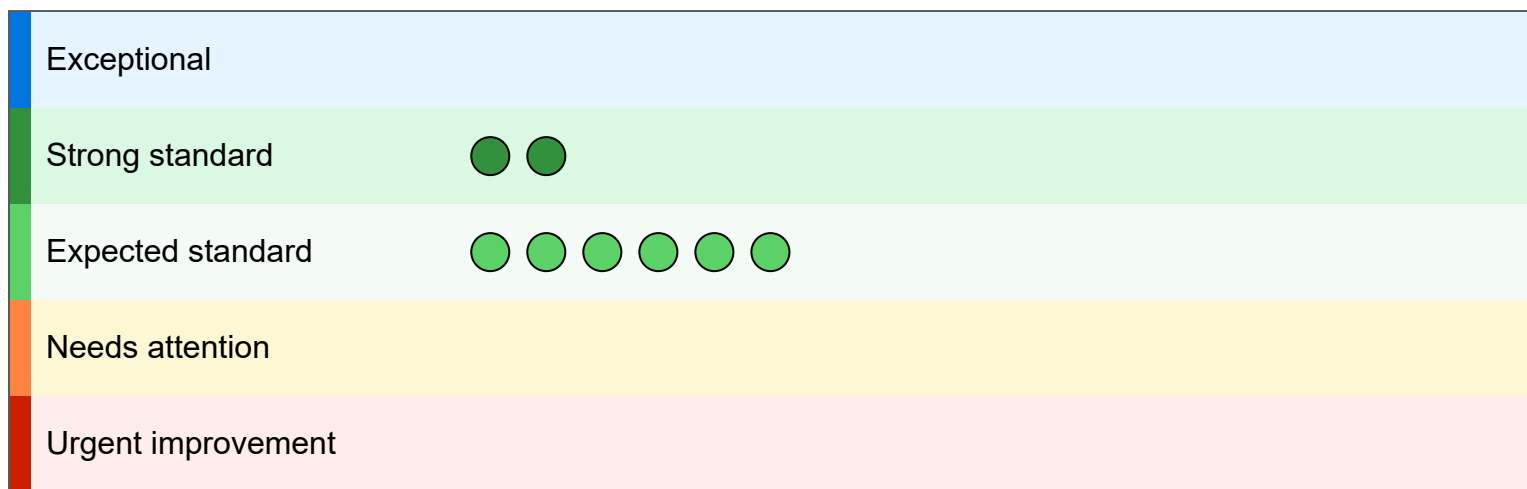


Bidwell Brook School

Address: Shinner's Bridge, Dartington, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 6JU

Unique reference number (URN): 113643

Inspection report: 24 March 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.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders have a positive impact on pupils' attendance. They are highly sensitive to and considerate of the needs of pupils who face barriers to high attendance, without lowering expectations. Leaders take swift action. They work closely and creatively with families to provide advice and guidance where attendance is too low. Leaders follow a thorough plan, take a stepped approach and use a range of strategies. Where appropriate, this involves external support from other professionals. Leaders are rigorous in their oversight of pupils' attendance. This leads to increasingly successful experiences of school for pupils with high levels of need.

There are high expectations of pupils' behaviour across the school. This starts in the early years, where routines are established well. Leaders prevent escalation in behaviour by recognising behaviour as communication. They are highly alert to pupils' triggers linked to sensory needs, routines or emotions. This is a result of the depth of knowledge staff hold for each pupil. Staff model language and approaches consistently. They make extensive and skilled adaptations and adjustments to support pupils when they are overwhelmed or struggle to manage their emotions or responses. Leaders draw on close analysis of behaviour incidents to refine the provision that is in place, whether that is linked to person or environment. The impact of this is a reduction in incidents of behaviour. Pupils feel safe and are not at risk of discriminatory behaviour, such as bullying. Pupils want to be in school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

The personal development and wellbeing programme prepares pupils to be active, responsible citizens who understand core values, including fundamental British values. Character development is deliberately planned. It fosters pride, belonging and self discipline from the early years to the sixth form. Pupils learn about their disabilities and diagnoses where appropriate. Staff are skilled in their use of responsive teaching, positive communication with families and celebration of achievements to strengthen pupils' understanding of the importance of community and their self-esteem. This leads to pupils becoming inspirational champions for special educational needs and/or disabilities. They educate the world around them about what they have to offer and how they can contribute to society.

