

St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Address: Link Lane, Pulborough, West Sussex, RH20 2AN

Unique reference number (URN): 126048

Inspection report: 15 September 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 ●

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders use an ambitious and highly effective personal development and wellbeing programme that aligns closely with the school's vision. The programme is rich, well-organised, and designed to build pupils' knowledge over time. Leaders ensure that learning directly reflects the needs of the school and its community, resulting in positive and well-established outcomes for pupils.

Pupils' social, moral, spiritual, and cultural development is highly developed, supported fully by the school's ethos. Pupils develop a sophisticated understanding of life in modern Britain, reflect deeply on their experiences and consider how they can help others. They consistently demonstrate respect and kindness, understand right from wrong, and discuss moral and ethical issues while listening carefully to different views.

Leaders have implemented an excellent relationships, sex, and health education which is planned precisely from the early years onwards. The content is age-appropriate, preparing pupils brilliantly for later life by focusing on healthy relationships, personal safety, and wellbeing. Online safety is treated as an ongoing priority, with key messages revised regularly so pupils learn how to stay safe both online and in the wider world, while knowing how to ask for help when concerns arise. Highly effective staff training supports accurate teaching about emerging digital risks, including artificial intelligence.

Pupils also develop a secure understanding of shared community values and citizenship. These principles are taught through regular lessons, assemblies, and various opportunities to take on meaningful responsibilities. Thoughtful and responsive pastoral support is fully integrated into this work. The school provides a diverse range of clubs, music, sport and arts activities. Leaders promote that all pupils, and especially those who face any barriers or disadvantage benefit strongly from these opportunities. Visits from employers, alumni, and other schools provide pupils with an inspiring early introduction to future opportunities, successfully raising aspirations and broadening their understanding of the wider world.

Expected standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard ●

Leaders take effective action to make sure pupils attend school regularly. Although attendance is still too low for a small number of pupils, leaders are taking the right steps to improve this. They work closely with families and other professionals to help pupils and families overcome barriers to attendance. Leaders use a range of information to understand the causes of absence. Leaders use well-planned strategies to improve attendance and step in immediately when concerns arise. Instead, they adapt their support to help pupils and families. Leaders also use newsletters and other regular updates to promote the importance of good attendance.

Behaviour is positive across the school. Pupils behave well in lessons and during social times. They listen, cooperate and respond well to adults. Staff use consistent and calm approaches to support pupils, including those who need additional help to manage their emotions. This helps pupils know what to expect from staff. Pupils who struggle to regulate their behaviour receive personalised support. The school promotes a respectful and inclusive environment. Children are kind to each other. Incidents of any unkind behaviour, bullying or discrimination are very rare. Staff quickly resolve any issues that arise.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the curriculum's strengths and areas for development. The curriculum is broad and well sequenced. Leaders consider the school's location and context when planning trips and inviting visitors into school. This brings learning alive for pupils. Lessons are typically taught well. This is particularly evident in mathematics in key stage 2. Staff training has strengthened teachers' understanding of what pupils should know and remember. This helps teachers to build pupils' knowledge over time so they emphasise the most important content. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged receive carefully adapted provision. Staff have secure subject knowledge and use this to model new concepts clearly. Staff use assessment to determine pupils' gaps in knowledge and to inform future teaching but this practice is variable.

Leaders have recently implemented new approaches to teaching phonics which are helping to accelerate pupils' progress and further strengthen their outcomes in reading and writing. Pupils love to read. They speak enthusiastically about the stories they read and the reading tasks set by teachers. The design of these activities help pupils to acquire and successfully use a wide range of ambitious vocabulary.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders are determined to give children in the early years a positive start to their education. Transition into the Reception Year is well planned. Staff carefully identify children's starting points. The curriculum is well designed and leaders adapt this precisely to meet the needs of individual children. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from the same ambitious experiences as their peers. Effective teaching focuses on communication and language, personal and social skills and physical growth. Children enjoy creative activities and joyfully learn rhyme and songs and familiar stories. Staff carefully build vocabulary through talk, questions and activities. Leaders recognise that the teaching of phonics would benefit from further refinement. Children make appropriate progress from their starting points, particularly in communication and language and personal development. As a result, children achieve well in the early years.

Children are encouraged to share ideas and work with others. Well-established routines are calm and help children become independent. Staff prioritise promoting children's welfare and happiness. Children develop confidence and learn to recognise and manage their feelings. The learning environment is safe, welcoming and stimulating. As a result, children feel happy and safe and enjoy learning.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders know pupils and their families well. Leaders ensure pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged are included in every aspect of school life. These pupils learn confidently alongside their peers and have access to the full curriculum with appropriate support. Where necessary, pupils receive tailored adaptations, including specialised equipment and planned movement or sensory breaks.

Pupils' needs are identified quickly when they join the school. Where barriers to learning are identified, leaders ensure that appropriate strategies are implemented, supporting pupils to succeed. Leaders make timely referrals to other professionals where required. This enables staff to support pupils effectively through specialist guidance. Leaders provide staff with the practical advice and guidance they need to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. The school is careful to record and review individual provision for pupils. This information is communicated clearly so that all staff are aware of the help these pupils need.

The school uses additional funding for disadvantaged pupils effectively to prioritise their academic achievement and wider opportunities. Disadvantaged pupils are encouraged and supported to access all the opportunities the school offers.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders, governors and staff share a clear vision for the school, balancing an accurate understanding of its current strengths and what needs further work. Leadership focuses on what is best for pupils, ensuring clear priorities are set and the impact of actions are checked. Leaders care deeply about pupils' futures, actively listening to advice from governors and external partners to refine their work. Driven by the school's core values and a deep understanding of the local community, they ensure the curriculum always puts pupils' interests first.

