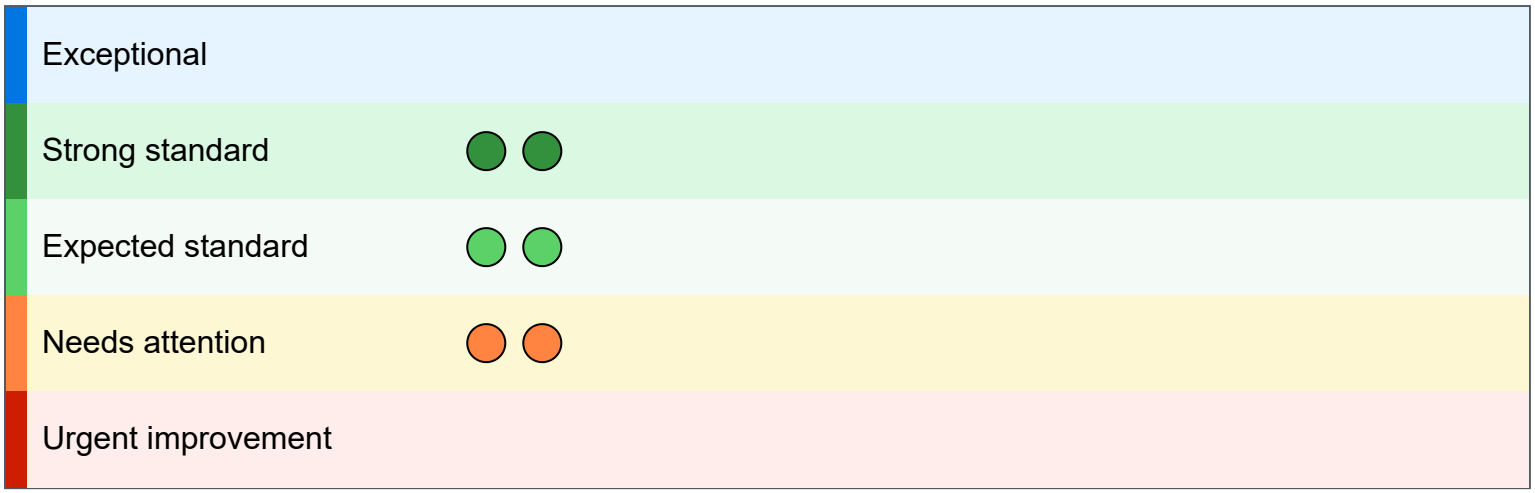
Airedale Academy

Address: Crewe Road, Airedale, Castleford, West Yorkshire, WF10 3JU

Unique reference number (URN): 136613

Inspection report: 15 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.

Strong standard

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard

The curriculum is consistently taught well. Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and implement the school's agreed teaching strategies highly effectively. Teachers present new concepts clearly and regularly check pupils' understanding. They are then quick to address misconceptions and adapt their teaching when needed. These approaches enable pupils to gain knowledge and skills securely.

Leaders, with the support of the trust, have revised the school's curriculum so that new learning builds on what pupils already know. It is now well sequenced across subjects and year groups. Leaders use assessment carefully to monitor pupils' learning and to intervene when needed. Staff provide targeted support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to enable them to access the curriculum. Teachers ensure that disadvantaged pupils are supported to learn well and fulfil their potential.

Leaders ensure pupils secure important basic skills and knowledge in reading, writing and spelling. There is a well-organised literacy strategy in place, which develops the reading skills of pupils. Teachers also place an emphasis on supporting pupils to develop their language and vocabulary so they are able to articulate their learning with clarity.

Pupils' attainment in external assessments has historically been low. Since joining Castleford Trust, leaders have prioritised actions to develop the curriculum and to strengthen teaching. The curriculum is now regularly taught with precision, and pupils' standards of achievement are rising.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard

Leaders at Airedale Academy have brought about rapid improvements. Since joining the trust in February 2025, leaders have acted quickly to improve many areas of the school's provision. Older pupils, staff and parents and carers speak positively about this improvement, and leaders now speak of 'the golden years of Airedale'.

Leaders at all levels remain highly ambitious for the school and understand their role in its continued improvement. They have a precise understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and as a result provide strategic clear direction for the school community.

