

St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Child Okeford

Address: Station Road, Child Okeford, Blandford Forum, Dorset, DT11 8EL

Unique reference number (URN): 149656

Inspection report: 3 March 2026

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

✔ **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.

This school requires significant improvement

His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires **significant improvement** because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have adopted a rigorous system to track and support pupils' attendance. They look carefully at trends and patterns to identify any potential barriers. This work helps to ensure that pupils who are persistently absent come to school more often. Requests for time out of school, such as for holidays, are dealt with robustly. Leaders' high expectations, coupled with clear communication with families, ensure that pupils come to school regularly and on time.

The school teaches pupils the importance of politeness. Pupils show genuine kindness and consideration towards one another. In the classroom they generally share, take turns and contribute positively to each other's learning. Staff reinforce the school's expectations and follow the behaviour policy consistently. Pupils are 'ready, respectful and safe'. Effective and sensible adjustments support any pupils who need extra help to meet these expectations. For example, the school uses alternative provision thoughtfully to support the individual needs of some pupils. Staff actively support pupils with their friendships. As a result, bullying is rare. Pupils value the range of rewards for good behaviour and the opportunity to reflect and improve their behaviour. Incidents of misbehaviour that lead to suspensions have reduced significantly.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders place pupils' personal development at the centre of all that they do. The curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education helps pupils to understand about the dangers of alcohol, how to keep safe and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Themes such as health and relationships education and citizenship are woven throughout the curriculum. Pupils learn to be physically active through events such as the daily mile. They enjoy the chance to walk the school dog, Millie. Pupils have an age-appropriate knowledge of how their bodies change as they get older. They learn about important issues like consent and online safety. Pupils can explain the choices they make and know the difference between right and wrong. The school promotes an appreciation of tolerance and diversity. This helps pupils to understand the differences between people and what makes them unique.

Pupils enjoy the additional responsibilities on offer. For example, the sports ambassadors support younger children in the playground, and the Archbishop Young Leaders Programme helps pupils to develop their leadership skills and sense of community and responsibility. Residential outdoor adventure trips help build pupils' confidence and independence. Other experiences, such as the Greek and science days and visits to museums, bring the curriculum to life and allow pupils to deepen their understanding.

Pupils take part in a number of clubs that nurture their talents and interests. These include gardening, art, rugby and football. Staff also introduce pupils to new experiences, such as orienteering, broadening their horizons. Leaders ensure that all pupils benefit from the rich offer. As a result, there is a high level of pupil participation.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Leaders have high ambitions for pupils, which are beginning to bear fruit. However, some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, have gaps in their knowledge, particularly in writing. Some staff do not address misconceptions or errors in handwriting. This limits pupils' ability to write, across the curriculum, and affects the quality of their work. Most Year 1 pupils score above the national average in their phonics screening check. However, attainment in writing and mathematics falls short of leaders' ambitions. The results of national curriculum tests at the end of key stage 2 paint an uneven picture of achievement over time.

In some other curriculum subjects, for example history, pupils build their knowledge well. Pupils in Year 3 recall the dates and events that they have learned about the Great Fire of London. In science, pupils in Year 6 learn about Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution and how animals adapt to their environment.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

While leaders understand the school's strengths and areas for development, actions to bring about improvements have not been quick enough. This has been due to instability in staffing. Leaders understand that there is more work to do to ensure that all pupils across the school benefit from teaching that is consistent and of high quality. At present, pupils do not learn as well as they should and have gaps in their knowledge. This is particularly the case in mathematics and writing.

The curriculum is well designed, ambitious, broad and balanced. It identifies the knowledge that pupils need to learn and remember. Teachers generally demonstrate secure subject knowledge. Typically, they explain information and tasks clearly. However, staff do not routinely check pupils' understanding or provide activities that meet their needs as well as they could. This means that some of the gaps in pupils' prior learning are not successfully addressed, so they persist. This is also the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who face other barriers to their learning. Leaders are beginning to address this. They have established some common approaches to teaching to ensure that pupils receive a consistent quality. These developments are in their early stages.

The school's support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged has not been effective enough. Leaders take the time to understand the barriers that some pupils face and to provide support intended to reduce them. However, leaders do not check carefully enough whether this support is helping. This holds some pupils back from developing the knowledge that they need to succeed, because gaps in their learning have not been successfully addressed. Leaders know this and have recently begun to improve their processes for reviewing the effectiveness of support; however, it is too early to see the impact of this work.

Despite these weaknesses, the school has a clear ambition for all pupils to thrive. Leaders work with pupils' families and specialists such as educational psychologists. This collaboration helps pupils with education, health and care plans to achieve well from their starting points. Staff receive appropriate training to support pupils with SEND. However, frequent changes in staffing have had a negative impact on pupils' learning. Leaders use additional funding effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils benefit from the many experiences beyond the classroom that support their social and personal development.

Leadership and governance

Challenges with staff recruitment and continuity have slowed the progress that school and trust leaders have been able to make. Despite this, leaders demonstrate that they know what the school does well and where further improvement is required. Now that staffing has stabilised, pupils are beginning to experience more consistent support. This greater consistency means that training and development work is no longer being repeated, enabling leaders' actions to start having a more sustained impact. Even though pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have not consistently received the quality of education they should, things are beginning to improve.

Trustees and local governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities and offer suitable support and challenge in some areas of the school's work. This is reflected in the way they consider staff wellbeing. Leaders are continuing to monitor and evaluate areas that require rapid improvement, particularly in the early years. Actions taken are starting to have a positive impact, although leaders and the trust know this work needs a continued focus to ensure that all pupils benefit.

