

Birchanger Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Address: Birchwood, Birchanger, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 5QL

Unique reference number (URN): 115127

Inspection report: 28 April 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.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Most pupils develop a secure knowledge of the early stages of reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have made sure that the school's phonics programme, which has been strengthened since the last inspection, is securely embedded. Typically, pupils develop fluency and accuracy in word reading and spelling. This helps them to become proficient readers. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening test have improved considerably since 2023.

In the Year 6 national tests, pupils typically achieve in line with the national expectations. This helps them to be well prepared for their next stage of education. Some pupils with barriers to their learning do not always achieve as well as leaders would like. However, pupils do progress well from their various starting points.

Pupils do not always achieve the same high standards in some wider subjects as they do in English and mathematics. Leaders have started to address this issue.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Most pupils attend school regularly. Leaders carefully analyse the attendance of pupils. They use this analysis to support pupils to improve their attendance and attend more regularly. Once an attendance concern is identified, leaders provide bespoke support. For example, some pupils have benefited from effective pastoral support. This has helped to improve their attendance.

Pupils generally behave well. Their conduct around school is typically calm, orderly and respectful. This is because leaders have secured high expectations for behaviour. Leaders' expectations are built on positive relationships, rules and routines. Pupils generally understand these and staff apply them consistently. This approach closely aligns with the school's '4Bs' of believing, being my best, being creative and belonging. In lessons, pupils are typically calm and focused on their learning. Pupils enjoy lunchtimes and using the large number of resources on offer, the introduction of which has reduced the number of behaviour incidents. Staff deal fairly and effectively with any incidents that arise. Adaptations are made for pupils who require specific, individual support to help them to meet the behaviour expectations. Bullying is rare. When bullying does occur, leaders deal with it quickly and effectively.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders and staff have made improvements to the teaching of reading. These have had a positive impact on how well pupils learn to read. The school-wide focus on vocabulary helps pupils as they progress through the curriculum. As a result, pupils express ideas with precision and learn to understand different texts. If pupils fall behind, leaders ensure they receive timely and effective support.

In the early years and key stage 1, teachers ensure a sharp focus on the early stages of reading, writing and mathematics. Staff demonstrate a consistent approach to teaching these important foundations of pupils' learning. In key stage 2, teachers enable pupils to build on this prior knowledge. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from appropriate adjustments to their learning. This helps pupils with SEND to learn the curriculum alongside their peers.

Leaders have a secure understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. The curriculum is broad and designed well. Leaders focus on the most important knowledge and skills pupils need to develop. In some subjects, such as history and geography, pupils do not consistently produce high-quality work. This is because, sometimes, the activities teachers provide do not enable pupils to deepen their thinking and understanding.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children in the early years are welcomed into a caring and positive learning environment. Staff ensure that they get to know each child well. Staff are ambitious for children to learn. They quickly identify what additional support a child may need and are swift to put appropriate help in place. This helps children to progress well.

Leaders have established a well-sequenced and detailed curriculum. This ensures children have the basic skills needed for the next stage of their education. Staff ensure that children develop the physical skills required to hold a pencil and form letters. This helps children's skills in the early stages of writing.

Staff provide opportunities for children to develop their vocabulary and knowledge of the wider world through books, stories and poems. For example, children enjoyed a poem about pizza and the activities available to them that were linked to it. Opportunities for pupils to read with staff during the day develop an early enjoyment of text.

Staff treat children with respect. They support children with warmth, kindness and genuine care. When staff model language and engage children in high-quality talk, children develop their communication skills effectively. However, this does not occur consistently well.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

This school is inclusive and committed to meeting the needs of all pupils. Parents and carers of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) typically speak positively about their children's experiences. Leaders and staff identify pupils' needs promptly and accurately. Targeted interventions, such as individual reading support, help pupils to further consolidate their learning and access the curriculum in other subjects.

Leaders and staff regularly review actions to support pupils with their education, health and care plans. Leaders check the impact of learning support and interventions for pupils with SEND. When changes are necessary, leaders help staff to adapt their approaches. Staff receive appropriate training to support pupils with different needs. Consequently, many pupils progress well.

The school works with a range of specialist professionals. This helps to ensure that pupils, including those with SEND, receive the targeted help they require. Leaders arrange for pupils to access suitable support off the school site when it is in the best interests of the pupils.

Leaders understand the individual needs of disadvantaged pupils. They work to break down the barriers that the pupils face and involve them in all aspects of school life.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have a secure knowledge of the context, strengths and weaknesses of the school. Leaders use this knowledge to make decisions in the best interests of pupils. Pupils are at the heart of leaders' decisions.

Leaders' actions have a positive impact on the aspects of the school's provision that need improvement. For example, over the last 3 years, leaders have focused on strengthening the teaching of early reading. As a result, pupils generally learn to read well, and a much higher percentage now pass the Year 1 phonics screening check. Leaders' efforts in other areas, such as mathematics, have had less of an impact so far because these developments are still at an early stage.

