

# Mount Tamar School

**Address:** Row Lane, Higher St Budeaux, Plymouth, Devon, PL5 2EF

**Unique reference number (URN):** 149391

## Inspection report: 20 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	●
Urgent improvement	● ● ● ● ●

## ⊗ Safeguarding standards not met

Physical assaults on pupils and staff occur often. Pupils and staff are at risk of injury, either because it is necessary for staff to physically restrain pupils, or due to direct assaults. Pupils who are not involved witness violent incidents. This increases their anxiety and causes emotional difficulties, especially for pupils with emotional, mental health and communication needs. It can also affect pupils' confidence to attend school. Parents and carers, staff and visitors to the school all express concern for the safety of pupils and staff.

Pupils' views of their day-to-day experience of school are not heard. There are no well-established routes through which pupils can have a voice. Leaders have begun to invite pupils' feedback, but they have not responded with appropriate urgency to pupils' concerns about feeling unsafe in school.

Recently, leaders have acted to strengthen some safeguarding systems and procedures. The school understands the risks pupils face outside of school. Leaders work with external agencies, such as specialist charities and the police, to help pupils behave safely towards each other and in the local community. The school puts the safety of pupils first when recruiting staff and managing allegations about adults.

### 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.

## ⊗ This school requires special measures

His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires **special measures** because it is failing to provide an acceptable standard of education, and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

## Needs attention ●

### Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention ●

Pupils do not develop a secure understanding of the fundamental British values that underpin life in modern Britain. Few can talk about ideas such as equality and respect. Pupils are not clear what it means to be part of a democracy. They do not appreciate that individual characteristics, such as religious belief and gender, are protected in law.

Pupils follow a 'Life Skills' curriculum. This includes age-appropriate relationships and sex education and health education. Similar learning is provided for pupils who are based off site. The school makes pupils aware of any local risks and incorporates specific safeguarding themes as they arise. Important messages are reinforced by expert visitors to the school. For example, leaders engage with the police, children's charities and the local university to challenge prejudice within the school.

Careers education is underdeveloped. Pupils have not benefited from a systematic careers programme over time. This important limitation inhibits how well older pupils are prepared for adulthood. It means that pupils do not consistently receive the help and planning that they need to secure a post-16 placement that suits their aspirations. Leaders have recently begun to evaluate the quality of the careers provision and identify improvement priorities.

Leaders have recently improved pastoral care. Pastoral roles are defined clearly. Leaders have reshaped routines at the start of each day, so that pupils benefit from pastoral support on arrival at school. Pupils who are newly admitted to the school receive individual support as they settle in.

All pupils benefit from enrichment activities built into the school day. Pupils develop their physical confidence through climbing and hiking activities. Some pupils undertake challenges and gain the silver Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Learning at the school's farm site promotes pupils' independence and their readiness to work in small teams. Pupils are able to use these positive experiences to shape their future plans.

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## **Urgent improvement** ●

### **Achievement**

**Urgent improvement** ●

Pupils do not secure essential knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics during their time at the school. Many pupils join the school with significant gaps in their knowledge and skills, and these persist. It is difficult for pupils to make sense of the curriculum intended for their age group because they do not have the building blocks of fluent reading and writing in place. Pupils' recall of recent learning is very weak.

Increasingly, pupils are entered for a range of qualifications, and some gain passes in these before they leave the school. However, pupils do not achieve as well as they should due to the significant amount of lost learning that is not made up over time. A high proportion of pupils leave the school each year with no suitable next-steps placements arranged for education, employment or training.

### **Attendance and behaviour**

**Urgent improvement** ●

Attendance has been poor for several years and shows no sign of improvement. Pupils' attendance has not been tracked and monitored properly. Recently, leaders have taken action to create systems to respond to absence. The school has raised expectations of attendance. Absences are now followed up. Some pupils do not attend school full time, or they spend time at different settings. However, their whereabouts are sometimes unclear

due to incorrect or misleading recording of their attendance. This affects highly vulnerable pupils, such as those in care.

