

Fearnhill School

Address: Icknield Way West, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 4BA

Unique reference number (URN): 117504

Inspection report: 21 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 

Pupils typically develop appropriate knowledge and skills across the curriculum. They are able to articulate their learning confidently. Within the curriculum, leaders have developed a culture for supporting disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This culture ensures that pupils make appropriate progress from their starting points. Improving achievement is generally reflected in the school's published outcomes for pupils who need additional support.

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils. Historical outcomes for pupils have been below national averages. However, more recently, they have improved. Pupils generally produce work that demonstrates their positive progress throughout different areas of the curriculum.

As a result of impactful literacy intervention, pupils' work demonstrates improvements in grammar and spelling. As a result of this intervention, pupils are able to access more complex areas of the curriculum.

In the post-16 provision, students move on to ambitious and appropriate destinations. Leaders have adapted the curriculum well with students able to produce high-quality work that demonstrates deeper knowledge and critical thinking.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Pupils study an ambitious and broad range of subjects across the curriculum. Furthermore, leaders understand how to improve and modify the curriculum to support the needs of pupils.

Leaders ensure that staff develop their subject knowledge through continuous, effective training. In science, for example, teachers use their subject knowledge skilfully to explain complex topics and address pupils' misconceptions well. Leaders also ensure that teachers receive regular training to make appropriate interventions for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leaders have introduced consistent practice for teaching and learning, which pupils are familiar with. For example, some practice helps pupils to recall and develop their learning further. Over time, the whole school vision for teaching and learning is generally used effectively by staff to check pupils' understanding and address misconceptions. As a result, pupils are progressing well through the curriculum. However, leaders also recognise the need to ensure that their work is further embedded across all subjects to support pupils in producing consistently high-quality work.

Leaders have developed effective interventions to secure pupils' basic skills in reading and writing. Additional support is targeted well to pupils who need to catch up or who require support to overcome their barriers to learning. For example, support includes small-group

teaching, individual reading intervention and handwriting improvement. As a result of this support, pupils access the curriculum.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

The school creates an inclusive culture that puts all pupils, including those who have barriers to their learning, at the forefront of decision-making. Targeted support is put in place effectively, ensuring pupils engage in their learning well. As a result, staff are able to support pupils to overcome barriers to learning and wellbeing through deliberate adaptations. Staff receive regular training and individual coaching sessions based on the emerging needs of their pupils. For example, staff receive training on supporting pupils with complex circumstances and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result of this training, staff are able to develop different ways to adapt their practice alongside pupils' changing needs. Leaders and staff maintain high expectations and ensure that interventions are timely and appropriate.

Staff provide pupils with high levels of pastoral support and intervention well. For example, designated spaces allow pupils to receive individual support and guidance on their wellbeing and emotional regulation. This support and guidance reduces barriers to learning and helps pupils to develop self-esteem.

Pupils receive individual and small-group support for reading and writing. Leaders monitor the impact of all intervention strategies to ensure that they are suitable and make a difference to pupils' foundational skills and knowledge. Leaders use pupil premium funding effectively, to directly support the needs of disadvantaged pupils. As a result of this funding, pupils are well equipped and ready to learn effectively.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have a precise understanding of the school's context, including pupils who face barriers to their learning and need additional support across the curriculum. Leaders know the school's strengths and areas for improvement well, and they have taken effective steps to improve pupils' experience within the classroom. For example, there are more established routines around teaching and learning, behaviour and teacher development. Leaders' approach ensures that teaching is effective and typically consistent. Leaders make decisions that focus on pupils directly, especially for those who need support for their wellbeing.

Leaders are outward looking and take effective actions from external feedback and professional challenge. The school's experienced governors play a central role in professionally challenging and improving the school. Governors work well alongside leaders and staff to ensure that areas across the school are held to account. Leaders recognise the need to refine some of the ways that they monitor and evaluate their work to further improve attendance, for example. Professional training is carefully matched to staff development and the school's wider priorities. Well-structured activities help staff to build confidence and embed leaders' visions for the school.

Leaders have taken appropriate steps to reduce staff workload and ensure that staff feel valued. Leaders and staff are committed to the school's continuous development.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have developed a personal development and wellbeing programme to support the needs of their pupils and community. This programme is coherent, well sequenced and helps pupils' confidence in understanding the social and moral values they need for life in modern Britain.

The curriculum for personal development and wellbeing ensures that students develop a secure understanding of topics such as risks in the local area, relationships and mental health and wellbeing. Pupils can talk effectively around their understanding of these themes. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive individual support to help them prepare for their next steps. This support helps them develop greater independence and self-awareness.

High-quality pastoral care supports pupils form positive relationships with their peers and staff. This helps pupils feel safe and valued. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the support that they receive and how it helps them to be successful in their learning. Leaders also work with a range of external services to ensure that its pupils are well rounded, respectful and tolerant individuals.

Pupils develop their character and interests, beyond the classroom, through an extensive and inclusive programme of clubs, trips and leadership opportunities. These include student- and staff-led activities at lunchtime, such as Lego and logic club, year-group visits to London and the management of a student newspaper, 'Fearnzine'. Leaders encourage pupils to use their voices to impact positive change through the use of an embedded student voice programme. Regular pupil surveys help leaders to evaluate the impact effectively. Leaders regularly review the content, quality and impact of the personal development programme. This ensures that it meets their pupils' needs and is updated to reflect the emerging needs of their community.

