

Almond Hill Junior School

Address: Almonds Lane, Stevenage, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 3RP

Unique reference number (URN): 117221

Inspection report: 13 January 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.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders drive sustained improvements in attendance. Their actions have had a clear positive impact over time. They embed a whole-school strategic approach that ensures every member of staff understands their role and fulfils it consistently. Staff analyse attendance data forensically and identify patterns and trends with precision. They use this insight to tailor support for pupils and families. This helps pupils attend regularly. Staff work relentlessly to make Almond Hill a place where pupils want to come each day.

Pupils understand the high expectations that leaders set for behaviour. All staff implement these expectations consistently. They deliberately reinforce key ingredients to excellent behaviour. Pupils learn the routines and language they need to express themselves appropriately. The school's pastoral team provides timely, additional support when needed. They also ensure that pupils always have someone to talk to. Staff address issues quickly because they care.

Pupils behave with great courtesy and high levels of consideration. They show respect towards each other and their teachers. They engage enthusiastically in their learning and enjoy sharing their work. Staff foster a calm and happy environment in which pupils feel secure and thrive.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Almond Hill fosters an inclusive culture where pupils actively respect and value each other's differences. Staff champion equality of opportunity. They make sure that disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the same high-quality experiences as their peers. Leaders design provision carefully because staff know pupils exceptionally well. They use this knowledge to remove any barriers quickly.

Staff assess pupils' needs as soon as they join the school. They act swiftly on what they learn whether or not pupils have SEND. They receive targeted professional learning that equips them with strategies they use, review and adapt confidently. Staff select appropriate resources and adjust teaching methods to help prepare pupils effectively for their learning. Leaders evaluate the impact of these strategies rigorously and guide staff to refine them when they do not secure the intended improvements.

Parents, carers and external agencies work closely with leaders to create a supportive environment that enables every child to thrive. Leaders' use of additional funding is sharply focused. It directs funding towards the pupils who need it most and ensures it makes a measurable difference. Leaders work well alongside the alternative provision to ensure that any pupils who access it receive the support they need.

Through these proactive actions, staff maintain ambitious expectations and keep pupils fully engaged in learning. As a result, pupils develop confidence and a secure belief that they can achieve highly.

The school delivers a well-established personal development programme that leaders plan and sequence carefully. This includes an up-to-date relationships curriculum. Pupils learn how to look after their mental health and wellbeing, how to stay safe online and how to understand body image. Leaders review the programme regularly and add new content when needed. For example, learning about the consequences of vaping was introduced in response to national trends.

Pupils enjoy learning about the differences between people, including culture, disability and faith. Their depth of knowledge is further enhanced through events such as the recent diversity day. Here, pupils, parents and carers, as well as staff, shared their identities and experiences. Pupils ask thoughtful questions and speak confidently about fairness and respect. They say consistently that staff treat everyone fairly and celebrate differences. Leaders also promote pupils' heritage through a prominent hall display that encourages pupils to engage in meaningful discussions.

The school offers extensive pastoral support. Leaders match support closely to pupils' needs and continue to explore new ways to identify groups who may require additional help. They do this with skill. For example, they identified a significant group of young carers and created a dedicated space where these pupils can regularly meet. They benefit from time together and access activities that support their needs. They freely choose whether to attend, but many do so regularly.

Pupils contribute positively to their community. They understand the democratic processes used to elect the school council and value the opportunity to influence school life. When pupils requested a chess club and a reading club, leaders acted on this and introduced both. Peer mediators support those in younger year groups. They skilfully use the strategies they learn through thorough training. This helps pupils to independently rectify any minor issues.

Leaders plan wider opportunities carefully, so all pupils take part. They track participation rigorously. Barriers are quickly removed that could otherwise prevent pupils from joining activities. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who are disadvantaged.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Over the last three years, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have achieved results in reading, writing and mathematics that match national standards. More recently, pupils' achievement has been stronger in reading and mathematics. This reflects leaders' focused curriculum work in these subjects. The quality of pupils' written work continues to improve. This is reflected in their English books. However, it is not embedded consistently across different subjects and year groups.

Pupils typically show a secure range of knowledge and skills across the curriculum. They speak confidently about their learning and explain how their knowledge has developed over time. Leaders identify pupils' needs accurately. They act quickly to address any gaps. This enables pupils to build knowledge successfully and to make sustained progress. Most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, leave the school well prepared for secondary education.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders take pride in the school curriculum. They have designed an ambitious, broad and engaging curriculum that reflects pupils' needs and tackles common barriers on entry. Leaders identify precisely what knowledge pupils must learn and the vocabulary that secures it. They sequence this content deliberately so that learning builds logically and prepares pupils well for what comes next. Leaders analyse the curriculum regularly and pinpoint where they need to refine or strengthen it.

Leaders maintain an accurate understanding of teaching quality across the school. Staff draw on strong subject knowledge and use vocabulary purposefully to deepen pupils' understanding. They ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities learn successfully. Staff know the strengths and needs of each pupil. They apply precise strategies to tailor learning effectively.

