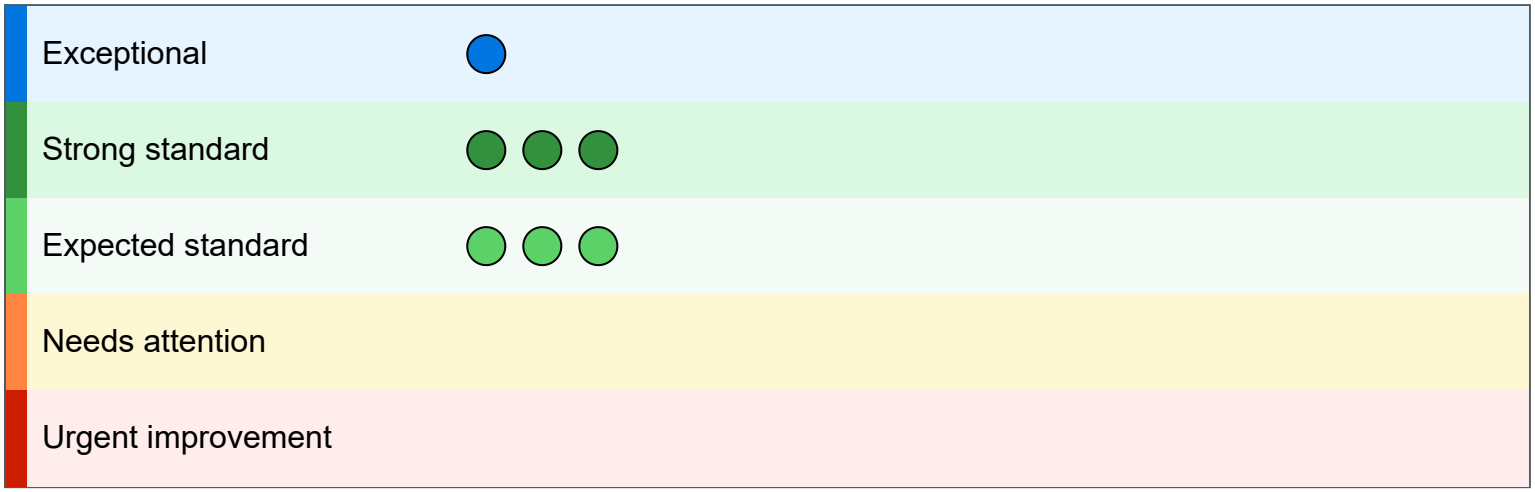
Watergate School

Address: Lushington Road, Bellingham, London, SE6 3WG

Unique reference number (URN): 100766

Inspection report: 30 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.

Exceptional

Attendance and behaviour

Exceptional

The importance of high attendance is a focal point for leaders and staff. Leaders have a precise understanding of reasons for absence and are relentless in their drive to remove barriers that prevent pupils from attending school often. They provide very effective individualised interventions and support for pupils, parents and carers. Transitions, both into school and between phases, are managed thoughtfully to reduce anxiety. As a result of these rigorous processes, pupils' attendance is improving year on year. It is now above the national average for all schools, not just special schools. This is a huge credit to the school.

There are clearly established and familiar routines to support pupils' behaviour that all pupils understand. These are coupled with very high expectations and a tireless positivity throughout the school. As a result, pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are consistently kind to each other. There are no reports of bullying, and staff respond swiftly and sensitively to instances of emotional dysregulation. Pupils flourish in both their attitudes to learning and their behaviour. Carefully planned adaptations, such as sensory breaks and co-regulation plans, help pupils to engage positively at all levels. Leaders track behaviour incidents very carefully and provide pupils with skilful support during periods of emotional dysregulation. The school is a remarkably happy and calm place as a result.

Strong standard

Early years

Strong standard

Children are well cared for in the early years. Their needs are identified as soon as they arrive at the school. Bespoke support is put in place swiftly and, as a result, children engage well with staff. Communication methods appropriate to each child's age and developmental stage are used effectively by staff. High-quality interactions maximise language development and encourage children who are a little reluctant to engage.

