

St Swithun's Church of England Primary Academy

Address: Grove Street, Retford, Nottinghamshire, DN22 6LD

Unique reference number (URN): 145447

Inspection report: 13 January 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.

This school requires significant improvement

His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires **significant improvement** because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Needs attention

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Pupils' attendance is improving. Leaders have introduced tighter systems that help families understand the importance of coming to school every day. Staff follow up absence quickly. The school holds parents and carers to account when attendance does not improve. Leaders know families well. They use this knowledge to offer support when it is needed. This approach is now beginning to make a difference. Attendance is starting to rise, including for pupils who were persistently absent in the past. Leaders record and track attendance with precision. They listen to parents and pupils. Leaders identify barriers and respond with suitable support.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Staff and pupils enjoy warm and caring relationships. Staff deal with bullying concerns promptly. Any incidents are correctly recorded. The school uses suspensions appropriately. Staff support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities through calm, warm guidance and reasonable adjustments. Some pupils behave calmly in lessons and show respectful attitudes. Older pupils in particular focus well and follow routines. However, standards of behaviour vary too much across the school. Some adults apply the school's behavioural expectations clearly, but others do not. This means that in some classes, pupils lose focus when moving between tasks or group activities.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses in the school's curriculum. They have taken steps to improve teaching, particularly in early reading and mathematics. Although expectations in phonics have recently increased, leaders know there is still more work to do to ensure that pupils learn to decode new words and build their reading fluency as quickly as possible. There is variation in the effectiveness of the support provided to pupils to help them catch up when they have fallen behind in reading.

The wider curriculum is broad and designed to build on the foundations of the early years. Pupils' books show that the intended curriculum is taught. Exercise books show that teachers now check pupils' understanding more often. However, this does not yet happen routinely. Some pupils' misconceptions are not addressed quickly enough. As a result, some pupils do not have the knowledge that they need to access new learning. Although teachers have knowledge of the subjects they are teaching, this does not always lead to productive learning.

There is inconsistency in how well tasks match pupils' needs. Consequently, some pupils face additional challenges because they cannot access tasks independently. Teachers' adaptation of lessons for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is inconsistent. Some pupils use carefully adapted resources or work spaces. This helps them to concentrate and build their independence. In contrast, some pupils struggle because they do not receive the tailored support that they need.

Early years

Needs attention 

Staff build warm and positive relationships with children in the early years. Children are safe and nurtured. Staff use songs, stories and play to help children learn new words. In the Nursery provision, adults help children join in with actions and sounds. They encourage children to talk about their ideas. Some staff model new vocabulary well, but this is not consistent. Some staff encourage children to use new words during sensory play. However, not all staff do this as well. Some children do not benefit from the same quality of interactions with adults. This hampers them from developing the rich body of language they need.

The early years curriculum is appropriately sequenced. It sets out how children build their knowledge from Nursery into the Reception Year. The curriculum focuses strongly on communication and language. Children enjoy exploring and learning through play in a well-resourced provision. Activity choices enable them to talk, share and use story language. However, there are too few chances for children to begin to write. The level of challenge is not high enough for many children. This is especially important for disadvantaged children, some of whom start with low language and communication skills. Although learning to read is a priority, overall expectations of children's achievement are too low.

Staff in the early years work well with parents and carers.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Leaders show commitment to supporting pupils with additional needs or specific vulnerabilities. They identify pupils' needs and work proactively with external agencies. However, the quality of support that pupils receive in the classroom is variable.

Staff provide calm and sensitive support for pupils who struggle socially, emotionally or academically, or those who are new to English. Practical activities often help pupils to take part. Despite this, leaders are not yet checking closely enough how well appropriate adjustments are used across the school and what impact they are having on pupils.

Leaders have very recently used guidance from professionals to create an enhanced provision. A small number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who require a higher level of support access this. Staff use the regular training they receive to help them to meet pupils' individual needs. Teachers have identified which pupils need extra support and when. However, these plans remain at different stages and are not fully embedded.

