

Layston Church of England First School

Address: The Causeway, Buntingford, Hertfordshire, SG9 9EU

Unique reference number (URN): 117390

Inspection report: 23 June 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 

Leaders have been very effective in significantly reducing the number of pupils persistently absent from school. This has been especially the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or eligible for pupil premium funding. Overall, pupils' attendance is broadly in line with national averages. Leaders have robust systems in place for identifying and tracking pupils' attendance. They are swift to respond to any dips in this. Leaders work closely with families to overcome any barriers to attendance. Leaders remind parents of the importance of attendance and punctuality. There are effective adjustments in place for pupils with SEND and/or vulnerable pupils. This means these pupils feel safe and secure in school with trusted adults so are able to attend regularly, as any worries are successfully abated.

The school has also tightened up its approach to addressing any disruptive behaviours. Staff have had suitable training on how to support pupils to manage their emotions and needs. Suspensions have also reduced. If and when they are used, they are having the desired impact in terms of reversing unwelcome behaviours. Lessons in school and social times have hardly any low-level disruption. Bullying is rare, and leaders address this swiftly and effectively. Staff follow the behaviour policy consistently well so pupils are clear on the rewards and sanctions process. Pupils of all ages follow these expectations very well.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

The school is successful in accurately identifying pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Recently, leaders have refined this process even further so that no child slips through the net. Several pupils with SEND are also eligible for pupil premium funding or are known or previously known to social care. Leaders have been quick to identify that these pupils' main barriers to learning have been linked to their emotional, communication, safety and social needs. Some of these pupils also had low attendance previously. Through targeted support, leaders have ensured that these pupils have had the necessary adjustments and pastoral oversight to help them feel safe and secure in school. As a result, all of these pupils access learning in class alongside their peers and experience the curriculum in all its fullness.

Leaders work closely with parents and external agencies to ensure that pupils have the specialist support needed. Staff receive the necessary training to support these pupils. Staff here are very committed and dedicated to wanting to help the most vulnerable pupils succeed. Leaders have appropriate systems in place to review how well pupils with SEND and/or who are eligible for pupil premium are behaving, attending and attaining. Leaders are currently working with staff to tighten up target-setting for these pupils to be more robust than it is currently. This work is in hand.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils and care deeply about them. They are leading the school well on its upward improvement journey. For example, they have overseen

significant improvements in attendance and behaviour. Leaders have ensured that the rising number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), those eligible for pupil premium funding or those known to social care have had barriers to learning overcome so all can access learning in class.

Leaders have improved the quality of phonics teaching, and this is now starting to be seen in improved outcomes. They have improved the curriculum offer in school, and staff have benefited from training on this. Leaders know their school well and have accurately prioritised the right areas to work on. In order to maximise the rate of improvement, leaders have engaged well with local authority support. However, they are not overly reliant on this.

Leaders have shown resilience and tenacity in managing to maintain the school's upward trajectory, despite unforeseen operational challenges. Governors have strategic and effective oversight of the school and fulfil their statutory duties. Staff are very supportive of leaders and how mindful they are of their wellbeing. Leaders are effective in engaging well with parents. Parents remain overwhelmingly supportive of the school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have ensured a high standard of pastoral care. Staff take time to get to know pupils well and soon spot any concerns that pupils may have. These are addressed quickly and successfully. Pupils have trusted adults who check in with them regularly. Pupils talk positively about the impact that this has on their wellbeing and happiness. This means all pupils have the emotional support and strategies needed to access learning in class, especially pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or those who are eligible for pupil premium funding.

Leaders have ensured that the planned personal, health, social and economic curriculum, religious education and collective worship teaches pupils about the importance of being tolerant and respectful. Pupils can typically recall detailed facts not only about Christianity, but different religions and their cultural beliefs and practices. For example, they understand why some Muslim females choose to cover their hair as they consider it is a gift from God that must be protected. They also learn about different laws and why these are important in society. Pupils know the school values and are able to articulate what these look like in their daily lives. For example, pupils can explain what 'forgiveness' means and give examples of when they may show this in their lives. They get to experience democratic processes through elections to roles such as wellbeing ambassadors.

The curriculum supports pupils in developing positive attitudes towards being healthy. Overall, pupils know about healthy foods and the importance of regular exercise. They learn about everyday dangers such as smoking or drinking. They know how to stay safe online.

Pupils develop resilience, patience and team-working skills during their regular sessions in the school's forest area. They demonstrate compassion and empathy by living out their school values and letting their 'light shine' out into the community, such as performing in the local area and raising money for a school abroad.

Needs attention ●

Achievement

Needs attention ●

Leaders have started to remedy the historically below national average outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check. Most pupils at the early stages of reading are now working in class at a standard expected for their age. Likewise, the school is also seeing an early uptick in school of pupils improving their attainment in the Year 4 multiplication check. However, these improvements are still in their infancy.

Most pupils by the end of Year 4 have secured the reading, writing and mathematical knowledge they need for middle school. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or who are eligible for pupil premium funding receive targeted support. While this is starting to have an impact, leaders recognise that gaps in reading fluency and writing for some of these pupils are not yet closing rapidly enough. Some pupils with higher starting points are not receiving sufficient opportunity to extend or deepen their knowledge.

