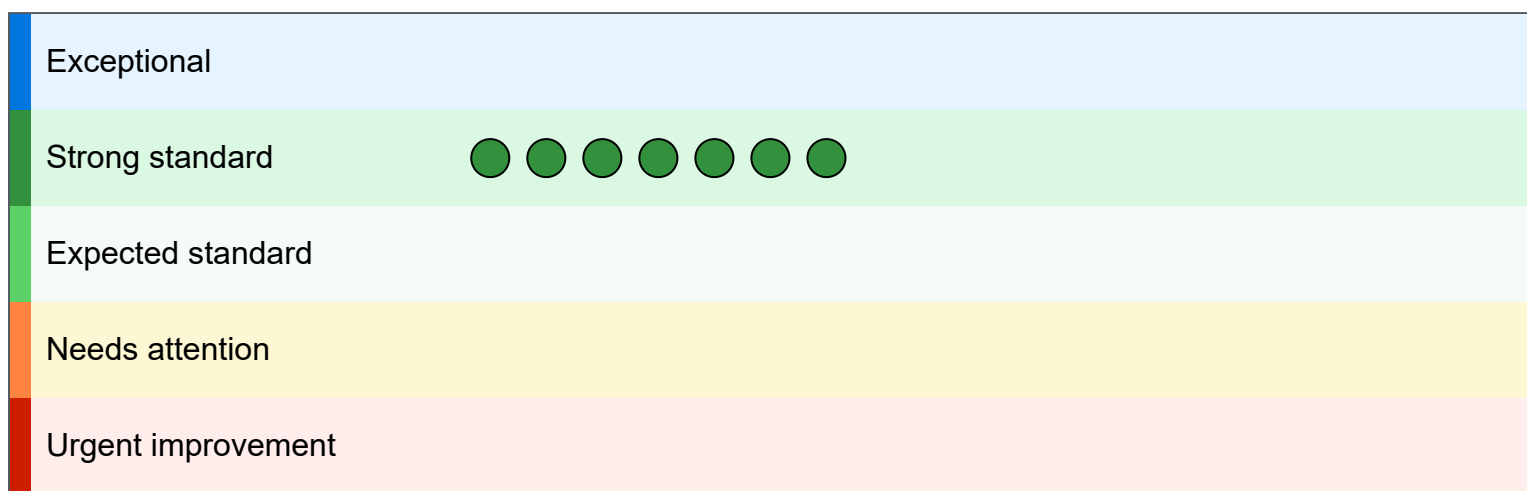


Bower Lodge School

Address: Main Road, Southampton, SO45 5TD

Unique reference number (URN): 150911

Inspection report: 24 February 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.
- **Insufficient evidence:** Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Once pupils join the school, their achievement improves considerably, often from low starting points. Many pupils arrive with substantial gaps in their communication, cognition and regulation. They may also have significant gaps in academic areas. The school's assessment systems focus sharply on rebuilding core pastoral and academic skills. This means staff have a good understanding of what pupils are ready to learn next.

The school's play-based, developmental approach ensures that pupils acquire the engagement, attention and interaction skills that form the foundation for later academic learning. Staff understand pupils' profiles well and use highly individualised developmental plans to ensure that learning builds in precise, incremental steps. When pupils are ready for more formal learning, the work they produce shows secure progress across the curriculum.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

The school's practice around attendance is thoughtful, positive and highly individualised. Leaders recognise that almost all pupils join the school with previously low school attendance. Leaders design transitions programmes that are both ambitious and sensitive to pupils' needs. Leaders monitor each pupil's attendance closely and intelligently. This approach is very effective with the majority of pupils attending school significantly more than they did prior to starting. Leaders also respond swiftly to practical barriers, working with other agencies to ensure issues, such as travel difficulties, do not hinder attendance.

