

Wareham St Mary Church of England Primary School

Address: Streche Road, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 4PG

Unique reference number (URN): 142167

Inspection report: 7 July 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

Early years

Expected standard 

Children make a successful start in early years. Staff deliver the curriculum carefully, so children learn new words, early reading, mathematics and artistic skills. They choose themes and story-based activities that help children build vocabulary and understand ideas. Links are made between themes, such as role play with pirate ships, which supports learning about water and sea life. Pupils enjoy the 'slow reveal' approach to reading where anticipation and prediction entice children into new vocabulary.

Adults talk with children often, model good language and encourage them to think for themselves. Children enjoy activities like colouring, painting and exploring model rockpools. They practice their pencil and painting control when colouring seashells. Staff check children's learning and help them fix mistakes, especially in writing and number.

Children behave well. They choose resources sensibly, work with others and stay focused on their tasks. Those who start school with lower confidence levels get much support to catch up with their classmates.

Leaders spot additional needs early. Children with communication, social or emotional needs get the right support quickly. Staff work closely with families to help these children feel secure. The learning environment indoors and outside is well organised and full of chances to explore and play.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders' work with the trust and external specialists develops effective approaches to inclusion. Robust systems support early and accurate identification of pupils' needs. Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is targeted effectively. Alternative provision is used and reviewed appropriately.

Staff hold a secure knowledge of pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. They track their needs carefully. They use this information to provide creative and tailored support for pupils at different times of the school day. For pupils who struggle first thing in the morning, sensory circuits and 'soft starts' help them to focus on being ready to learn. Well-trained staff in 'the hive' and 'rainbow room' nurture provision give effective support during the day for pupils experiencing anxiety or struggling with their mental health. The 'mellow meadow' provides a quieter space for pupils to socialise.

In classes, staff establish trusting relationships with pupils. They offer therapeutic and nurture support. This helps pupils to understand and focus on their learning. Visual timetables, adapted workstations and clear routines enable most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to access learning successfully. Adaptations are increasingly breaking down academic content and increasingly supporting pupils' academic needs more precisely.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders are taking effective action to raise expectations, tackle underperformance and secure improvements across the school. They are focusing on the right priorities, in the right order. Leaders are brave in their decision-making. This has resulted in a high level of staff changes and raised anxiety among some parents and carers. However, actions are made in the best interests of pupils. Current staff feel very well supported and pupils feel safe, happy and fully included in the life of the school.

Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are aware that staff changes are impacting on the curriculum and quality of teaching. They take strategic actions to address any shortcomings. Leaders plan learning opportunities for staff to improve teaching and pupils' academic outcomes. They draw on a range of internal support from the trust. External specialist support from the local mathematics hub, or to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is effective.

Support from the trust is purposeful, detailed and aligns closely with the school's vision. Trust leaders identify precise points for improvement across a range of the school's work. Trustees have strengthened their structures to provide greater oversight of the school's performance. Local governors hold a secure understanding of the school's work. They obtain reports from which they challenge and support leaders effectively. Established reporting arrangements enable the trust board to maintain oversight and contribute to the ongoing improvements at the school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The personal development programme enables pupils to develop a clear understanding of similarities, differences and tolerance of others. The school's values of respect, courage and perseverance support pupils' development and are reinforced by staff at every opportunity. Pupils' daily interactions demonstrate the school values in action. Pupils value staff at the school saying they are 'kind and patient'. Older pupils reflect thoughtfully when discussing matters of faith, religion or feelings.

Developing relationships underpins much of the school's work. Pupils therefore build a secure understanding of healthy relationships and consent. They demonstrate a keen appreciation of the importance of both physical and mental health. The school's established pastoral system supports pupils' understanding and self-awareness.

Participation and engagement in the school's wide enrichment and extra-curriculum programme is high. All pupils join in. Leaders track uptake and ensure pupils' interests contribute to planned activities. Pupils value leaders' efforts to make adaptations or adjustments so all can share in the school's offer.