While pupils with SEND are able to access their learning, they are not making sufficient independent academic progress once in class. This is due to academic targets being too broad and well-intentioned staff being too keen to 'over-help' these pupils to complete work.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention ●

Leaders have recently updated the curriculum, including in reading, writing and mathematics. They have clearly laid out how pupils' knowledge builds up over time across all subjects. Overall, this curriculum content is being taught as intended. Leaders have ensured that the teaching of early reading is becoming more expert. Reading books match well to pupils' reading ability overall. Teachers typically follow the school's agreed focus on promoting rich vocabulary and recapping prior learning. Teachers are getting used to the new system for checking how well pupils have understood their learning.

However, staff are currently not routinely using these checks to inform their next steps in teaching. This means that learning is not always adapted with enough precision to meet the differing needs and abilities of all pupils. Pupils are not clear as to exactly why they have done well in a piece of work or what they need to get better at, for example in their writing. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or who are eligible for pupil premium funding often have misconceptions that remain, such as in letter or number formation or punctuation. Pupils with SEND are supported by adults in class to access the learning. However, sometimes this help, although very well intentioned, is hindering how well pupils learn and apply their knowledge independently.

Early years

Needs attention ●

Leaders are well aware that early years remains a priority area for improvement. They have started to make positive inroads into this in a relatively short period of time. They are navigating the necessary changes in the right order. However, there is still work to do to ensure children's outcomes across all areas of learning continue to improve and are

sustained. This includes for children in early years with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Leaders have ensured that the early years curriculum is now well thought out, builds to clear end points and is ambitious. Staff are in the early stages of getting used to the expectations of this revised curriculum. Children access learning activities that are matched to the planned curriculum offer. However, currently, these activities are typically limited in scope, including for children with SEND. There is little chance for children to have their knowledge extended or deepened. Staff do not routinely use their questioning with enough precision to maximise learning opportunities. This means children are not securing the curriculum knowledge as well as the ambitious curriculum intends.

Children are starting to benefit from the school's renewed focus on improving the teaching of phonics. Children sustain concentration, take turns, listen and manage their self-care. It is a safe and caring environment. There have been appropriate adjustments to the learning environment made for pupils with SEND so they are able to access the curriculum in class with their peers.

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

Pupils are starting to benefit from the recent improvements leaders have made to the school. Pupils, including the increasing number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are well-cared for and safe. Across the school, pupils learn in calm and orderly classrooms. Pupils have responded positively to the updated behaviour policy and there are now few unwelcome behaviours. Playtimes are enjoyable. Pupils cooperate kindly and respectfully, without any worries about bullying.

Pupils value the updates leaders have made to the curriculum. They enjoy the range of subjects they are taught. Pupils are beginning to see their achievements improve, for example in phonics and knowledge of times tables. Most pupils leave Year 4 with the necessary knowledge ready for their next school. However, pupils, including in early years, are not routinely set work that is precisely matched or adapted to their needs. This includes pupils with SEND and/or who are eligible for pupil premium funding. Consequently, this means that these pupils have gaps in knowledge that are not securely addressed. In early years, there are missed opportunities for children to have their learning extended further.

The school ensures that pupils with SEND have the necessary resources and support to access the curriculum in class with their peers. However, some pupils with SEND are over-reliant on adult help, which hinders their independence.

Pupils like the opportunities they have to learn new skills, such as den building in the school's forest area. They relish leadership roles such as being wellbeing ambassadors, lunchtime buddies or 'class greeters'. Pupils enjoy 'letting their light shine' through collective worship, supporting others in the local community and sponsoring a school abroad. Clubs such as dodgeball, gymnastics and girl's football are popular.

Pupils attend regularly and know why this is important.

Next steps

- Leaders need to ensure that in early years, staff increase their expectations of what children can achieve in their learning and ensure interactions with children maximise learning opportunities, so children achieve as highly as the curriculum intends.
 - Across the school, including in early years, leaders need to ensure that staff use assessment more effectively to inform next steps in teaching and adapt learning to meet pupils' needs more precisely.
 - Leaders need to ensure that pupils across the school with the highest needs make suitable academic progress from their starting points and develop more independence academically.
 - Leaders need to ensure that staff ensure pupils with gaps in reading and writing fill these gaps more quickly.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Colin Wilson.

The deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator took up their roles in September 2025.

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

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, staff and pupils during the inspection. Inspectors also met with the local authority school effectiveness advisor. The lead inspector met with 4 governors, including the chair and vice-chair. Inspectors also considered the views of parents from the parent surveys and those met on the playground.

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. It is in the Diocese of St. Albans. Its last section 48 inspection was in 2019.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher: Adele McMurrough

Lead inspector:

Sara Boyce, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Karen Stanton, 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 23 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

139

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

150

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)

21.58%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 26.3%

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

2.16%

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

17.99%

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).

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)	5.6%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	7.3%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	8.7%	5.9%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	12.7%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	17.6%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	26.3%	16.2%	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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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