Leaders monitor when interventions for disadvantaged pupils take place. However, they do not have sufficient oversight of the impact these actions are having on pupils. Many

strategies are offered to most pupils and are not tailored to individual needs. This makes it difficult for leaders to evaluate the specific impact pupil premium funding is having on disadvantaged pupils.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Leaders know that while the school is improving, there is still the need for further improvements in many areas. The incoming leadership team members have developed a clear view of what the school does well and what must get better. They have begun to make strategic decisions that aim to help pupils. For example, the recent change to how older pupils are taught in mathematics is sensible. It ensures that pupils receive better support. This is helping to address gaps in their knowledge. Leaders are beginning to track more closely the progress that disadvantaged pupils make across the curriculum. However, this work is at an early stage. It is not yet making a difference to the pupils who need it most.

Many staff feel that the school is more settled than it has been in recent times. They consider professional learning to now be better planned and more helpful. They appreciate the way in which leaders think about their workload and wellbeing. Despite this, some staff feel less positive about life at school.

The work of the governing board is increasingly effective. Governors have started to ask more focused questions about the school's progress. School leaders are working with the trust to ensure that the school is receiving the support it needs to continue to move forwards. Some school improvement initiatives have been too slow to be implemented. As a result, over time, some pupils have not benefited from the right level of support. Leaders have ensured that there is now a clearly sequenced curriculum in place.

Parents' and carers' views are mixed. Although some are positive, others have concerns about communication, leadership and the support provided for pupils. Leaders are working to rebuild trust with the community.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

Leaders place increasing importance on pupils' personal development and wellbeing. They have strengthened the programme so pupils learn about families, healthy relationships and keeping themselves safe, including online. Staff use clear and consistent language when teaching this content. Leaders also respond quickly to local issues, such as pupils accessing apps that are not age-appropriate.

However, pupils do not remember enough of what they have been taught from the school's personal, social and health education curriculum. Some can recall learning about the fundamental British values, such as the rule of law and democracy. However, their understanding of what these mean and how they relate to their everyday lives is limited. Older pupils have learned about tolerance and acceptance. However, pupils struggle to recall earlier learning about different types of families and the characteristics that the law protects. The curriculum has not supported all pupils to hold fully inclusive views. Pupils' understanding of different religions is limited. As a result, pupils are not as well prepared as they could be for life in modern Britain.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of enrichment opportunities. Many pupils attend clubs, including sports, creative activities and environmental groups. Older pupils value the opportunity to attend a residential trip. These activities help pupils grow in confidence and discover new interests. Younger pupils benefit from enrichment designed for their age group. Leaders now track these opportunities more closely so disadvantaged pupils can take part fully.

Pupils say they feel they belong in the school. They speak warmly about their teachers and friends. Pupils understand what bullying is in all of its forms and say it does not happen often. Some pupils benefit from additional pastoral support to help them to manage their emotions. Some pupils take on leadership roles through groups such as the school council and eco team.

Urgent improvement ●

Achievement

Urgent improvement ●

Pupils' achievement across the curriculum, and over time, is weak. Published outcomes show clearly that pupils have not gained the knowledge and skills they need. Outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics have fallen over time. By the end of key stage 2, pupils' outcomes in national curriculum tests are significantly below national figures. Leaders know this and understand that many pupils do not have a grasp of the basic skills needed for them to thrive, both in and out of school. Too many pupils struggle with phonics, early writing, number facts and handwriting. As a result, these pupils cannot take part fully in lessons or reach the learning goals set for them.

Occasionally, some older pupils show confidence in arithmetic and can use mental methods well. Elsewhere, some pupils read with growing accuracy and are starting to correct their mistakes. However, this is the exception rather than the norm, and achievement is not consistent across the school. Too many pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, have significant gaps in their knowledge. As a result, too many pupils are not yet well prepared for their next stage in education.

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

Pupils are happy and feel safe. They know that staff care about them and help them with any worries that may arise. Pupils feel they belong and enjoy spending time with friends. However, they do not experience the same quality of education across the school. This affects how well they achieve across the curriculum. Published outcomes in national curriculum tests are disappointing. Pupils are not gaining the knowledge and skills they need. Consequently, they are not well prepared for the next stage of education.