Governors carry out their legal duties with diligence. They evaluate leadership decisions, asking purposeful questions during regular school visits to check progress against agreed priorities. Holding high expectations for all pupils, including those with additional needs or facing disadvantage, governors provide constructive feedback to ensure positive outcomes for pupils.

Staff wellbeing and workload are carefully considered. Consequently, staff feel supported, valued, and listened to. Leaders provide high-quality professional learning linked directly to school priorities. They systematically check how training improves classroom practice. They utilise staff expertise effectively, encouraging the sharing of successful practice across the school.

Partnerships with parents, professionals, and the community are highly valued. Leaders keep families well informed and welcome their views. They collaborate effectively with outside agencies when pupils require extra support, while active links with local groups enrich wider school experiences. This collaborative approach helps the school remain deeply responsive to the evolving needs of its pupils and families.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Over time, pupils' achievement has not been high enough. Published results at the end of key stage 2 remain below the national average. This means pupils are not as well prepared for secondary school as they could be. Leaders are taking appropriate steps to address this, but it is too soon to see sustained impact. Typically, many pupils now achieve in line with their peers in phonics and the multiplication tables check. Pupils' handwriting and spelling are appropriately developed. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make suitable progress from their starting points.

Pupils' work in books across different subjects show that achievement is improving in the wider curriculum. In some subjects, such as art, geography and science, pupils talk about their learning confidently which reflects secure knowledge and skills. Pupils are increasingly confident using new vocabulary when they speak and write across different subjects.

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

Pupils enjoy coming to St Mary's Church of England Primary School. They are happy and feel safe. The school environment is welcoming and calm. The school values, which focus on love and wisdom, shape daily life. Pupils are polite, well behaved, and positive about learning. They build strong relationships with adults. Pupils enjoy lessons and feel that staff listen to them. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. They know who to speak to if they have a worry. Pupils say that bullying is rare. Staff deal with any problems quickly when they happen. Pupils understand the importance of treating everyone with respect.

Pupils achieve well in some subjects, including in personal, social and health education. Key stage 2 published outcomes show that pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is below the national average over time. In other ways, pupils are prepared well for the next stages of their education. For example, they develop positive attitudes, confidence, and independence.

Children of all ages benefit from many exciting opportunities. They talk enthusiastically about school clubs, trips, and visitors. Leaders make excellent use of the local area and community links. These partnerships include the local church and nearby businesses. Pupils assume extra responsibilities and develop sophisticated leadership skills. For example, they become eco-warriors, school councillors, or prefects. These roles help pupils contribute positively to daily school life. Pupils also learn to work with others, share ideas, and grow in maturity and resilience beyond the classroom. The school makes great use of its outdoor space. Pupils enjoy playing and taking part in activities that they have suggested themselves. They appreciate that the school council gives them a real voice in these decisions. For instance, pupils helped to design the tunnels and the castle on the field. These opportunities help pupils feel truly valued and involved in their school.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue their focus on improving the published outcomes at key stage 2 so pupils are sufficiently well prepared for secondary school.
 - Leaders should maintain a sharp focus on attendance to ensure pupils' attendance continues to improve and persistent absence reduces further.
 - Leaders should strengthen the use of assessment so staff identify pupils' gaps in knowledge and use this information to inform future teaching.
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About this inspection

The chairs of the board of governors in this school are Mr Andrew Clark and Mr Julian Edge.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This inspection took place from 15 to 16 September 2026.

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 school leaders, staff, pupils, governors and parents during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:
The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher: Samantha Copus

Lead inspector:

Helen Longton-Howorth, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

James Broadbridge, His Majesty's Inspector

Ian Waine, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from [different sources](#).
More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.



The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 15 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

295

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: 268

School capacity

420

Above 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)

23.05%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 26.5%

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

3.39%

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: 4.1%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

14.58%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational needs support 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	48%	61%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	39%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	55%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	52%	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	66%	74%	Below
2024/25 (final)	58%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	80%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	65%	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	63%	72%	Below
2024/25 (final)	63%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	66%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	60%	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	65%	73%	Below
2024/25 (final)	56%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	73%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	69%	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	25%	46%	Below
2024/25 (final)	7%	47%	Below
2023/24 (final)	50%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	20%	44%	Below

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	42%	62%	Below
2024/25 (final)	29%	63%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	67%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	30%	60%	Below

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	42%	59%	Below
2024/25 (final)	36%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	58%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	30%	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	44%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	36%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	67%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	30%	59%	Below

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	25%	68%	-43 pp
2024/25 (final)	7%	69%	-62 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	67%	-17 pp
2022/23 (final)	20%	66%	-46 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	42%	80%	-38 pp
2024/25 (final)	29%	81%	-52 pp
2023/24 (final)	67%	80%	-13 pp
2022/23 (final)	30%	78%	-48 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	42%	78%	-36 pp
2024/25 (final)	36%	78%	-43 pp
2023/24 (final)	58%	78%	-19 pp
2022/23 (final)	30%	77%	-47 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	44%	80%	-35 pp
2024/25 (final)	36%	81%	-45 pp
2023/24 (final)	67%	79%	-13 pp
2022/23 (final)	30%	79%	-49 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 (3 term)	6.0%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	5.5%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.3%	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)	19.4%	13.0%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	15.6%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	18.1%	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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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