Pupils develop a sharp awareness of risk. They learn to manage their actions when learning outside. They know the importance of wearing wellies for protection outside in 'The mellow meadow'. They understand the importance of keeping personal information safe when online.

Leaders' use of outdoor learning is a key feature of the school's offer. Extensive opportunities for deliberate outdoor play make an important contribution to pupils' emotional wellbeing, social interaction and physical development. Pupils develop their imagination and cooperation when using the many different pieces of equipment available.

Pupils develop into responsible citizens. The school's vision of nurturing pupils to maturity is reflected through community engagement, charitable activities and opportunities for leadership. Pupils develop empathy and feel strongly that respect and kindness for others is crucial to their own happiness. Pupils feel well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' standards in reading, writing and mathematics sit well below the national average. For disadvantaged pupils, outcomes are below those of their disadvantaged peers nationally in writing and well below in mathematics. Pupils' performance in the Year 1 phonics check, while improving, remains well below national expectations.

Pupils' current achievement is too variable across different age groups. Staff changes have hindered pupils' achievement. Their progress speeds up and slows down widely as they move through the school. Several year groups have key gaps in their writing, phonics, spelling, handwriting and number knowledge. They follow a 'catch-up' curriculum, with content from earlier years, to plug gaps in their knowledge.

Most pupils can recall and apply prior learning. They talk enthusiastically about their understanding of democracy from history studies on the ancient Greeks. They link learning in science and geography, when studying the impact of climate change on human and animal habitats.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Despite leaders' efforts, pupils' overall attendance remains well below the national average. Staff check pupils' attendance and punctuality daily. Individual plans include access to free breakfast club, sensory circuits or later starts to support better attendance. Assemblies and personal letters to parents and carers celebrate good or improved attendance. Staff work sensitively with families whose home circumstances make good attendance a challenge. Leaders challenge parents when their children's attendance falls without good reason. They escalate matters with external partners if necessary. Leaders' raised expectations have resulted in some 'push back' from parents. However, leaders are determined and their efforts are beginning to make a difference, although for some pupils good attendance is proving stubbornly hard to achieve.

Behaviour in lessons and across the school is orderly and respectful. Pupils work cooperatively and engage positively with staff. Pupils demonstrate self-control, cooperate well with one another and engage well in their learning. Routines are well established, so pupils are safe and settled. Learning is rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. Trusting

relationships and effective pastoral care underpin the promotion of good behaviour. Pupils learn how to manage their emotions. For those who need it, they gain additional support when visiting 'the hive' nurture room.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Staff turnover and leadership changes have affected the consistency of teaching. Some classes have experienced multiple teachers within a single year. While there are examples of effective practice, teaching is not securing pupils' core knowledge in spelling, handwriting and mathematics. Weaknesses in pupils' handwriting and spelling affects their ability to write accurately, at speed and with stamina.

At times, staff do not model clear handwriting expectations in mathematics books or help them set out their work accurately. Checks on pupils' understanding are mixed, meaning gaps in knowledge continue or pupils move on to new content without securing prior learning. Some weaker teaching and outcomes in early reading exist. Pupils build grammatical knowledge and sentence structures effectively. They apply this knowledge when writing in different genres. Some pupils understand a range of different methods to solve mathematical problems.

Pupils hold a secure understanding across the wider curriculum. In history they develop knowledge of the causes and consequences of key historical events during the Second World War. They learn about espionage and the impact of imprisonment for those captured by the enemy. In geography, pupils learn to compare contrasting biomes, such as The Mojave Desert and the nearby New Forest.

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

Pupils enjoy coming to Wareham St Mary and the many varied and interesting opportunities staff plan for them. Staff hold a deep understanding of the challenges affecting pupils' wellbeing and mental health needs. They help pupils build secure relationships and learn how to manage their emotions. Nurture or therapy-based support in 'the hive' or 'the rainbow room' provides effective support for any pupil who needs it. This helps all to feel safe, secure and more able to focus more on their learning.