Leaders and staff ensure that children feel safe and happy. Staff are in tune with children and use interactive activities and visuals skilfully to develop nurturing relationships. Leaders and staff monitor children's development closely and take effective action when gaps are identified. For example, staff set up play sessions using objects rather than toys to improve children's attention and exploration skills.

The curriculum is taught consistently well. Staff model language effectively using visual supports such as communication boards, and they give children time to respond. Many classes also use singing cues to change activities, which helps children transition between activities. Gaps in children's knowledge and skills are identified and supported, with individualised interventions such as additional one-to-one support.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the standards of education and care in the early years, and they make rapid improvements when necessary. As a result, children develop well and make very good levels of progress.

Inclusion

Strong standard

Leaders and staff know pupils very well. They have a detailed understanding of pupils' social, emotional, communication and behavioural needs. Regular checks of pupils' development ensure that emerging or changing needs are identified quickly. This begins in the early years, where children's needs are identified and supported swiftly. The expert support that pupils receive consistently reduces barriers to their development.

Leaders place the wellbeing of pupils at the centre of their work. They ensure that pupils experience a highly inclusive environment. Staff build warm, trusting relationships that help pupils feel safe and to communicate with confidence. These positive relationships make a meaningful difference to pupils' experiences and development. There is a clear sense that pupils belong and are valued.

Admission and transition procedures are rigorous and pupil-centred. The school uses additional funding for disadvantaged pupils to provide carefully considered support. Leaders also devote considerable time to building highly positive relationships with parents and carers. This enables the school's inclusive approach to be mirrored in other aspects of pupils' lives, so that pupils thrive emotionally and socially.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard

The personal development programme is a central aspect of the school's curriculum. Pupils benefit from a wide range of activities that support their personal development and wellbeing. Experiences are planned carefully to enrich pupils' experiences based on their interests and aspirations. These opportunities are woven into daily routines and are modified effectively according to pupils' needs.

Personal, social and health education equips pupils to stay safe and understand positive relationships. Sensory-based learning and structured communication programmes help them to understand appropriate and inappropriate touch and consent. Pupils learn about their rights and the importance of tolerance. They demonstrate an understanding of fairness and equality, and their recognition of diversity is positive.

The school offers a wide range of additional activities to all pupils. These include visiting taekwondo instructors, music sessions with the London Symphony Orchestra and opportunities to be part of the student council. Pupils also act as leaders for an aspect of school life. Pupils experience a variety of educational trips, including visits to museums and cultural events. Leaders tailor these activities to pupils' interests and track pupils' involvement closely. Pupils benefit greatly from these opportunities to support their wellbeing and develop their independence.

Pastoral support is a key strength of the school. Staff know pupils and their families well. Leaders support parents and carers with helpful activities such as coffee mornings and workshops. This deep understanding of each pupil ensures that staff are proactive in

identifying any pupils who need additional help. This support underpins all other activities and is highly effective. It raises pupils' self-esteem and increases their confidence and sense of belonging. Pupils are well prepared for their next stages of education.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Overall, pupils make progress in their social, emotional, communication and behavioural development and achieve well from their starting points. Leaders document pupils' progress carefully against the targets in their individual education plans. Pupils achieve particularly well in improving their communication and social skills, and in learning to regulate their own behaviour. This is because staff know pupils extremely well and are able to implement suitably effective support strategies. Achievement in these areas helps pupils to become more independent. However, a small number of pupils are not supported as well as they could be to improve their reading, writing and numeracy skills.

The skills and knowledge that pupils need are largely secure. Their achievements are reinforced by opportunities to apply their skills in real-life situations. For example, pupils go shopping in the local community with money and a budget. This helps to develop their confidence and independence. Pupils are generally ready for the next stages of their education, especially from the early years into Year 1.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching provided by the school. They understand the importance of high-quality teaching that is enhanced by targeted support for pupils. The curriculum is designed so that, on the whole, pupils are well prepared for the next stages of their education. Teachers have the expertise they need for the age and developmental phases that they teach. They typically take appropriate action to secure pupils' foundational knowledge in English and mathematics. Leaders are continuing to embed and refine a more structured curriculum to ensure that these strong foundations are established consistently and cater for pupils with increased academic capability, including early reading.