Dangerous and disrespectful behaviours are widespread. Staff, and parents and carers, report unaddressed bullying. The school recognises that pupils' special educational needs/and or disabilities can make them vulnerable to negative influences. Leaders work with parents and expert groups to promote mutual tolerance and respect among pupils. However, the impact of this work has been limited. For example, the use of offensive and prejudiced language towards women and different religions has spread.

Staff struggle to manage pupils' behaviour because boundaries are not clear. Pupils opt out of learning activities. Swearing and disorder go unchallenged during social times. Leaders' ability to identify and respond to patterns in pupils' behaviour and to learn from incidents is limited.

## **Curriculum and teaching**

**Urgent improvement** ●

The school's curriculum is broad, but it is not ambitious for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It is not designed to quickly close the gaps in pupils' knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils do not receive the support they need to develop their communication skills. Pupils who have already fallen behind before they join the school do not have the opportunity to catch up. The school does not provide the adaptations that some pupils need to be successful in examinations.

Leaders have taken steps recently to strengthen reading support for primary-age pupils. Older pupils also need this but do not receive effective support. There is no curriculum in place to teach pupils how to improve their handwriting. A curriculum for mathematics was introduced without training for staff to support its delivery. Teachers do not have the secure subject knowledge required to teach English or mathematics effectively.

Staff do not understand pupils' starting points well enough. Support plans for pupils with SEND are inaccurate, out of date and unclear. Staff do not have the right information or training to guide how they might adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs.

Pupils' experiences of learning are typically weak. However, they benefit from some effective specialist teaching. For example, some pupils in the secondary phase receive well-focused teaching in English and physical education. The school's outdoor education programme promotes pupils' physical development, confidence and independence well.

## **Inclusion**

**Urgent improvement** ●

Despite the school being a specialist setting for pupils with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, it is not successful in reducing these barriers for pupils. All pupils have education, health and care plans. Pupils do not reliably receive the support set out in these plans. The school does not identify the most relevant targets for pupils. Staff do not know how to use pupils' support plans to shape their teaching because their training is insufficient. As a result, pupils do not benefit from the adapted approaches that they need.

The school does not act effectively to support pupils' behaviour and reduce risks following incidents. Staff do not know how to support the pupils involved, including those who were witnesses. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are repeatedly suspended because their needs are not identified clearly or met. The barriers to learning associated with pupils' behavioural difficulties are not overcome.

Vulnerable pupils, including children in care and those known to social care, are sent home when staffing levels are low. The additional funding made available to support children in care is underused. Oversight of individual arrangements, such as the use of part-time timetables, is insufficient. Leaders have not provided accurate information about the provision in place for pupils so that relevant authorities can be assured of pupils' wellbeing.

## **Leadership and governance**

**Urgent improvement** ●

The arrangements for governance have not served the school well. The trust has not provided the school with the necessary leadership capacity for the rapid improvement required. Leaders are overburdened with too many different responsibilities. The school struggles to retain leaders. Consequently, any improvements are not sustained.

Trust leaders have not acted quickly enough to put in place the fundamental building blocks of an effective school. Systems to follow up pupil absences have only very recently been implemented. The curriculum does not enable pupils to fulfil their academic potential. Low expectations and a lack of boundaries have been allowed to persist. This leads to ongoing negative experiences for pupils and staff alike.

Leaders do not provide the training that staff need to meet pupils' particular needs or to teach the curriculum with confidence. When planning the school year, leaders aim to balance the pressures on staff. Despite this, staff still find their workload excessive. They are overwhelmed by the challenging conditions in the school. Leaders engage with staff and listen to their concerns but have been unable to create the conditions necessary for improvements to take root. This has led to a loss of confidence among staff.

A new team of school and curriculum leaders has begun positive work focused on the school's priorities. It is too soon for this to have made a difference to the day-to-day experiences of pupils and staff.

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

Being a pupil at this school is often difficult. Learning is overshadowed by incidents of conflict between pupils. These episodes can become violent, leading to injuries and pupils feeling anxious or unsettled. Too often, pupils use or hear derogatory and intolerant language. Sometimes, the behaviour that pupils experience amounts to bullying. Among parents and carers, and staff, there is a lack of confidence in the school's approach to challenging this. This contributes to an environment that can feel unsafe or unkind for pupils.