Careers education is meticulously planned and well established in the school. Pupils receive professional advice and guidance alongside visits from external speakers and former students. This helps ensure that pupils are well prepared for further education, apprenticeships or employment.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Students benefit from an ambitious, inclusive and welcoming post-16 provision. Leaders' work has ensured that pupils are able to follow a broad, varied and unique programme of study. This includes an ambitious A-level and vocational curriculum. Leaders' planning ensures that this curriculum meets the needs of their students and supports them with their future aspirations.

Published outcomes for A levels were below average in the last academic year. However, leaders' work in improving the quality of teaching and learning is showing the curriculum is taught well. Typically, students are well prepared for examinations, and their secure subject

knowledge allows them to progress through the curriculum well. In lessons, teachers use their well-developed subject knowledge effectively. This subject knowledge further allows students to develop their own deeper knowledge within their chosen subjects.

Students speak positively about the support they receive both pastorally and academically. They benefit from a comprehensive programme of personal development and wellbeing. This includes trips as part of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, visits and various additional careers events and volunteering opportunities. Many students take on leadership roles as mentors to younger pupils as part of the student council.

Careers advice and guidance is effective. It enables pupils to progress to ambitious next steps, including a range of university degree courses.

Needs attention

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Leaders' work to improve pupils' attendance remains a priority. The impact of this work is still in its early stages. Leaders have reviewed systems to support attendance, but overall attendance remains low and some groups of pupils are persistently absent. Although leaders' work is showing some improvement to attendance, there needs to be more rapid actions taken.

Leaders use approaches such as soft starts, therapeutic input and detailed casework to improve this area of the school's work. Leaders also use innovative approaches to improve punctuality, and pupils speak positively about the importance for 'making school unmissable'.

On the whole, classrooms are calm and purposeful environments without disruption. Relationships between staff and students are positive. Leaders respond appropriately to incidents, including bullying and discriminatory behaviour. Pupils report that these are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils are confident in using processes to report behaviour that would be below the pupils' and school's expectations.

Leaders have introduced an 'Improve, Move, Remove' system for managing behaviour across the school. Pupils report that this system is effective and, generally, being applied across the school. The school also calls on external advice in order to work with groups of pupils to improve their behaviour for learning.

Pupil engagement varies in a small minority of lessons, generally where explanations or routines are less secure. However, typically, pupils conduct themselves well and work with purpose.

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

Pupils say they are proud to attend Fearnhill, and there is a sense of belonging across the school. Typically, pupils experience warm and consistent relationships with staff. They benefit from consistent routines that allow them to progress well through the curriculum. Pupils' individual needs are known well by leaders. Sixth-form students also engage with younger pupils, such as by mentoring them and participating in leadership opportunities.

Typically, pupils behave in a calm and respectful manner across the school. They are engaged in their lessons. Pupils recognise the increased staff presence and routines in the corridors. This encourages punctuality and generally calm transitions between lessons.

Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported through various interventions. These interventions help pupils to be understood, as individuals, and to receive targeted support.

Pupils speak positively about the academic and pastoral support that they receive from staff. Pupils understand how to report concerns and receive appropriate help from staff. This ensures that pupils feel safe and are well supported throughout all aspects of school. Pupils know that staff act swiftly to resolve concerns, including incidents of bullying.

Pupils are guided through a comprehensive programme of personal development. Pupils are taught how to stay safe in the local area, around respect, protected characteristics and how to prepare themselves well for life in modern Britain. Pupils are also offered many opportunities to participate in enrichment activities. These opportunities are made available to all pupils. They include visits to London and partnerships with local organisations to promote respect and tolerance. The 'Fearnhill Student' programme helps pupils to develop as kind, confident, resilient and self-aware individuals. Pupils compliment the use of the school magazine, which helps them stay up to date with aspects of school life.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that processes to increase pupils' attendance are accurately evaluated and are being monitored effectively.
- Leaders should ensure that staff consistently develop their teaching and learning practice, across all subjects, to support pupils producing their highest standards of work.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Aneurin Ronald Hathway.

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 chair of governors, governors, the headteacher, senior leaders, staff and pupils during the inspection. Inspectors reviewed the findings of the parent, staff and pupil Ofsted online surveys.

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

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The headteacher took up their position in September 2024.

The school currently makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Tim Spencer

Lead inspector:

Ross Marks, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Jason Carey, Ofsted Inspector

Jennifer Brassington, Ofsted Inspector

Tom Sparks, 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 21 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

601

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

1,055

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: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

39.30%

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

3.99%

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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

12.15%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

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).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	26.7%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	34.0%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	29.9%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	38.9	46.0	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	41.2	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	43.3	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.14	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.27	-0.03	Above

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	6.5%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	14.3%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	19.0%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	27.8	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	33.6	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	37.4	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.70	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.04	-0.57	Above

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	6.5%	53.1%	-46.7 pp
2023/24 (final)	14.3%	53.1%	-38.8 pp
2022/23 (final)	19.0%	52.4%	-33.4 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	27.8	50.4	-22.6
2023/24 (final)	33.6	50.0	-16.4
2022/23 (final)	37.4	50.3	-12.9

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.70	0.16	-0.86
2022/23 (final)	-0.04	0.17	-0.21

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	94%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	90%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers (revised)	98%	94%	Not available

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	24.71	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	33.57	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	32.12	34.16	Close to average

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.4	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	-0.2	0.0	Close to average

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)	10.9%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	11.5%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	11.0%	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)	28.7%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	33.6%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	33.8%	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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