Leaders listen to pupils. Leaders have acted on pupils' feedback to improve the activities they can enjoy at lunchtimes and after school. Leaders are beginning to respond to parents' and carers' calls for more open communication about pupils' learning and behaviour.

Governors have a secure understanding of the school. They ensure that decisions are well informed and resources are used efficiently. Governors challenge and support leaders effectively. For example, governors review the information they receive to check the impact of the school's work on early reading and behaviour. Governors also make their own checks to validate what leaders tell them.

Leaders ensure that all staff have access to high-quality professional development programmes. For example, staff have benefited from training in understanding neuro-diversity. Leaders support the wellbeing of staff and consider their workload when making decisions.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Governors and leaders share an ambition to prepare pupils well for the wider world. Leaders have carefully designed a personal development programme. It meets the needs of the pupils. Central to this is the school's '4Bs' of believing, being our best, being creative and belonging. The curriculum is adapted appropriately when the need arises.

The school's programme helps pupils to understand about relationships and health education in an age-appropriate way. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including online. They recognise the importance of keeping physically and mentally healthy, and how to do so. Pupils can talk about what they have learned, but this is not consistently secure and detailed.

The school's Rainbow Curriculum ensures pupils have access to a variety of opportunities to enrich their experiences. Pupils benefit from visits, theme days, visitors to school and participation in sports and performing arts. This has helped pupils to develop an understanding of different faiths. Lessons in the forest area help pupils to develop practical and personal skills, such as problem-solving and resilience. Pupils talk enthusiastically about these experiences and recognise the benefits that they bring to them.

From the early years, pupils learn how to cooperate and play well together. By the time pupils reach key stage 2, they typically demonstrate high levels of maturity and are confident to share their opinions.

Pupils delight in the various leadership roles the school provides. These include roles as school councillors. Older pupils are role models to pupils in younger classes by being reading buddies and play ambassadors. Pupils develop independence and leadership qualities through these opportunities. Pupils benefit from a growing range of clubs, including coding, sewing and gardening.

Pupils get effective pastoral support. They access different levels of help, including counselling from outside specialists. Targeted activities also help pupils to build confidence and learn to manage their behaviour.

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

Pupils benefit from a warm, friendly and positive start to each school day. They arrive to music and are greeted by staff who know them well. This helps pupils to settle quickly and begin learning calmly and with purpose. Parents are unanimous in their view that the school fosters a happy and welcoming atmosphere. Pupils describe the school as a place where they are known, valued and supported.

Pupils have strong and positive relationships with staff. Pupils say that if they have a worry, there is always an adult who will listen and help them. This contributes to pupils feeling safe and secure. Bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that staff will address any concerns swiftly and effectively. Pupils play an active role in maintaining the school's inclusive and friendly culture. They look after one another and take pride in contributing to a community where everyone is respected.

Around the school and in lessons, pupils typically behave with maturity. They are polite, calm and considerate. Pupils enjoy the friendships they form. They speak positively about the wide range of activities available to them at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They use the school's outdoor spaces and equipment sensibly and enthusiastically.

Pupils know that leaders and staff are ambitious for them to succeed. They enjoy learning and achieve well, both personally and academically. Pupils become confident, successful learners who typically meet national expectations.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from carefully planned support, including input from specialist professionals. Pupils who need additional help receive timely and effective support. Consequently, pupils with barriers to learning often

progress well. Leaders understand the needs of disadvantaged pupils and ensure that they are fully included in all aspects of school life.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers consistently provide activities that enable pupils to think more deeply and therefore produce their best work across all subjects and phases.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff in the early years consistently model language and engage children in high-quality talk.
 - Leaders should continue their work to improve communication with parents and carers about pupils' learning and behaviour.
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About this inspection

The co-chairs of the board of governors in this school are Ben Stickley and Adele Ward.

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, other school leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and governors, including the co-chairs, during the inspection.

The lead inspector also spoke with representatives from the local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. It is in the Diocese of Chelmsford. Its most recent section 48 inspection was in February 2019.

At the time of the inspection, there were 85 pupils on roll.

The school currently makes use of one alternative provision.

Headteacher: Mrs Sharon Vessey

Lead inspector:

Mark Carter-Tufnell, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Robert James, 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 28 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

97

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: 272

School capacity

117

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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

12.37%

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

2.06%

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

3.09%

Well below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

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

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	53%	61%	Below
2024/25 (final)	64%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	29%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	63%	60%	Close to average

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 (final)	91%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	71%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	75%	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	67%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	82%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	36%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	79%	71%	Above

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	65%	73%	Below
2024/25 (final)	73%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	43%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	75%	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		46%	
2024/25		47%	
2023/24 (final)	S	46%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	44%	S

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		63%	
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

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		59%	
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	58%	S

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		61%	
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	59%	S

‘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%	
2024/25		69%	
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	66%	S

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		81%	
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	S	78%	S

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		78%	
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	77%	S

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		81%	
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	79%	S

‘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 (3 term)	4.3%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	5.4%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	5.0%	5.9%	Below

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)	6.6%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	12.9%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	11.1%	16.2%	Below

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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