Leaders typically make decisions in pupils' best interests. Their diligent work on attendance, behaviour and pupils' personal development continues to make a positive difference. Staff generally value the support and training they receive. There is a well-structured staff development programme that aligns with the school's improvement priorities.

Urgent improvement ●

Early years

Urgent improvement ●

The quality of the school's early years provision requires urgent improvement. Children do not learn all that they should across many areas of learning. Although staff are caring and know children well, helping them to feel safe, adults do not support children sufficiently to develop their knowledge. Sometimes, staff miss opportunities to model language and extend children's vocabulary. As a result, children's communication and language skills do not develop swiftly enough.

Activities to support children's physical development, communication and language lack precision. Where there is more effective practice, children develop their fine motor skills, for example by picking up small objects using tweezers. However, there is not a suitable outside learning environment where children can explore, solve problems or build their understanding of the world through meaningful play. This hinders other aspects of their physical development and opportunities for creativity.

The school works with parents and carers to understand children's barriers to learning. Children are well cared for. This leads to positive relationships between staff, children and parents. The school has prioritised early reading. Leaders ensure that children learn to read from the moment they start school. Staff are trained in how to teach phonics and generally deliver this well. Children read books that match the sounds they know. Children who struggle to keep up with the pace of the programme are quickly identified and given the support they need. In the main, however, the early years curriculum does not prepare children for the challenges of Year 1 and beyond.

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

This is a welcoming school. Pupils live up to the school's values of friendship, respect, community and curiosity. Across the school, pupils behave well and attend regularly. Pupils follow clear routines and understand what is expected of them. They learn in calm classrooms and play together harmoniously. Pupils make sure that everyone is included in their games. Bullying is rare. Pupils trust the adults in school to swiftly resolve any concerns or worries that they have.

Children in the early years do not get off to a positive start to their education. This is because they do not experience a suitable curriculum. The poor quality of the outdoor provision in the Reception Year limits children's opportunities to develop their gross motor skills meaningfully. Furthermore, the quality of interactions between adults and children is not as effective as it could be. This means that children's communication and language skills do not develop as quickly as they should. By contrast, pupils in key stages 1 and 2 learn a broad and ambitious curriculum. However, some gaps in pupils' early learning persist as they get older. The support that they receive to catch up is not as helpful as it could be. By the end of key stage 2, pupils typically do not achieve as well as they could, particularly in writing and mathematics.

Pupils' experiences beyond the curriculum help them to build independence, persevere and take responsibility for the environment. Pupils learn about fundamental British values and have an age-appropriate understanding of respect and democracy. School councillors work on behalf of their peers. They represent their classes and make a positive contribution to making changes for the better, for example by raising money for playground equipment.

Next steps

- Leaders and the trust should ensure that learning activities in the early years have a clear learning intent and promote children's learning and language development effectively.
 - Leaders should ensure that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective support to overcome their barriers to learning and make progress from their starting points so that they achieve as well as they should.
 - Leaders should make sure that teachers use assessment information effectively to identify when pupils have mastered a concept, so that subsequent work can be adapted to deepen their understanding further.
 - Leaders should ensure that their approach to teaching handwriting is implemented consistently well so that pupils' writing fluency and the quality of their work improve.
 - Leaders and the trust should ensure the outdoor provision is purposeful so children in the early years can practise the skills they need to support their physical development.
 - Leaders should ensure that they have a clear focus on evaluating the impact of the school's work so that this information can be used to celebrate effective practice and quickly identify further action that needs to be taken.
 - The trust should ensure there is a clear strategy for sustainable school improvement and that all staff understand their roles and responsibilities within this.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Sherborne Area Schools Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), David Watson OBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Middleton.

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, deputy headteacher, special educational needs coordinator, the CEO and other officers of the trust, the chair of the trust board, the chair of the local academy committee and other members of this group. The lead inspector also had a conversation with a diocesan representative.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. It is in the Diocese of Salisbury. Its last section 48 inspection was in January 2026.

The school currently makes use of 2 alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

Headteacher: Jill Watson

Lead inspector:


Gavin Summerfield, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Malcolm Willis, 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 3 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

133

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: 272

School capacity

175

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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

16.54%

Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 26.3%

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

3.76%

Close to 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: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

19.55%

Above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Close to 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

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		61%	
2024/25 (revised)	43%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	36%	61%	Below
2022/23		60%	

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		74%	
2024/25 (revised)	71%	75%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	64%	74%	Below
2022/23		73%	

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		72%	
2024/25 (revised)	48%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	57%	72%	Below
2022/23		71%	

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		73%	
2024/25 (revised)	57%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	36%	73%	Below
2022/23		73%	

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 reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		46%	
2024/25 (revised)	50%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	S	46%	S
2022/23		44%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		62%	
2024/25 (revised)	50%	63%	Below
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23		60%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		59%	
2024/25 (revised)	50%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23		58%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		60%	
2024/25 (revised)	67%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23		59%	

'S' in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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 reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		68%	

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	50%	69%	-19 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
2022/23		66%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25 (revised)	50%	81%	-31 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
2022/23		78%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		78%	
2024/25 (revised)	50%	78%	-28 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S
2022/23		77%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25 (revised)	67%	81%	-14 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S
2022/23		79%	

'S' in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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)	5.5%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.2%	5.5%	Close to average

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)	11.5%	13.3%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	12.6%	14.6%	Close to average

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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