The culture of behaviour is built deliberately on positive relationships and explicitly taught expectations. Staff model the calm, respectful conduct they expect from pupils. This creates a helpfully predictable environment in which all pupils can participate fully. Day-to-day praise, stickers and weekly reward trips reinforce positive choices. Termly celebrations and whole-school events further strengthen pupils' sense of belonging. Staff help pupils understand the reasons behind behavioural expectations, enabling pupils to recognise unsafe or unhelpful behaviours. This helps them to make better choices more frequently. As a result, some pupils who have previously struggled to share space, accept adult support or attend lessons confidently. Furthermore, they maintain friendships and engage in learning. When more significant incidents occur, staff utilise their skills and training expertly.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

The curriculum and teaching across the school are highly consistent. Staff demonstrate a deep understanding of individual needs and a calm, respectful culture. The curriculum is broad and reflects the ambition of the national curriculum. Staff are well aware of the many gaps that pupils have developed prior to starting at the school. A rigorous assessment system ensures that these gaps are prioritised and addressed appropriately.

Across all classes, tasks are well sequenced, aligned to curriculum intentions and adapted with precision. Staff select activities that build on prior learning and offer appropriate challenge to enable secure progress across the curriculum. Many pupils benefit from well-

planned exploratory and sensory activities. Pupils who can access more formal learning do so successfully. Early reading strategies are particularly well implemented across the school. The school's phonics system is supported by rigorous assessment and staff use of books that are well matched to pupils' reading ability. Pupils who are not yet ready to verbalise sounds are given every opportunity to be exposed to this key early learning. Mark making, transcription skills and early writing routines are evident and tracked precisely through the school.

Early years

Strong standard 

Early years provision is highly ambitious and underpinned by staff's deep knowledge of each child. Highly effective support, in collaboration with parents and carers, means that children start positively when joining the school. Staff and leaders understand children's needs very well. Staff implement appropriate strategies throughout the school day. These create a calm, regulated classroom environment, where children feel safe, understand routines and sustain engagement. Leaders ensure routines at the very start of each day are predictable and effective in helping children settle every day.

Although many children are working below age-related expectations, staff are deeply ambitious to develop learning. Leaders understand how to adjust content without lowering aspiration. This ensures every child continues to develop securely and build the essential foundations for future success. Key elements of the curriculum are taught systematically and with precision, ensuring children develop secure early learning habits, such as early phonics learning. Communication and immersion in vocabulary is central to practice. Adults model vocabulary and alternative communication systems consistently, enabling pupils to express needs and build independence. Interactions are purposeful, and staff use their intimate understanding of each child to give targeted input that moves learning forward. Staff constantly observe and interact with children to ensure that learning opportunities are constantly utilised well.

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Inclusion is a defining strength of the school and sits firmly at the centre of its work. Pupils benefit greatly from the combined clinical and educational knowledge the school collates to identify pupils' barriers quickly and accurately. This insight ensures that the support for each pupil is sharply targeted, flexible and responsive to pupils' changing needs. Leaders monitor the impact of their work with precision and ambition. This means pupils receive what they need at the right time. Progress is tracked rigorously across academic, social, emotional and behavioural areas. When a pupil is not making the anticipated progress, provision is reviewed, targets refined and additional expertise sought quickly. This relentless focus on impact ensures every pupil is noticed, supported and enabled to thrive over time.

Communication development underpins the school's work. This promotes pupils' independence and increased aspiration for their long-term success. Classroom practice is very well informed by highly appropriate training. Staff confidence is very high as they utilise the excellent staff training offer to improve the achievements of each pupil. Any barriers to pupils' success are removed deliberately. This includes any pupils with financial

disadvantage, to ensure everyone can access trips, visits, clubs and enriching experiences that strengthen confidence and broaden horizons.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders have established a strong, effective and meaningful provision for primary-age pupils with significant needs. At all levels of leadership, governance and proprietary board level there is rigour, determination and a sharp focus to meet the full needs of the pupils in all areas. Leaders have a very secure understanding of the school's many strengths. The school's governance ensures that school leaders are well supported and appropriately challenged. Governors have ensured that all of the independent school standards continue to be met. All statutory duties are very well considered, including safeguarding, equalities and finance. On the rare occasions an aspect has briefly fallen below the school's aspirations, strong leadership has taken highly effective action to rapidly redress the issue in the best interests of the pupils.

