at overcoming pupils' SEMH barriers. They make frequent, responsive adaptations to their practice, such as signing Makaton, using sensory movement breaks and honing in on pupils' interests to distract or engage them. This helps pupils to communicate, regulate and engage in tasks.

Work is ongoing to ensure that, once settled at the school, pupils receive effective teaching and support to secure the basics in learning and make the academic gains they need.

Leaders work effectively with the local authority. Leaders take a thoughtful and personalised approach, carefully considering each pupil's context to overcome their individual barriers.

Leaders have embedded a broad, coherent personal development programme. They have paid careful consideration to the vulnerabilities and additional needs of their pupils. Staff know pupils well and understand the wide range of challenges they face. As a result, pupils feel comfortable and are confident in seeking pastoral support whenever they need it.

Leaders make sure that pupils are amply prepared for living in a diverse and modern Britain. Pupils have a secure grasp of fundamental British values and can explain how an election works. They are keen to take up leadership roles on offer, such as being school councillors. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of equality and recognise that discrimination is never acceptable.

Pupils learn how to recognise and develop safe and healthy relationships. They understand the different stages of human development and the concept of consent. Pupils learn how to manage their emotions and resolve conflict, supported by approaches such as breakout areas and the zones of regulation. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online. For example, they know not to give out their personal details and how to recognise a scam.

Pupils take part in a wide range of enrichment activities, such as sports, music and coding. These are planned to ensure that all pupils access them. This helps pupils to develop their interests or to learn new skills.

The school places a strong emphasis on careers education, making sure that pupils have a secure understanding of next steps and career pathways. Staff acknowledge the difficulties that many pupils face accessing unfamiliar groups and situations. They work closely with them to promote their understanding of community and build their confidence. Practical life skills, such as budgeting and travel planning, are taught effectively, ensuring that pupils are well prepared for the transition to further education and independent adulthood.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils arrive at the school with a history of fragmented education. They face many barriers and begin with different levels of prior achievement. Some pupils do not have a secure grasp of phonics or number facts. Leaders rightly focus first on addressing pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. This has meant that academic progress and achievement through the curriculum have not received enough attention. Gaps in many pupils' essential learning persist, and this hinders their ability to access more difficult concepts in reading, writing and mathematics.

Work in pupils' books presents a varied picture, often with repetitive tasks that do not demonstrate any clear progression or take account of pupils' abilities. Some pupils are able to articulate aspects of their wider learning. For example, some could explain the water

cycle using scientific vocabulary. However, many pupils are not prepared well enough for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Leaders have embedded a clearly sequenced curriculum for each subject and year group. Leaders have ensured that, through appropriate training, subject leaders know the content of their areas.

The proprietor and governors have not ensured that all of the independent school standards in part 1 have been met consistently. Staff's pedagogical approaches are not developed well enough. The delivery of the curriculum is of an inconsistent quality, with activities not always matching to learning objectives or to pupils' abilities. There is variability in how well staff implement strategies to address significant gaps in pupils' essential basic learning in communication, English and mathematics. As a result, these gaps persist.

Targets in pupils' individual support plans do not match the support they are receiving. Support lacks precision and is not consistently high-quality or regular enough. Staff use broad assessment bands rather than concise criteria. This does not enable them to check accurately what pupils know or to plan their next steps in learning. Consequently, pupils make little academic progress rather than the rapid catch-up that they need.

Unsettled behaviour does disrupt learning at times, but it is managed effectively by staff. Adaptations such as ear defenders, sensory breaks and now-and-next boards are used routinely and effectively to support pupils to remain calm.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

The proprietor and senior leaders' vision is firmly rooted in wanting the best for pupils in their schools. However, their oversight of the curriculum, teaching and pupils' progress is not sufficiently accurate. They have not identified that, once pupils are settled, they are not making the academic gains required and that the pace of learning progression is not rapid enough.

The proprietor and governors have provided effective oversight of the launch of this new school, particularly in key areas such as health and safety and safeguarding. The allocation of resources to ensure that staff are well trained to support the transition of vulnerable pupils back into school has been well judged and effective. However, the proprietor and senior leaders do not hold school leaders to account in the same way for how well pupils learn and achieve.

The proprietor and senior leaders ensure that staff wellbeing is maintained. Staff speak positively about their roles. There is a strong sense of teamwork evident at the school. Staff receive effective training through consultants and other educational professionals in their group of schools. Staff say they feel confident to manage the needs of pupils and that leaders are always ready to support them. Staff also appreciate the opportunities available for career progression.

Parents and carers are highly positive about the school. Many expressed appreciation for the caring and individualised approach taken by staff and shared their relief that their children are back in school and engaging positively with education again.

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

Pupils receive a warm welcome when they arrive at this newly established school. Many pupils have been away from education for a significant time when they arrive here. All pupils who attend Martha H School have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff focus on getting to know each individual pupil well and provide the bespoke support that they might need. This helps pupils to feel happy and safe and resume the stability they need. As a result, pupils settle quickly into their new school community.

Pupils try hard with their work. They make a genuine effort to live out the school's values each day, showing compassion in the way they support one another and creativity in how they approach learning. They explore new ideas with curiosity, and they grow in confidence as they take on new challenges.

Owing to some weaknesses in teaching, pupils generally do not achieve as well as they should. This includes some pupils not developing the fluency that they need in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils, therefore, are not always fully prepared for their next stages.

Staff build effective relationships with pupils that sit at the heart of their daily school experience. Pupils trust staff to resolve any issues that arise, including instances of bullying or name-calling. Pupils strive to build new relationships and be respectful towards others. Staff manage pupils' frequent instances of difficulty in managing their feelings, with confidence and care. Most pupils attend school regularly. The inviting school site, with its spacious classrooms and green field, helps create a calm atmosphere where pupils begin to rebuild positive experiences of school.

Pupils' personal development is prioritised by leaders. Pupils learn how to look after both their physical health and their emotional wellbeing. This includes enjoying regular enrichment activities such as gardening and computing clubs, and completing the daily mile in their playground. Pupils build healthy habits and positive attitudes to prepare them for life beyond school.

Next steps

- Leaders should support and develop staff expertise to ensure that pupils develop their foundational knowledge in communication, reading, writing and mathematics so that they consistently achieve well.
- Leaders should ensure that staff consistently align learning targets to meet the specific needs of pupils. Leaders should ensure that progress against them is accurately and regularly measured and that staff use this information to inform next steps in teaching.

- Leaders should ensure that staff have the expertise to teach the curriculum well, with highly effective lessons that employ the pedagogical approaches needed for each phase, subject and range of ability to consistently meet the associated independent school standards.
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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 representatives of the executive board and the headteacher during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with staff during the inspection. The lead inspector spoke with the proprietor and a representative of the local authority.

The name of the proprietor is Polaris Children's Services Limited.

The chair of the proprietor body is Joanne August.

The fees currently charged are £68,965.

The school's email address is schooloffice@marthahschool.co.uk

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school caters for pupils with education, health and care plans, with their primary need identified as social, emotional and mental health needs and/or autism.

This is the first standard inspection of a newly registered school. The school was registered by the Department for Education on 30 June 2025.

The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

Headteacher : Yvette Carr

Independent school standards

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

The following standards have not been met:

Paragraph 3

The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school–

- (a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
- (b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
- (c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
- (d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
- (g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;

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.

All standards have been met.

All standards have been met.

The following standards have not been met:

Paragraph 34(1)

The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–

- (a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
- (b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and

Lead inspector:
Ruth Moran, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Barbara Dutton, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.

 This data is from 12 May 2026

Total pupils

31

School capacity

42

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

31

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

31

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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