

Alfriston School

Address: Penn Road, Knotty Green, Beaconsfield, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, HP9 2TS

Unique reference number (URN): 137934

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.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise attendance. They ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Pupils' attendance is broadly in line with other special schools nationally. Leaders check pupils' attendance levels closely. As a result, they quickly take action when pupils' attendance falls. The positive relationships the school develops with parents and carers help to encourage regular attendance at school. Staff support pupils and their families well using a range of strategies. For example, a programme of exciting events in the last week of a term helps to motivate pupils to attend. Personalised support is effective in increasing individual pupils' attendance.

Well-embedded routines make for a calm, orderly and purposeful learning environment. Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. They apply the school policies effectively. Pupils behave well in lessons and around school. They have positive attitudes to learning and want to do well. Pupils demonstrate the school values consistently. Staff teach pupils how to manage their emotions, giving them the tools to self-regulate. Relationships between pupils are positive. Inevitably, pupils sometimes fall out. Staff are there to help them repair these relationships, which pupils appreciate. The positive and nurturing environment means that discrimination of any type is dealt with swiftly.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils follow a well-designed personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. This successfully teaches pupils about the most important topics they need to know now and in the future. For example, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, both online and offline. Pupils learn what it means to live in modern Britain by exploring different cultures and beliefs. They happily embrace and appreciate cultural differences. Pupils learn about fundamental British values, such as tolerance and democracy. Staff help pupils to improve their social skills and manage conflict with others. They sensibly adapt the PSHE programme to ensure that it meets pupils' needs.

Pupils receive helpful careers information, education, advice and guidance. Importantly, staff provide travel training and independent living skills so that pupils are prepared well for the future. As a result, their transition to education, employment or training is smooth.

The school's inclusive ethos and shared values mean that pupils are confident to think for themselves and to use their voice, despite their different ways of communicating. Pupils receive effective pastoral support that meets their needs. They are confident to ask for help when they need it. Pupils behave with respect towards others. Pupils hold leadership roles in high regard and those who have specific responsibilities, such as sports captains and school council representatives, proudly lead the way. The recent development of the 'peace garden' as a self-regulation area is just one example of how pupils have a positive influence on the school community.

Pupils benefit from a range of enrichment opportunities. Special events and themed weeks or months raise pupils' awareness of issues, such as Black History or disability. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and participation in a nationwide singing event, alongside

opportunities to meet people in the local community, are examples of the many activities that broaden pupils' horizons.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed a well-considered programme of study for students in the sixth form. This is thoughtfully adapted and implemented well to meet students' individual needs. Students typically make appropriate progress through the curriculum from their starting points. This is particularly strong in mathematics.

Students benefit from opportunities to use their knowledge and skills in real-life situations. A blend of formal learning, work experience and community activities helps prepare students for life beyond school. For example, students enjoy working in coffee shops and care homes. A range of wider experiences, such as martial arts, dance and fitness, enriches students' study programmes further.

Some students attend college. This gives them the opportunity to study particular courses as well as a taste of college life. In turn, it supports students' transition when they leave school and gives them a chance to experience success. Students receive high-quality careers education and are supported well for independent living. For example, travel training is high on the agenda so that students are fully equipped for the steps they take after school. Many students achieve helpful qualifications, which prepare them well for the next stage of education, employment or training.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils do not achieve as highly as they could. Their progress from their different starting points is inconsistent across subjects. Leaders know that the teaching of early reading needs to improve. Pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read are at a disadvantage, as their reading level makes it difficult for them to progress well in other areas of the curriculum. Similarly, the writing of these pupils does not develop quickly enough.

Pupils progress more strongly through the curriculum in practical subjects. They have a secure knowledge and understanding of what they learn in these subjects and talk confidently about what they know and remember.

The proportion of pupils who achieve success in formal examinations has declined. This is because of the changing needs of the pupils at the school. Despite this, nearly all pupils successfully transition to college or other suitable education, employment or training.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Staff do not teach subjects consistently well across the school. They do not routinely check pupils' understanding of what they have learned. This means that staff do not securely have

a clear picture of what pupils know and can do. Some staff draw on their knowledge of pupils' needs and starting points, and adapt their teaching well to meet pupils' individual needs, but this lacks consistency. As a result, pupils do not make as much progress as they could.

The curriculum is well designed. It provides pupils with plentiful opportunities to learn different subjects and topics. Opportunities to experience the world of work or attend college further enrich the curriculum. Staff implement the curriculum as intended. Most staff know their subjects well. They identify the most important content pupils need to learn and when they will learn it. This helps to prepare pupils for their next steps.

Currently, not all pupils receive highly effective help with early reading. This hinders their progress through the rest of the curriculum. Leaders are taking the right steps to tackle this. They know the strengths of the curriculum and how well staff teach it, and put professional development in place where this is needed.