There is a positive working environment where staff feel respected and supported. Teachers, including those at the start of their careers, have access to a well-structured professional learning programme. Leaders have developed careful induction programmes to make sure that new staff quickly develop the skills they need to securely perform in their role. Leaders consider staff workload and wellbeing carefully when making decisions.

Those responsible for governance understand the school well and fulfil their roles and responsibilities highly effectively. They meet their statutory duties. Governors and trust leaders check information carefully to assure themselves of the impact of the school's work for pupils. Through their work, they provide appropriate support and challenge for leaders.

Leaders have deliberately strengthened the school's engagement with parents and carers and are continuing to build trust with parents. Leaders act in the best interests of pupils.

Expected standard

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders know their pupils well. Through clear processes, they quickly identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) as well as those with other barriers to learning. Leaders then work carefully to put in place appropriate strategies designed to help pupils overcome these barriers. Typically, teachers use these approaches effectively. They have the training they need to make a positive difference for the pupils in their classes.

Leaders understand the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils. They use additional funding to provide supportive interventions and enhance pupils' access to enrichment activities. These approaches are having an improved impact on these pupils and in their participation in the life of the school. However, leaders are aware that there is more to do to ensure that pupils who are disadvantaged and those with SEND attend school regularly so they can benefit fully from the school's work to support them.

Staff support looked-after children and those known, or previously known, to social care effectively. Leaders maintain a detailed oversight of these vulnerable pupils and work closely with external agencies, including the virtual school, to ensure that these pupils receive the ongoing support they require. Appropriate alternative provision provides additional support for some pupils. This is well matched to their needs and used in the best interests of the pupils who attend.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders have designed a personal development programme that prepares pupils for adulthood and ensures they receive a broad range of opportunities beyond the taught curriculum. Pupils learn how to stay healthy and safe, including online, through the personal, social and health education curriculum delivered through the school's life and society lessons. They develop an understanding of healthy relationships through the school's effective relationships and sex education and health education curriculum. Pupils understand the importance of tolerance in their local community and how to play a positive role in the life of modern Britain. This curriculum has a positive impact on pupils, although some pupils do not yet recall detailed knowledge as a result.

The school has a well-designed careers programme. This enables pupils to explore their careers and aspirations and have meaningful encounters with employers and further education providers before successfully embarking on their next steps. This ensures that pupils are ready to move forward with confidence. Through effective careers education and guidance, the school has increased the number of pupils who leave with a clear and sustained onward placement following the end of Year 11.

Pastoral support is a strength in the school. Leaders know pupils' individual needs and contexts well. Pupils are confident in accessing support when needed, and staff work with a wide range of agencies to carefully put in place the correct support for pupils when needed.

Staff organise a significant number of wider opportunities for pupils to develop their social skills and confidence and to enhance their learning. These opportunities include a range of trips, clubs and activities. This offer is broad, including sporting opportunities, particularly the successful girls' rugby club, creative and performing arts clubs or opportunities to develop a new hobby or interest. Leaders closely track pupils' participation in enrichment activities and use this information to target attendance, especially for pupils who might have barriers to participating.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention

Pupils' attainment in national assessments has been too low over time, and published outcomes show underperformance across a range of subjects and for disadvantaged pupils and for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, historically, many pupils have not been well prepared enough for their next steps when they leave school.

However, past outcomes do not fully reflect pupils' current achievement. Leaders have significantly strengthened the quality of teaching. As a result, pupils, including those with SEND, are making increasingly secure progress across the full range of subjects. Pupils typically take pride in their work and are increasingly able to speak confidently about their learning.

Leaders have introduced whole-school approaches to accurately identify any gaps in pupils' important basic knowledge, such as literacy and mathematics, and have designed interventions that support pupils to make progress from their starting points. As a result, these pupils increasingly keep up with their peers.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention

Too many pupils regularly miss school. This includes many who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Overall attendance is below national averages and has been for some time. Leaders have put in place strategies to identify and remove pupils' barriers to attending more regularly. These strategies are having an impact, and there are signs that attendance is starting to improve quickly. However, leaders recognise that there is more to do. Staff are now working effectively with pupils and parents and carers to help pupils attend school more regularly. Pupils increasingly understand the importance of regular attendance.

