

St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School

Address: Church Green, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 2TP

Unique reference number (URN): 117434

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.

Strong standard ●

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Pupils' actions reflect the school's ethos. They model the school's values of kindness, perseverance, hope and responsibility. Leaders ensure that pupils develop spiritually, morally and socially. This means that pupils are reflective. They understand ideas of diversity and tolerance, with detailed knowledge of Christianity and other faiths.

Pupils have a deep understanding of the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. They talk with confidence and maturity about what they know, including aspects of relationships and sex education. Leaders adapt the PSHE curriculum to support pupils further in keeping safe. For example, pupils have a secure understanding of the risks of social media, including sharing images.

Leaders prioritise pupils' development beyond the curriculum, including vulnerable pupils. For example, funding effectively supports disadvantaged pupils to take part in clubs and trips. Leaders provide bespoke pastoral support to meet individual pupil need. They monitor the impact of their work. This means they continue to make considered changes to put the best support in place.

Leaders offer a carefully designed personal development programme. This is because they know pupils' interests and talents. They make changes to the wider offer to allow pupils to flourish. This means that, for example, pupils enjoy a range of clubs including Spanish, boxing and gymnastics. Pupils value a broad range of school trips, starting in the early years. Consequently, all pupils, including those who are vulnerable, experience their learning in a meaningful context. For example, visiting the British museum and visits to a farm. Pupils take on leadership roles in the school, including wellbeing and sustainability ambassadors. Pupils understand their roles and responsibilities. This means that pupils develop confidence and independence. As a result, they are very well prepared for life beyond school.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Pupils' achievement in national tests is a strength across the school. Pupils mostly attain above average outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics combined at the end of key stage 2 and in the Year 1 phonics screening check. However, achievement in pupils' daily learning is more varied. This is because some pupils, including those who are vulnerable, do not consistently apply the key skills they learn, particularly in writing. This means that some pupils could achieve better across the curriculum.

Pupils, including vulnerable pupils, typically achieve well from their starting points. This is because leaders are quick to identify barriers to learning and wellbeing and put the right support in place. This means that generally, pupils build the knowledge and skills they need

across the curriculum. This is seen in how pupils talk about their learning with confidence. They are keen to share what they know with a level of depth and understanding.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders strive for high attendance of all pupils. They monitor attendance carefully. This means that leaders identify any dips in attendance. Leaders form positive relationships with pupils and their families to understand any attendance barriers. This means that leaders have a highly successful, personalised approach to effectively support pupils. This is reflected in above average attendance and below average persistent absence for all pupils, including vulnerable pupils.

Pupils feel safe at school. They know that bullying is rare and adults deal with any concerns well. Staff manage behavioural incidents effectively. This is because leaders adapt the curriculum to respond to any incidents. This means that pupils learn how to keep themselves and others safe both online and offline. Leaders put effective support in place for a small number of pupils, including vulnerable pupils, who struggle to manage their behaviour and emotions.

Pupils are kind and polite. They play well together and interact positively. This means that typically, pupils behave well at school. However, in classrooms, some pupils are less focused on their learning. This is because staff do not always follow the behaviour policy. This means that some pupils do not engage with their learning as well as they could.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. They understand the needs of their pupils to achieve better. Consequently, leaders make appropriate changes in order to improve.

Generally, the curriculum is taught well. Leaders have focused on developing subjects in the wider curriculum since the last inspection. This means that the curriculum is broad, enriching and well sequenced. Pupils typically build knowledge and skills across subjects over time. Teachers use their subject knowledge and a range of teaching strategies effectively. This includes the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. However, some teaching could be more precise so that pupils apply their knowledge and skills accurately and consistently, particularly in writing.

Leaders work closely with teachers to ensure that support is in place for vulnerable pupils. Generally, support in lessons is well suited to pupil need. This includes following individual plans where appropriate. This means that typically, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with English as an additional language progress well through the curriculum.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children in the early years make a secure start at school. Leaders carefully craft the setting so that children build positive relationships with each other, adults and older pupils in the

same classroom. They are happy and feel safe. Children are generally confident and independent. This is because they follow clear routines well.

Leaders have designed a carefully sequenced curriculum. This is because staff in the early years know their children well. Leaders identify barriers to learning and wellbeing. They make effective changes to the curriculum and provision so that children, including those who are vulnerable, develop in all areas of learning. Children are typically well prepared for their next steps.

Leaders focus on developing children's language and communication skills. For example, modelling vocabulary and sharing stories. This supports children to make progress from their starting points. Children are starting to build key skills in reading, writing and mathematics. However, some struggle to apply these skills successfully. For example, using capital letters, full stops and spellings accurately when writing in the wider curriculum. While children are typically well prepared for Year 1, some children are not securing knowledge and skills as well as they could.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders and staff know their pupils well. They work effectively with families to understand pupils' barriers to learning and wellbeing. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), disadvantaged pupils and pupils with English as an additional language.

