

St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Bradford Abbas

Address: Mill Lane, Sherborne, Dorset, DT9 6RH

Unique reference number (URN): 144299

Inspection report: 6 May 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

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Pupils attend well. The attendance of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), has improved steadily, and rates are above the national figures. The number of pupils with less than 90% attendance has reduced because leaders have successfully increased their focus on these pupils. The school works closely with families to support pupils' regular attendance.

Generally, pupils behave well in and around the school. They get on well together and make effective use of the wide range of activities and equipment available to them during breaktimes. The behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school has been a major focus of the interim leadership team. The simplified message of 'ready, safe and respectful' has made it much easier for pupils to understand and meet the school's expectations. Pupils understand these rules and routines and see them as fair. Pupils are confident that staff will always deal with any bullying or other concerns they may have. Improvements to the support for pupils with SEND and for those at risk of suspension has also improved pupils' behaviour. A greater understanding of these pupils' needs has made the support they receive far more effective.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children are safe and happy in the early years. They enjoy the wide range of activities and resources available to them. Staff develop warm relationships with children and use the rules and routines to help children feel settled and happy in the classroom. Children enjoy working alongside adults and talk enthusiastically about the stories they are learning and the activities at hand. They are confident in the classroom and love working in the outdoors space. As a result, most children gain the knowledge they need to be ready for Year 1.

Staff support children's developing language and communication. Speech and language needs are identified early. Leaders have visited other schools to understand different approaches. A suitable curriculum is in place that covers all areas of children's learning. Staff carefully prepare activities that interest and engage children. Staff listen carefully to what children say and make links to previous learning. In this way, teaching builds on children's interests and contributions, extending their thinking and deepening their understanding. However, as elsewhere in the school, leaders have not identified exactly what foundational knowledge children need to learn by the time they finish the year. This slows the progress of some children.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are receiving increasingly effective support. Leaders have been supported by the multi-academy trust to review and improve all aspects of this work. Children who need extra help are quickly identified in their first year at school. Pupils get the additional support they need. When necessary, leaders ensure that pupils with higher levels of need quickly gain extra help through education, health and care plans.

The support for pupils who are at risk of being suspended has been significantly improved. Appropriate additional support, such as from carefully selected alternative provision, is enabling pupils to be happier and more settled at school. Not only is this reducing the likelihood of exclusion but is also more effectively preparing these pupils for the next stage in their education.

Disadvantaged pupils are well supported. Leaders carefully monitor additional funding to ensure that it makes a real difference to these pupils. The school makes good use of the support available from outside agencies to evaluate and improve the quality of provision for individual pupils. Although leaders monitor pupils' progress, the current approach does not identify gaps in their foundational knowledge quickly enough.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

The school's leadership has changed since the last inspection. The trust acted quickly to provide the school with interim leadership. The rapid action plan put in place has been supported by additional support from the trust, for example the support from the director of inclusion to audit and improve the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Trustees and governors have effective oversight of the school. They are pleased with the progress the school has made under the current interim leadership arrangements. Trustees have robust systems in place to ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. Governors benefit from clear information that they understand. They use this to support and challenge school leaders.

Staff in the school feel well supported by leaders. They appreciate leaders' work to improve the school and say that leaders are considerate to their wellbeing and workload. Staff are confident that pupils are kept safe, bullying is handled effectively, and behaviour management is effective. Staff value the training they receive to support the school's work to improve outcomes for pupils.

Leaders have successfully identified and improved aspects of the school that needed to be stronger. For example, the support for pupils with SEND and the general expectations of pupils' behaviour are both significantly stronger because of leaders' actions. Sometimes leaders' plans are too broad. This makes it difficult for staff to know exactly what needs to change.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders and staff care about pupils' personal development. A thoughtful programme is in place that gradually builds pupils' knowledge and understanding as they move through the school. This programme is enhanced with additional opportunities and input from specialists. As a result, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are developing their knowledge and understanding of areas such as fundamental British values, racism and major religions.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities in art, music and sport. Well-established creative opportunities include working with local artists, singing with nearby

schools and annual performances. The range of sports clubs and events include football, swimming, cross country, dodgeball and netball. External providers, including Yeovil Town Football Club, contribute to the curriculum and after-school provision. Leaders carefully track the clubs and extra activities to ensure that all pupils benefit from them.

Pupils are well supported to develop the skills they need to get on with others and to see other people's point of view. Pupils understand the school's values, exploring a different one each half term. They give thoughtful examples of values, such as service and offering a helping hand. Pupils are supported to think about the world of work through enterprise projects linked to the summer fair and visits for younger pupils. Pupils value the opportunities they get to have additional responsibilities in the school. For example, pupils serve on the school council, which gathers and acts on ideas to improve the school.