Pupils learn how to maintain healthy lifestyles, understand risks such as substance abuse and recognise how mental health affects behaviour. Mental health and wellbeing are closely linked to the school's advocacy approach. Pupils learn about safety, such as road, water and online safety. They understand public versus private behaviour, medical terminology and practical life skills. Staff skilfully reinforce this through the curriculum, social stories, outdoor learning and community experiences. The school's outdoor learning provision, 'rural skills', helps pupils apply learning in real-life contexts and supports their pastoral, social and emotional development. Enrichment, including clubs, trips, residential visits and activities funded through additional resources broadens pupils' experiences.

Leaders ensure that there is a wide-ranging therapeutic offer and a strong culture of advocacy that ensures pupils' voices shape their learning. The personal, social and health

education curriculum meets statutory requirements. It extends to build pupils' confidence, resilience and emotional wellbeing. There is an increasing focus on relationships and community as pupils move towards the sixth form. The curriculum responds to safeguarding themes and local intelligence. This equips pupils to thrive beyond school.

Pupils develop an appreciation of the wider world by learning about different faiths, cultures and backgrounds. Older pupils engage in community projects, such as supporting the local church. Age-appropriate careers education, visits, visitors and partnerships provide meaningful work-related learning and guide pupils towards aspirational pathways into adulthood.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

The school supports pupils well to progress successfully from their starting points. The school ensures that pupils build a secure and appropriate knowledge base in English and mathematics.

Achievement beyond the academic is clearly evident throughout the school. Increasingly, pupils attend school well and strengthen their communication and skills to advocate for themselves, as well as manage emotional regulation and grow in independence. Pupils are prepared well for the transitions they make between key stages. They manage successfully the demands of moving into subject-specific learning from an engagement-focused approach to learning and development.

Pupils' sustained and appropriate destinations from the end of key stage 4 onwards demonstrate the positive impact of the school's education offer. Pupils in key stage 4 and students in the sixth form achieve an appropriate range of qualifications, which include BTEC National Diplomas and functional skills. Pupils are prepared well for next steps after school, whether this be education, employment or training.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The ambitious curriculum is designed to be flexible enough to meet pupils' starting points and is underpinned by each individual's education, health and care plan. The 3 curriculum pathways support teachers to teach the curriculum at an appropriate level for the diverse range of needs in each class group. Staff are skilled in using a range of communication approaches, including signing and symbol-based systems. This is fundamental in ensuring that pupils can participate fully in their learning.

Leaders have an accurate view of the curriculum provision. They use this information to develop and refine the current curriculum offer to secure greater consistency in teaching. Leaders check its impact on what pupils learn and can do across all subject areas. The curriculum places a clear focus on foundational skills in reading, writing, mathematics and personal, social and health education. Staff have the subject knowledge and detail of pupils' needs and barriers to adapt learning effectively based on precise home-school agreement

targets. This supports pupils to increase these core skills. Pupils have opportunities to transfer and practise these skills, and those from the wider curriculum, in more practical ways such as in rural skills lessons and real-life learning in the community.

Early years

Expected standard 

The early years classroom, Ladybirds, provides a well-designed learning environment with varied sensory and play-based activities. Children are supported to explore physically and develop motor skills. The space supports children to feel safe and benefit from nurturing, positive relationships with staff.

The environment is intentionally designed to build early learning foundations. These come through play, repetition, sensory experiences and communication-rich opportunities, including activity trays, water play and varied exploratory resources. Typically, the staff team supports this well through its detailed knowledge of each child. However, leaders continue to improve the consistency and strengthen the precision with which the early years curriculum impacts on what children know and can do.