Many pupils miss substantial amounts of school. Some of this is caused by frequent suspensions and school closures due to high rates of staff absence. Irregular attendance

makes it hard for pupils to build their knowledge and skills steadily over time. In some subjects, the curriculum is new and teachers lack the confidence to teach the content well. This leaves pupils unsure and confused about what they are learning.

Pupils' immediate learning needs are not addressed urgently enough. They usually have some catching up to do when they join the school because their special educational needs and/or disabilities have created barriers to their learning in the past. However, support to help pupils overcome these barriers and catch up is insufficient. This severely limits what pupils achieve in their time at the school.

Despite these difficulties, pupils have some positive experiences. They enjoy a range of outdoor learning opportunities. Pupils benefit from the care of staff, who try to create a welcoming environment. Pupils' achievements are celebrated and valued by the school. Each morning begins positively in the school's canteen or in tutor rooms. Pupils enjoy their breakfast in a warm, homely space. This helps them to feel appreciated and connected before the school day begins.

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## Next steps

- Leaders must reduce the risk of injury to pupils and staff by learning from incidents of poor behaviour and adapting the provision so that pupils' needs are understood and met fully. Leaders should ensure that staff are supported to anticipate and manage physical behaviours effectively.
- Leaders should develop procedures that allow pupils to raise concerns in the school. They should gain a detailed understanding of what makes pupils feel unsafe and take the actions necessary to restore pupils' confidence.
- Leaders must improve the attendance of all pupil groups. They should ensure that attendance is recorded accurately, with a particular focus on pupils who split their time between sites, those with temporary arrangements to attend school part time and those who access their education through alternative provision.
- Leaders must establish high expectations of pupils' behaviour and social interactions. This includes teaching and upholding clear boundaries and ensuring that responses to any disrespectful or disorderly behaviour are consistent.
- Leaders must ensure that teaching is informed by the clear identification of pupils' learning and developmental needs. They should ensure that staff know how to adapt the curriculum and their teaching to enable pupils to work towards their individual, long-term goals.
- Leaders should provide a curriculum that is designed to quickly close the gaps in pupils' knowledge of communication, including reading, writing and speech, and mathematics. They should support staff to develop the secure subject knowledge that they need to teach these elements of the curriculum effectively.
- Leaders should prepare pupils effectively for life in modern Britain by developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of different cultures and religious traditions. They should develop pupils' respect for women and for other people with characteristics that are protected by law.
- The trust should ensure that there is sufficient leadership capacity to urgently and

effectively tackle the important weaknesses that have been identified in the school. Leaders should ensure that recent improvements to essential systems are embedded and sustained.

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## About this inspection

This school is part of the Transforming Futures Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the interim chief executive officer (CEO), Sandra Harris, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Carole Burgoyne.

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 interim CEO and the interim deputy CEO, the chair of the board of trustees and one other trustee, the executive headteacher and members of the school's senior leadership team.

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.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers. The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

Inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school provides education for pupils with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, and/or autistic pupils. All pupils have education, health and care plans.

The school makes use of 3 alternative provisions, including 2 that are unregistered.

The school provides education at 2 off-site premises. These are located at: Seymour House, Mount Wise Garrison, Cumberland Road, Plymouth PL1 4JQ and Granary Farm c/o Tencreek Farm, Liskeard PL14 3PS.

Executive Headteacher: Mark Ruffett

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**Lead inspector:**

Lydia Pride, His Majesty's Inspector

**Team inspectors:**

Mark Burgess, Ofsted Inspector

Marie Thomas, His Majesty's Inspector

Tracy Hannon, Ofsted 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 20 January 2026

**School and pupil context****Total pupils**

**108**

Well below 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: 1,067

**School capacity**

**110**

Well below 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: 1,152

**Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)**

**83.33%**

Well above average

**What does this mean?**

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

National average: 28.9%

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

**100.00%**

Well 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: 3.1%

**Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support**

**0.00%**

Well below average

**What does this mean?**

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

National average: 13%

**Location deprivation**

**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).

## 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 (2 term)	28.5%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	23.1%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	23.2%	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 (2 term)	65.7%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	67.0%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	53.2%	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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