Pupils take part in a wide range of outdoor and extra learning activities. They make a difference to their community when creating an annual float for The Wareham Carnival. They contribute artwork for Purbeck Art Weeks Festival. Pupils participate in weekly sporting events organised by the local secondary school, Purbeck School. Pupils display friendship and kindness to each other. Playtimes and lunchtimes are well-managed where pupils can be active or talk quietly and share books with their friends. Bullying is rare, but dealt with quickly, if it ever happens.

Children in the early years get off to a solid start in their learning. Staff identify any barriers to future success quickly. In particular, the school's work to overcome emotional and mental health needs is thorough and effective. Pupils build trusting relationships with adults and are confident they will provide the right support for their learning and personal development.

Pupils learn a broad curriculum. However, it is taught inconsistently. That means some pupils are not building the academic knowledge and understanding they need over time. Pupils' spelling and handwriting are insufficiently developed. Actions to improve teaching have resulted in many staff changes and some parental anxiety. However, current leaders are focusing on the right priorities and acting for the benefit of pupils to improve their achievement and attendance.

Next steps

- Leaders should raise pupils' achievement further, so that their knowledge and skills are equally secure across all subjects and age groups.
 - Leaders should ensure that pupils progress consistently well in spelling, handwriting and letter formation so they can write at speed and with accuracy.
 - Leaders should make sure that staff plan activities that build on pupils' prior knowledge and skills and check that content has been secured before moving learning on.
 - Leaders should ensure that the school's attendance strategy consistently improves pupils' attendance and reduces rates of absence.
 - Leaders should work in partnership with parents and carers to improve communication and understanding of the school's work so all can support pupils' learning together.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Coastal Learning Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Paul Howieson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Martin Copsey.

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, senior leaders, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator and a group of staff to consider their views. The lead inspector held a discussion with the chief executive officer and director of education from the trust and chair of the trust board.

Inspectors visited all classroom to look at pupils' work and the curriculum, and speak with pupils about their learning and wider school activities.

The school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. It is part of the Diocese of Salisbury. It received a section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character in March 2022. The next inspection is due within 5 years from this date.

Inspectors spoke with some parents at the start of the school day. They considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.

Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently makes use of 3 alternative provisions, including 2 that are unregistered.

Headteacher: Naomi Shrimpton

Lead inspector:

Richard Light, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Claire Fortey, Ofsted Inspector

Victoria Griffin, His Majesty's 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 7 July 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

175

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

216

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)

32.57%

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: 26.3%

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

5.14%

Above 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

15.43%

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

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

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	47%	61%	Below
2024/25 (final)	50%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	53%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	39%	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)	74%	74%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23 (final)	72%	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	64%	72%	Below
2024/25 (final)	67%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	63%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	61%	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)	67%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	68%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	59%	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	20%	46%	Below
2024/25 (final)	36%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	10%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	11%	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	61%	62%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	64%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	50%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	70%	60%	Close to average

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	43%	59%	Below
2024/25 (final)	64%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	30%	58%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23 (final)	33%	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	42%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	55%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	40%	59%	Below
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	20%	68%	-48 pp
2024/25 (final)	36%	69%	-33 pp
2023/24 (final)	10%	67%	-57 pp
2022/23 (final)	11%	66%	-55 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	61%	80%	-18 pp
2024/25 (final)	64%	81%	-17 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	80%	-30 pp
2022/23 (final)	70%	78%	-8 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	43%	78%	-34 pp
2024/25 (final)	64%	78%	-15 pp
2023/24 (final)	30%	78%	-48 pp
2022/23 (final)	33%	77%	-44 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	42%	80%	-38 pp
2024/25 (final)	55%	81%	-26 pp
2023/24 (final)	40%	79%	-39 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)	6.5%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	6.6%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	5.8%	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)	16.4%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	15.3%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	16.0%	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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