Pupils feel safe and well supported at school. They say that staff are approachable and responsive when they need help. Pupils benefit from a range of pastoral support that provides support for pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' results in national assessments fluctuate year on year. This is because some pupils do not gain the secure knowledge they need in reading, writing and mathematics to do well. This is the case for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Improvements to the way teachers teach are ensuring that pupils learn and remember more of their lessons. The school regularly monitors pupil's learning and provides extra help if pupils fall behind. However, these checks are not sufficiently focused on pupil's foundational knowledge. This is because the school has not identified exactly what pupils need to learn. This means that pupils with gaps in their basic knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics are not identified quickly enough to stop them from falling behind.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

The school has an ambitious curriculum that sets out what pupils will learn as they move through the school. However, overall, the implementation of the curriculum is not yet consistent. Teaching of foundational knowledge in reading, writing, vocabulary and mathematics does not ensure that all pupils learn this essential knowledge well. This includes children in the early years and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teaching is not consistent enough to ensure that all pupils have the secure knowledge they need for the next stage in their education.

The careful sequencing of the curriculum makes it easier for pupils to build the knowledge they need as they get older. This is clear in some subjects where pupils can easily recall what they have previously learned and apply that knowledge to new learning. Generally,

teaching ensures that pupils behave well in lessons so that they concentrate and settle quickly to learning.

Leaders and staff have strengthened the way that the curriculum is being taught. The teaching of reading is prioritised for younger pupils. Children learn phonics right from the start of the Reception Year, and most pupils are keen to talk about the stories they enjoy.

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

Pupils enjoy their time at St. Mary's. They say that the school treats them as individuals. Pupils value that the school welcomes everyone because, 'Everyone is unique.' Pupils behave well in and around the school and get on well together. They enjoy their lessons and are keen to talk about their learning. Pupils are enthusiastic about the wide range of trips and experiences on offer. These include learning about the Romans, pantomime visits, residential and the summer production.

However, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should. They do not develop secure knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders know there is more to do to ensure that all pupils gain the foundational knowledge they need to be ready for the next stage in their education.

Pupils feel safe and say adults take good care of them and take any worries they have seriously. Pupils are confident that, if bullying happened, staff can be relied upon to sort it out. Older pupils say that behaviour in the school has improved since leaders simplified the school rules. Pupils appreciate the recently introduced leadership roles, such as the opportunity for pupils in Year 6 to support children in Reception.

Parents and carers appreciate that they can talk to staff and that the school provides the information they need about their child's education. Parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are pleased with the support that they receive.

Leaders have worked closely with staff to strengthen the quality of teaching. The school's expectations of what pupils will learn and how they will behave in lessons has been clarified. Staff have improved the way that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported in lessons. These actions are making it easier for those pupils to learn.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to improve outcomes for pupils by ensuring that teaching quickly identifies and addresses gaps in pupils' reading, writing and mathematics and that strategies are systematically and skilfully adjusted to make a sustained difference to pupils.
- Leaders should clarify the foundational knowledge that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and children in the early years, need to acquire to be ready for the next stage in their education. Leaders, including governors, should then

closely monitor the progress of all pupils, ensuring that teachers focus on this key knowledge so that pupils are well placed to succeed.

About this inspection

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.

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

The school and multi-academy trust have undergone some significant changes in senior leadership since the last inspection. An interim leadership team is currently in place.

During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the interim executive headteacher, interim school leaders and other school staff. Inspectors also met with members of the trust, members of the local governing body and a representative from the Diocese of Salisbury.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. The most recent section 48 Statutory Inspection on behalf of the Diocese of Salisbury took place in May 2025.

The school makes use of two registered alternative provisions.

Executive headteacher: Ian Bartle

Lead inspector:

Phil Minns, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspector:

Jonathan Gower, 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 6 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

89

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

119

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)

6.74%

Well 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

2.25%

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

28.09%

Well above 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	50%	61%	Below
2024/25 (final)	44%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	58%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	50%	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	69%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	63%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	83%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	64%	73%	Below

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	64%	72%	Below
2024/25 (final)	56%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	75%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	64%	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	64%	73%	Below
2024/25 (final)	69%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	67%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	57%	73%	Below

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	70%	46%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	47%	S
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	70%	62%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	S	63%	S
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	70%	59%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	59%	S
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	70%	60%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	61%	S
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	70%	68%	2 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	69%	S
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	70%	80%	-10 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
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	70%	78%	-8 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	78%	S
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	70%	80%	-10 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
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)	4.1%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	4.1%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	5.3%	5.9%	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 (3 term)	6.2%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	3.7%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	16.3%	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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