Many pupils do not enjoy their learning as much as they should. Learning tasks are not matched well enough to what they know. Staff support pupils with additional needs with kindness, but adjustments to learning are not used consistently. Although teachers check pupils' understanding more often than before, this does not yet routinely happen.

Misconceptions and mistakes that pupils make go unnoticed. Too many pupils struggle with basic skills. Many do not read fluently, form letters accurately or recall key number facts. This makes it difficult for them to take part fully in lessons. In some phonics sessions, routines are not applied in the intended way. As a result, too many pupils do not build secure knowledge, especially in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupil behaviour is improving but remains inconsistent. Staff respond quickly to any bullying concerns and record these carefully. Some pupils behave calmly in lessons, while others lose focus during transitions and group activities. This disrupts learning. Pupils' attendance is improving.

School leaders understand clearly what must improve. They have already begun work to strengthen teaching, behaviour routines and support systems. This work is starting to make a difference, but significant improvement is still required so that pupils can achieve well and thrive every day.

Despite the weaknesses that exist, pupils enjoy clubs, trips and leadership opportunities. Older pupils value their residential visit. These experiences help pupils grow in confidence.

Next steps

- Leaders should raise expectations in reading, writing and mathematics so that gaps in pupils' basic skills narrow quickly, allowing them to achieve and secure the knowledge they need to be well prepared for the next stage of their education.
 - Leaders should check that staff apply strategies to support vulnerable pupils consistently, so that those with additional needs and specific vulnerabilities receive a high quality of support in all classes.
 - Leaders should ensure that pupils benefit from a consistent quality of teaching that helps them to learn and remember the intended curriculum.
 - Leaders should ensure that behaviour expectations are applied with consistency so that routines are followed and learning is not disrupted.
 - Leaders should ensure that teaching enables pupils to recall content from the personal development programme, including around protected characteristics and fundamental British values, to help prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.
 - Leaders should strengthen early years teaching so that children, including those with low starting points, receive appropriate support while also benefiting from greater challenge and clear progression from Nursery into the Reception Year.
 - Leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, should continue to act with speed and rigour to address school improvement priorities so that pupils benefit from higher standards throughout the school.
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About this inspection

This school is part of the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham Multi-Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is

run by the chief executive officer, Chris Moodie, and overseen by an interim executive board, chaired by Roger Smith.

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 held meetings with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, trustees and local governors, including the chair of the interim executive board.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently makes no use of any alternative provision.

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. The school's last section 48 inspection took place in July 2024.

Executive headteacher: Mrs Anna Martin

Lead inspector:

Luella Dhoore, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Angela Kirk, 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 13 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

90

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

210

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)

55.42%

Well above 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

2.22%

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

14.44%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Well 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	43%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	17%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	36%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	65%	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	60%	74%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	50%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	55%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	71%	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	48%	72%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	25%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	36%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	71%	71%	Close to average

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	58%	73%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	25%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	55%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	82%	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	42%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	13%	47%	Below
2023/24 (final)	43%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	64%	44%	Above

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	54%	62%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	38%	63%	Below
2023/24 (final)	57%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	64%	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	46%	59%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	13%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	43%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	73%	58%	Above

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	58%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	25%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	57%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	82%	59%	Above

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	42%	68%	-25 pp
2024/25 (revised)	13%	69%	-57 pp
2023/24 (final)	43%	67%	-25 pp
2022/23 (final)	64%	66%	-3 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	54%	80%	-26 pp
2024/25 (revised)	38%	81%	-43 pp
2023/24 (final)	57%	80%	-23 pp
2022/23 (final)	64%	78%	-15 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	46%	78%	-32 pp
2024/25 (revised)	13%	78%	-66 pp
2023/24 (final)	43%	78%	-35 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	73%	77%	-5 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	58%	80%	-22 pp
2024/25 (revised)	25%	81%	-56 pp
2023/24 (final)	57%	79%	-22 pp
2022/23 (final)	82%	79%	3 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 (2 term)	7.5%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	8.8%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	12.2%	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 (2 term)	29.1%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	31.2%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	42.9%	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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