The school prioritises reading, writing and mathematics. Staff promote oracy clearly. They support pupils to speak confidently and to reflect on their learning with maturity. Leaders have ensured a consistent focus on reading as part of the curriculum. Staff promptly identify and support pupils who need extra help with reading. Leaders continue to strengthen writing. Although this is being developed well in English lessons, it needs to be consistently applied across other subjects within the curriculum.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

The school leadership team has a clear and ambitious vision for the school. Leaders act to build a culture of high achievement in which pupils thrive. They know the school well and celebrate its strengths. Leaders prioritise actions for improvement carefully. They use a wide range of evidence to inform decisions that benefit all pupils. They think creatively about how to reach their goals and work to make their plans a reality.

Governors are passionate to support the school in the best way that they can. They have carefully thought through and planned their actions for the year. There remain a very small number of areas where they should strengthen their strategic understanding. This is so that they fully understand the impact of the actions that leaders have taken.

Staff receive effective support through purposeful professional learning and regular, developmental conversations about their practice. Leaders provide appropriate support for staff that complements the current school priorities. Early career staff receive the right guidance at the right time. They are confident to seek help from any colleague because they trust the support they receive.

Leaders consider staff workload carefully and place a high value on wellbeing. They only ask staff to complete work that has a clear purpose. Leaders remain accessible and ready to support whenever needed. The school plays a central role in its community. Pupils, staff, governors, parents and carers all express pride in belonging to this school.

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

When pupils join the school, they begin their Almond Hill climb that encourages them to aspire to be the best they can be. Throughout their time at the school, they build resilience, independence and perseverance. This prepares them well for future life.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and attend regularly because they value their learning and friendships. They trust the adults who work with them. This mutual respect creates a warm, friendly environment. Staff care deeply for pupils and ensure that they thrive in all aspects of their lives. This helps them to feel safe and secure. Pupils learn well in calm classrooms. Staff tailor learning carefully so that every pupil accesses a broad and balanced curriculum. They provide timely support for any pupil who needs it, whether this involves preparing them to be ready to learn or offering targeted help. Staff hold high expectations, and pupils respond positively to the challenges set. As a result, pupils leave the school confident and ready for their next steps in secondary education.

Staff teach clear routines and manage pupils' behaviour consistently well. Pupils know that staff address any concerns quickly. Bullying is rare. Leaders value pupil voice and act on their ideas. For example, pupils requested a swimming pool. Leaders introduced a pop-up pool to ensure that all pupils have the best opportunity to learn to swim 25 metres. Pupils contribute positively to the school community, from litter picking in Year 3 to working as headteacher assistants in Year 6.

Pupils also extend their influence beyond the school. Their involvement in the 'Stevenage regeneration project' enables them to shape local developments by sharing their views alongside other community members. Pupils speak with maturity about their contributions to improve their locality. Their engagement reflects the success in nurturing responsible, active citizens.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that high standards of writing are consistent across year groups and subjects.
 - Governors should continue to develop their knowledge, skills and processes to fully assure themselves of the impact of the different aspects of the school's work.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Claire Lanni.

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, senior staff, teachers, support staff, pupils and some parents and carers during the inspection. They also spoke to representatives from the governing body and local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of one alternative provision, which is unregistered.

Headteacher: Emma Fordham

Lead inspector:

Katie Devenport, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Ania Vaughan, Ofsted Inspector

Michele Geddes, 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 13 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

342

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: 272

School capacity

360

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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

22.22%

Close to 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

2.05%

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

12.57%

Close to 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%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	70%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	62%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	51%	60%	Below

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	78%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	88%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	72%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	74%	73%	Close to average

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	69%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	75%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	72%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	59%	71%	Below

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	75%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	84%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	69%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	70%	73%	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 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	49%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	50%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	57%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	39%	44%	Close to average

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	69%	62%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	83%	63%	Above
2023/24 (final)	74%	62%	Above
2022/23 (final)	50%	60%	Close to average

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%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	67%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	65%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	44%	58%	Below

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	61%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	67%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	65%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	50%	59%	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 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	49%	68%	-18 pp
2024/25 (revised)	50%	69%	-19 pp
2023/24 (final)	57%	67%	-11 pp
2022/23 (final)	39%	66%	-27 pp

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	69%	80%	-10 pp
2024/25 (revised)	83%	81%	3 pp
2023/24 (final)	74%	80%	-6 pp
2022/23 (final)	50%	78%	-28 pp

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	59%	78%	-18 pp
2024/25 (revised)	67%	78%	-12 pp
2023/24 (final)	65%	78%	-12 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	44%	77%	-33 pp

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	61%	80%	-19 pp
2024/25 (revised)	67%	81%	-14 pp
2023/24 (final)	65%	79%	-14 pp
2022/23 (final)	50%	79%	-29 pp

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)	4.0%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	5.8%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.8%	5.9%	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)	9.0%	13.3%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	13.7%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	18.0%	16.2%	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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