The school's early success has been underpinned by a highly purposeful and developmental training programme for staff. Whole-school priorities are balanced thoughtfully with individual support, ensuring all staff grow in confidence and expertise. Across the staff team, there is a deep sense of shared high expectations and practice. As a result, staff morale is extremely positive, with staff expressing unwavering confidence in the school's leadership. Parent and carer feedback is overwhelmingly positive, with all parents positive about the notable impact the school has had on their child already.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

The personal development programme is a significant strength of the school and reflects leaders' deep moral commitment to giving every pupil a voice. The personal, social, health and relationships education curriculum is designed with care and delivered with expertise. This ensures lessons remain appropriate, sensitive and firmly attuned to pupils' developmental needs. Staff are well trained to address questions pupils may have. They provide individually tailored support that is highly suitable for pupils with autism. Parents and carers seek guidance confidently from the school on these matters, reflecting their strong trust in the staff's expertise.

Safety education is explicit and well embedded. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online, how their body changes over time and how to be safe when out in the community. Healthy lifestyles and mental health are promoted through cooking, gardening and structured emotional-literacy work. Fundamental British values, protected characteristics and kindness are woven through the curriculum, helping pupils understand themselves as local, national and global citizens.

Opportunities for wider personal development are rich, ambitious and inclusive. Lunchtime clubs, shaped by pupil requests, offer experiences ranging from LEGO and sensory play to sport and science. Music and performing are increasingly prominent, supported by external partnerships with local churches and cathedrals. Pupils are regularly immersed into the local community, such as swimming, shopping and visiting local leisure venues. All visits are carefully managed so every pupil can participate meaningfully. Staff are also keen to promote and nurture individual pupil's talents, offering bespoke opportunities for pupils with

particular strengths. Leaders are also acutely aware of ensuring strong transitions, when pupils move on to their next school and ensure that pupils are well prepared for this change.

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

Bower Lodge School has a clear and strong moral purpose that every pupil should be seen, heard and be able to communicate with dignity. Many pupils join the school with highly restricted means of communication, yet staff remove barriers swiftly and sensitively. Leaders model language consistently and embed alternative communication systems effectively. They establish calm, predictable routines that promote emotional safety for pupils. This culture enables pupils to attend regularly, regulate themselves, trust adults and engage successfully in all aspects of school life.

Inclusion is deeply embedded, with leaders using educational and clinical thinking to adapt provision swiftly. Many pupils have significant gaps in learning, when they join the school. Leaders have ensured the curriculum is ambitious and well sequenced. The curriculum is precisely adapted to enable pupils to build their learning very well, despite their lower starting points. As a result, pupils make excellent progress across the curriculum.

There is a clear sense of respect at this school. Pupils' behaviour is increasingly positive as they develop a true sense of belonging. There is no sense of deliberate unkindness towards others. Leaders have ensured the personal development programme is carefully designed and responsive to meet pupils' individual needs. Strong partnerships with parents and carers enable consistent approaches for pupils. Safety education is explicit, systematic and woven into routines. For example, pupils learn about online safety and how to navigate the community safely, with road awareness modelled and practised across a variety of school outings. Pupils access rich wider development activities through many lunchtime clubs, growing music provision and trips that build life skills and independence. Pupils also engage with national celebrations, as well as key theme weeks that develop respect and understanding of others.

Next steps

- Leaders need to maintain the development of academic and pastoral support to further strengthen provision and secure even better outcomes for pupils.

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.

During the inspection, the inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the chair of the proprietary board, the chair of the governing board and a representative of the local authority who places pupils at the school.

The name of the proprietor is Acorn Care and Education Limited. The chair of the proprietary board is Richard Power.

The fees currently charged are £65000 to £80000.

The email address of the school is info@bowerlodgeschool.co.uk.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

Pupils attending the school have severe learning difficulties and a diagnosis of autism.

The school does not use any alternative provision.

The school operates from a single site at Main Road, Southampton SO45 5TD.

The school admitted its first pupils in October 2024.

The school currently has 39 pupils on roll, with a capacity of 40 pupils.

This is the first standard inspection of the school since it was registered by the DfE in September 2024.

Headteacher: Jemma Dudgeon

Independent school standards

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

1. Quality of education provided

Standards met

All standards have been met.

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.

6. Provision of information

Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Standards met

All standards have been met.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:

Chris Parker, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Ed Mather, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

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

 This data is from 24 February 2026

Total pupils

39

School capacity

40

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

39

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0

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.

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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