Leaders and staff manage behaviour proactively. The school is a calm and orderly environment. Pupils are polite, respectful and kind. Instances of derogatory language are rare and addressed promptly. Pupils are confident that staff take incidents of bullying

seriously. Pupils behave well around school. Staff model high expectations and build warm and friendly relationships with pupils. Clear and consistent routines are well embedded, and these support pupils to make the right choices. Staff take effective action when pupils make mistakes and, where appropriate, ensure that pupils receive the support they need to reflect and improve on their behaviour.

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

Pupils at Airedale Academy are part of an improving school. They are benefiting from the deliberate actions that leaders have taken to promote positive behaviour, strengthen the curriculum and put in place the high-quality teaching that ensures they get taught consistently well. As a result, pupils are happy, enjoy school and are increasingly learning securely in their lessons. Well-qualified subject specialists teach pupils with great skill and enthusiasm.

Despite this, some pupils do not attend school as often as they should do. This means that they miss out on important parts of their learning. Leaders are beginning to use a range of strategies to support pupils to attend more regularly, which are having a positive impact on pupils' attendance.

Historically, pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged, have not attained highly enough in the national assessments taken at the end of key stage 4. Leaders have made significant changes to the sequencing of the curriculum and strengthened the quality of teaching, which means that pupils can increasingly talk with confidence about what they have learned and the skills they are developing. Pupils enjoy their learning.

Pupils behave well in lessons and during social times, responding positively to staff. Classrooms are calm and focused. Bullying is rare. Pupils know they can report any incidents to staff, and they are confident that they will be dealt with promptly.

Pupils build positive relationships with staff. They know that trusted adults will listen to any concerns they raise and take appropriate action when needed. Pupils feel safe because of this.

Pupils with SEND receive the right support through the school's 'know who, and know how' principles that underpin the approach to inclusion. Staff understand pupils' individual needs and develop the practical skills needed to use strategies that support them in the classroom.

Next steps

- Leaders should maintain their focus on the school's attendance strategy and build on this work to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence so pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who are disadvantaged, attend at least in line with national averages.

- Leaders should ensure that actions to improve achievement, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who are disadvantaged, support pupils to secure better outcomes and be ready for their next stage of learning.
- Leaders should build on the strengths of their personal development programme to embed the opportunities available to all pupils and to ensure that pupils develop secure and detailed knowledge as a result of their participation in the personal development programme.

About this inspection

This school is part of Castleford Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, George Panayioutou, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Adam Fletcher.

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

This inspection took place on 15 and 16 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 pupils, school staff, senior leaders, trust leaders, trustees, members of the local governing body and representatives from the local authority during this 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 includes a recently established provision for pupils with communication and interaction needs.

The school currently makes use of 6 alternative provisions, including 2 that are unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection and no longer has sixth-form provision. The school was previously part of a different multi-academy trust, and joined Castleford Trust in February 2025.

Headteacher: Andrew Percival

Lead inspector:
James Evans, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Steve Willacy, Ofsted Inspector
Simon Barber, Ofsted Inspector
Michael Evans, 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 15 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,008
Close to 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

1,250
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)

51.98%
Well above 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

4.66%
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

21.83%
Well 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

Well 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).

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)	25.1%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	24.1%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	23.0%	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)	33.8	46.1	Below
2023/24 (final)	34.0	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	33.2	46.3	Below

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)	-0.72	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.68	-0.03	Below
2021/22 (final)	-0.23	-0.03	Close to average

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)	19.1%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	14.5%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	11.5%	25.2%	Below

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)	27.5	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	27.8	34.6	Below
2022/23 (final)	27.4	35.0	Below

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)	-1.10	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.03	-0.57	Below
2021/22 (final)	-0.68	-0.55	Close to average

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)	19.1%	53.1%	-34.0 pp
2023/24 (final)	14.5%	53.1%	-38.6 pp
2022/23 (final)	11.5%	52.4%	-40.9 pp

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)	27.5	50.4	-22.9
2023/24 (final)	27.8	50.0	-22.2
2022/23 (final)	27.4	50.3	-22.9

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)	-1.10	0.16	-1.26
2022/23 (final)	-1.03	0.17	-1.19
2021/22 (final)	-0.68	0.15	-0.83

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)	87%	92%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	87%	93%	Below
2021 leavers (revised)	91%	94%	Average

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)	15.2%	8.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	13.1%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	11.7%	9.0%	Above

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)	41.9%	23.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	42.6%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	37.9%	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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