Teachers' knowledge of the subjects and developmental stages they teach is secure. The learning they plan is often based on pupils' interests and informed by targets in pupils' individual education plans. Pupils are most engaged when there is a range of different learning activities that are well suited to their individual needs. Adjustments to the curriculum are considered carefully. Pupils' barriers to learning are understood well. Staff help pupils overcome these obstacles so they can develop their social, emotional, communication and behavioural skills. This attention to detail starts in the early years and continues as pupils progress through the school.

Leadership and governance **Expected standard**

Leaders understand the school’s context and the emotional, behavioural, social and communication needs of their pupils extremely well. They know the school’s strengths, and they generally recognise the school’s areas for development. Leaders typically take appropriate action to make improvements in areas that fall short.

Staff receive extensive training and support, which they see as having real relevance to how they support pupils. Training related to pupils' specific needs is successful and raises levels of staff expertise. This is especially the case for pupils' emotional, behavioural, social and communication needs. However, there are some inconsistencies in how well staff are trained to support pupils' learning needs, meaning that some pupils could achieve more highly than they do.

Relationships are characterised by mutual respect and a passion for supporting pupils and acting in their best interests. Staff feel valued and say their workload is manageable. Leaders and staff at all levels model high standards and professionalism. Leaders work very effectively with other schools and organisations. They have established constructive relationships with parents and carers and with the wider community, and leaders’ focus on this is a key element of the school’s success.

Those responsible for governance fulfil their statutory duties well. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's context. They are passionate about the school and provide effective levels of support and challenge to leaders.

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

Pupils enjoy being part of this school. They are happy to arrive at school, and they have warm, trusting relationships with staff. Staff know pupils extremely well and understand their special educational needs and/or disabilities. These needs are considered fully in everything that happens at school. As a result, staff support and assist pupils skilfully. Routines are well established, and pupils feel secure and ready to learn. Pupils enjoy lessons and make positive progress in their development of social, communication and behaviour regulation skills.

Pupils take part in a wide range of exciting enrichment and community experiences that help them grow in confidence. These include shopping trips, outings to museums and visits to the school from musicians and taekwondo instructors. These experiences broaden pupils' aspirations and prepare them well for their next stages of education.

Pupils take on responsibilities, such as being part of the student council or as a health and safety monitor. These roles develop pupils' independence and self-esteem. Behaviour is highly positive, and pupils are kind to each other. Bullying does not take place, and pupils have complete confidence in staff to deal with problems quickly. When pupils find things difficult, staff respond skilfully so that pupils can regulate their emotions. Pupils benefit from being part of a caring community, and there is a sense of clear belonging.

The school culture is overwhelmingly supportive. Pupils feel safe and attend often because they want to be at school. They use a range of communication aids and strategies to express their choices and preferences. They are proud to share each other's successes. Pupils enjoy being part of this welcoming community that enables them to succeed.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that there are consistently high expectations for pupils' learning at all stages of development.
- Leaders should make sure that teaching is adapted appropriately for pupils who are cognitively more able.
- Leaders should ensure that pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read are taught to do so through systematic synthetic phonics.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors is Simon Whittaker.

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 headteacher and other leaders, as well as staff. Inspectors also spoke with representatives from the local authority, governors and the chair of governors.

The inspection took place from 30 June to 1 July 2026.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The school caters for pupils with a range of special educational needs and disabilities.

The school uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher: Linda Matthews

Lead inspector:
Emily Leonard, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Teresa Neary, Ofsted Inspector
Joanna Tarrant, 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 30 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

189

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

186

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)

44.44%

What does this mean?

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

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

98.41%

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

1.59%

What does this mean?

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

Location deprivation

Well 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).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SpLD - Specific Learning Difficulty, VI - Visual Impairment, SLCN - Speech, language and Communication, ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health, MSI - Multi-Sensory Impairment, PD - Physical Disability, MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty, 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).

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 (3 term)	10.4%
2023/24 (3 term)	12.3%
2022/23 (3 term)	12.4%

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school
2024/25 (3 term)	35.6%
2023/24 (3 term)	42.8%
2022/23 (3 term)	45.9%

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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