To prepare children for the transition into key stage 1 and beyond, there is a clear focus on routine and communication. Staff use a variety of approaches well. Staff ensure that children have well-designed opportunities to practise their communication and develop their preferred approach. This provides important foundations for early reading development.

Staff work alongside parents and carers. These relationships help staff to understand children's needs precisely and provide effective support from the moment children start at the school. Children benefit from the early identification of additional needs and vulnerabilities, including work with external professionals, to ensure that their needs are met holistically.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

The school has established an inclusive culture that is woven into staff practice successfully. When pupils join the school, leaders gather detailed information about them. They use pupils' education, health and care plans to understand individual needs. Leaders have effective checking systems to assure themselves of the accuracy of this information. This thorough and detailed knowledge is used effectively to provide the appropriate support pupils need to make progress from their starting points. It is underpinned by the school's focus on each pupil having a voice and ability to communicate fully.

Staff work alongside other professionals, such as medical and therapy staff, in class and for guidance and advice. This ensures that pupils' additional needs are met well and they can take part meaningfully in learning and wider school life. Leaders ensure that staff have the necessary expertise to adapt and adjust provision, working with other external agencies if appropriate. Families and pupils are actively involved in the design of each individual's education offer. This is through statutory review processes and processes such as regular home-school agreement target setting.

The school uses additional funding well to ensure that different vulnerable groups achieve

successful outcomes. The school uses alternative provision wisely and with positive benefits for any pupil who may access it.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders demonstrate a quiet determination. They, including governors, know and understand the school's strengths and areas for priority actions. The school has gone through a challenging year, which impacted considerably on the school community. Much has been learned and acted on in the last 12 months. Leaders welcome, and actively invite, external scrutiny and act on this advice. Leaders have gone some way to repair relationships, trust and confidence with parents, carers and staff. They are now able to focus on strengthening the precision and clarity of their oversight and closer evaluation of the impact of their decisions so that the most effective education offer is in place across all aspects of the school provision.

Leaders act in pupils' best interests. This is evident through their safeguarding practices around pupils and staff and effective multi-agency work with the local authority and other partners. This successfully supports the high levels of need and vulnerabilities of pupils who attend Bidwell Brook.

Leaders consider staff workload and wellbeing and encourage staff's professional growth. This builds staff confidence, including in support staff and teachers in the early stages of their careers. The school has faced challenges from reduced staffing levels. Leaders are aware of the need to further support staff to have full confidence in their expertise, skills and the resources they have available to them in light of this. That said, staff note a significant uplift in morale and climate recently. This has contributed to a calmer, more settled environment for staff and pupils. Families are more engaged and positive about the school's impact.

Governors know the school well and use their broad range of expertise well to fulfil their roles effectively. They keep themselves well informed of school developments through reporting from and meeting with staff, leaders and pupils.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

The sixth-form provision is structured with appropriate and ambitious outcomes and qualifications to enhance students' preparation for their next steps in education, employment or training. Qualifications, such as BTEC National Diplomas and entry-level functional skills, are selected to support practical application of knowledge. Teaching is flexible and responsive. Staff adapt learning in real time based on pupils' needs. Connected with the curriculum across the rest of the school, leaders are working to strengthen the design and consistency of how well the sixth-form curriculum is delivered. That said, students progress well from their starting points, particularly in developing independence, communication and employability skills. Achievement is measured not only through qualifications but through students' ability to apply skills in real-life contexts, including work experience and enterprise activities. Leaders' knowledge of the impact of the curriculum in the sixth form is supported by effective use of systems to check on progress and identify students' next steps.

Leaders have a clear focus on preparing students for adulthood. The curriculum is personalised and adapted effectively to meet students' needs, aspirations and destinations. The environment, routines and language used are intentionally age appropriate to reflect students' status as young adults. Student voice is used meaningfully to shape provision, for example through enterprise-led improvements to the sixth-form environment, such as the money raised by the students for the pool table and sensory equipment.