Inclusion

Needs attention ●

Leaders do not identify pupils' academic needs as effectively as they could. As a result, not all pupils receive appropriate academic help. For example, leaders have not established the most effective support for pupils at the early stages of learning to read. The way staff adapt the curriculum and their teaching to suit pupils' individual academic needs is inconsistent.

That said, leaders' systems and processes for identification of needs are developing and staff know pupils very well. As a result, staff support for pupils is improving. Staff keep a close check on pupils' education, health and care plans to ensure pupils receive the support to which they are entitled. Leaders continue to break down the barriers pupils face. Positive steps to improve therapies and the use of visuals and communication approaches are helping pupils. Additional funding to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is used well.

Staff receive appropriate training. This means that pupils benefit from a range of interventions, therapies and pastoral support. Leaders monitor this support, but it is too early to see the impact. Leaders work collaboratively with families and professionals. Importantly, they plan well for pupils' future pathways. The use of alternative provision makes a positive difference to pupils' school experience.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention ●

More time is needed for the improvements leaders have made to be fully embedded. In some areas, such as the development of early reading, leaders' progress towards their objectives has been too slow. Leaders have an accurate understanding of what is working well and what more they need to do to improve the school further. They have correctly identified the areas of the school that need attention. Leaders act in the best interests of pupils, and the plans they have for the future are well formulated.

There have been significant changes in the school's leadership since the last inspection. Staff are positive about new leaders' plans. They appreciate the support they receive, for example, for their professional development. Staff workload and wellbeing are a priority for

leaders. Parents' and carers' views of the school are largely positive, but a small minority are less so.

Changes to the board of trustees have led to clearer roles and responsibilities and some improvements in governance. Trustees have a clear understanding of the school's vision and strategic direction. They fulfil their statutory duties. Trustees bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise from a range of sectors. However, they do not use this confidently to hold leaders to account. They know that they need to do more to check the quality of the school's work and the impact leaders are having, but this aspect of their work is at an early stage of development.

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

Pupils are proud ambassadors of Alfriston School. They talk positively about their lessons and are keen to share their learning with others. Pupils benefit from well-understood routines, including when they arrive at school in the morning. This sets them up successfully for the day ahead.

A strong sense of belonging is something that makes pupils feel safe at school and supports them to attend increasingly regularly. Pupils embrace the school's values and live them out fully. They talk about the good friends they have and how well they get on with each other. Bullying is rare. Pupils recognise the differences between them, and support each other well, for example, with communication. Pupils behave well in their lessons. They are inquisitive and eager to find out more about different topics. There are times when pupils become dysregulated, but staff are on hand to provide support. As a result, these moments are short-lived.

Pupils benefit from an organised approach to education, pastoral care and therapies that prepares them well for life beyond school. Pupils' talents and interests are encouraged. They enjoy the different opportunities they have to go on trips and to learn more about the local community. Pupils benefit from the outdoor experiences they have. Notably, pupils are keen to make a difference to others. Pupil voice sits at the heart of the school.

Leaders have high expectations for what pupils can achieve. However, inconsistencies in the way staff teach the curriculum mean pupils do not achieve as highly as they could. Pupils' needs are not always fully understood and, therefore, they do not consistently receive the help they need to learn well. Pupils, parents and carers are mostly positive about the school and the changes staff are making.

Next steps

- Leaders should strengthen their understanding of pupils' academic needs and support teachers to adapt their teaching, so that pupils overcome barriers to learning and achieve more highly.
- Leaders should ensure that the support provided to pupils who are at an earlier stage of

learning to read enables them to progress more rapidly and access all aspects of the curriculum.

- Leaders should ensure that the school's assessment arrangements help teachers to check pupils' understanding and adapt teaching and/or the curriculum appropriately, so that the gaps in pupils' knowledge are addressed effectively.
 - Trustees should continue to strengthen their support and challenge for leaders and assure themselves of the quality and impact of leaders' work.
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About this inspection

This school is a single academy trust. The trust is run by the headteacher, Claire Smart, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Malcolm Lewis.

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.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other school leaders, the chair of the trust, the vice chair of the trust, staff and pupils during the inspection.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Inspectors only inspected the education provision at this school.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

All pupils at the school have education, health and care plans. The school provides education for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Most pupils also have speech, language and communication needs.

The school makes use of 2 alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. This includes the appointment of a new headteacher and significant changes to the board of trustees.

Headteacher : Claire Smart

Lead inspector:

Shaun Jarvis, Ofsted Inspector

Team inspectors:

Mary Davies, Ofsted Inspector

Janice Howkins, 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**

164

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: 1,067

School capacity

150

Well 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: 1,152

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

33.59%

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: 28.9%

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

100.00%

Well 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: 3.1%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

Well below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13%

Location deprivation

Well 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).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	92%	91%	Not available
2022 leavers (revised)	91%	93%	Not available
2021 leavers (revised)	96%	94%	Not available

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)	11.8%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	12.4%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	10.2%	9.0%	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 (2 term)	31.3%	21.9%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	40.2%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	32.5%	26.5%	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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