Leaders put in place appropriate support to help pupils, including pupils with SEND, to achieve successfully. They work positively with external professionals, when needed, to ensure the right support is in place. Pupils with SEND have targeted support which typically reduces barriers to learning and wellbeing. Leaders adapt the curriculum and learning environments to match their needs. This means that pupils with SEND access the curriculum alongside their peers.

Disadvantaged pupils are well supported to achieve well. This is because leaders use funding to focus on learning and wider opportunities. For example, one-to-one tuition in school and access to clubs and trips. As a result, disadvantaged pupils generally make suitable progress from their starting points. They are also fully included in all aspects of school life.

Pupils accessing learning through alternative provision achieve well in school. Leaders ensure that alternative providers are well matched to pupil need. This means that pupils get the support they need to make progress from their starting points.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders know their school well. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and what it needs to do better. Leaders work with other professionals, including the local authority and diocese, to ensure their work is thorough. This means that leaders create change in the best interests of their pupils. Leaders' actions support the school's vision of believe and achieve. They have high expectations and aspirations for all pupils, including those who are vulnerable. This supports pupils to thrive during their time at the school.

Governors support school leaders effectively. They understand the school's context well. This is because governors carry out regular visits into school. This allows them to talk to pupils, parents and staff. They ensure pupils are safe and have equal opportunities within their education. This means they provide appropriate support and challenge to make sure leaders' actions have a positive impact on pupils.

Staff feel valued and well supported in their roles. This is because leaders provide appropriate support and training. This means that leaders support staff's wellbeing and manage their workload well.

Leaders, staff and governors build positive relationships with parents. On the whole, parents are very positive about the school. They feel that their children are seen and understood as individuals. As a result, pupils generally achieve well and feel a sense of belonging within the school family.

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

Pupils are welcomed with care and kindness in this nurturing school. They are valued as individuals and their talents celebrated and grown. This is because leaders ensure that all pupils have the same opportunities. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life beyond the school.

Pupils live out the school's vision to believe and achieve. Typically, they behave in line with leaders' high expectations. They are respectful and polite and play well together at social times. Pupils feel safe. Bullying is rare and any incidents are dealt with quickly. This is because pupils build positive relationships with each other and adults. For example, the buddy system supports all pupils, including early years, to play and learn together. Pupils' attendance, including vulnerable pupils, is above national averages. Pupils enjoy coming to school and value their education.

Pupils typically learn the broad curriculum well. They talk with confidence about what they know. Some aspects of pupils' achievement are reflected in above average outcomes in national tests. However, some pupils do not always apply what they know, particularly in writing, to their daily learning in school. Vulnerable pupils learn successfully in school. This is because leaders know them well. This means that the right support is put in place at the right time, to reduce barriers to learning and wellbeing. As a result, vulnerable pupils make suitable progress from their starting points.

Pupils benefit from a wealth of wider opportunities. They enjoy taking part in sports, music and languages clubs, including fencing, chess and percussion. Pupils value the variety of experiences they gain. For example, visits to museums and themed days allow pupils to live out their learning. Pupils achieve well and feel a sense of belonging within the school family.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teaching is precisely linked to the foundational knowledge they want pupils to learn so they can apply this to their work, particularly in writing.
 - Leaders should ensure that the behaviour policy is consistently implemented across all year groups so that pupils show dedication to their learning.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Lucy Parr.

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

This inspection took place from 7 July 2026 to 8 July 2026.

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

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other school leaders, staff, governors, pupils and parents and carers. They also spoke with representatives of the local authority and diocese during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

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 September 2025.

The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Rizelle Crouch

Lead inspector:

Charlotte Martin, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Lynda Walker, Ofsted Inspector

Peter Hynes, 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 7 July 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

154

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

154

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)

3.90%

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

0.00%

Well below 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

7.14%

Well below 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	79%	61%	Above
2024/25 (final)	91%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	68%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	79%	60%	Above

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	92%	74%	Above
2024/25 (final)	100%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	92%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	83%	73%	Above

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	90%	72%	Above
2024/25 (final)	95%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	84%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	92%	71%	Above

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	92%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	95%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	84%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	96%	73%	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 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	S	46%	S
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	S	62%	S

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	S	59%	S
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	S	60%	S
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	S	68%	S
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	S	80%	S
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	S	78%	S
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	S	80%	S
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)	3.1%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	3.4%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	4.1%	5.9%	Below

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)	4.8%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	5.1%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.2%	16.2%	Below

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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