Leaders enrich the sixth-form offer further with students taking on leadership roles, enterprise projects and 'Champions for Change' advocacy work. It provides them with a tangible taste of the difference they can make as an active member of their chosen communities.

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

Pupils have a voice at Bidwell Brook. It is valued and makes a difference in school and beyond. Pupils' confidence and individuality are fostered through staff commitment and skill in meeting their needs and aspirations for what they can achieve, academically and personally. Developing communication and forming nurturing relationships underpin each pupil's experience of school, from the early years through to the sixth form. As a result, pupils across the school enthuse about their time in school. They identify many aspects that bring them joy.

Pupils benefit from the sensitivity and care they experience from staff. Pupils then show this to each other. Pupils describe behaviour in classes as generally positive. Behaviour out of the classroom is equally as positive. When pupils practise and transfer learning from the classroom into real-life contexts, they are tolerant and considerate of their peers. Pupils feel confident speaking with staff when issues arise, reflecting an open and trusting culture. When incidents occur, including those that may be linked to discriminatory behaviour or bullying, pupils report that staff respond quickly and effectively. Pupils are keen to celebrate the friendships they have across the school. They demonstrate a secure awareness of how they are each different and unique. Pupils understand that they require different approaches from staff and each other to feel safe and included in school life. This in turn leads to pupils attending highly.

Pupils hold positive and inspiring ambitions for their futures. This is as a result of the 'futures' programme and the school's personal development offer. Pupils' experiences are further enhanced by activities such as trampolining, climbing, cinema trips, sports tournaments, sensory theatre, horse therapy and extensive outdoor learning opportunities. Pupils are prepared well to move confidently and knowledgeably through the different school phases and on to appropriate post-16 destinations, at the right time in their school journey.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to develop and strengthen the curriculum. This is in order to secure greater consistency in how the curriculum is taught and provide more detail and

knowledge about how well pupils progress through the different aspects of the school's provision.

- Leaders should strengthen the precision and clarity of their oversight of the impact of actions and decisions they make. This is to inform an increasingly robust and insightful knowledge of what works most successfully in the best interest of pupils at the school.
 - Leaders should continue their work to equip staff with appropriate strategies, professional learning and resources that provide the necessary skills and knowledge they need to feel confident and skilled to manage the demands of day-to-day expectations across the school.
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About this inspection

The school is part of a federation called Learn to Live Federation. The school is also part of the cooperative education trust called SENTient Trust.

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

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 executive headteacher, the head of school, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher during the inspection. Leaders also spoke with other leaders and staff throughout the inspection. The lead inspector met with members of the governing body and representatives from the local authority. An inspector spoke with the alternative provision that the school is using currently. Inspectors spoke with pupils with staff present, to support effective communication, and also without staff present.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

All pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan. The school provides for pupils with a diverse range of high levels of need, which include profound and multiple learning disabilities and severe learning difficulties.

The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.

The school is registered to take children from 3 years old but does not currently have any 3-year-olds on its roll. The youngest children are Reception-age children.

Executive headteacher: Nikki Burroughs

Lead inspector:

Leanne Thirlby, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Claire Thomson, Ofsted Inspector

Gavin Summerfield, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 24 March 2026

School and pupil context**Total pupils**

153

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.

School capacity

140

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.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

50.00%

What does this mean?

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

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

100.00%

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.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

What does this mean?

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

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)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SLD - Severe Learning Difficulty, PMLD - Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

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
2023 leavers (provisional)	100%
2022 leavers (revised)	89%
2021 leavers (revised)	S

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
2024/25 (2 term)	10.8%
2023/24 (3 term)	10.1%
2022/23 (3 term)	10.4%

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school
2024/25 (2 term)	38.0%
2023/24 (3 term)	31.0%
2022/23 (3 term)	33.6%

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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