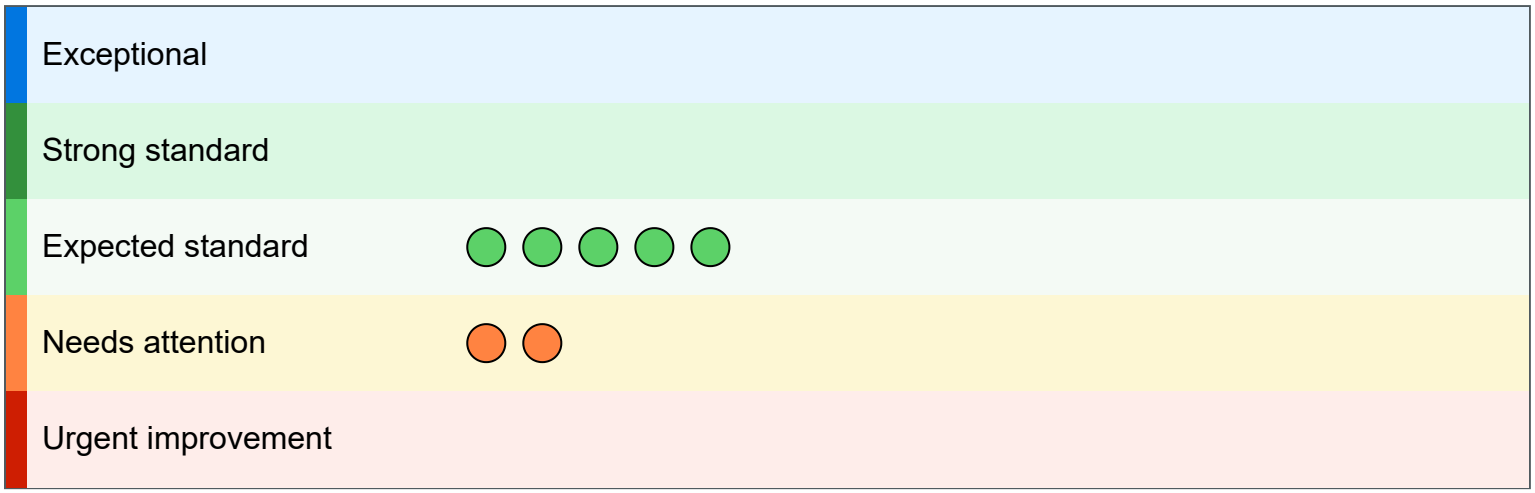
Harlowbury Primary School

Address: Watlington Road, Old Harlow, Harlow, Essex, CM17 0DX

Unique reference number (URN): 144664

Inspection report: 16 June 2026



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

Achievement

Expected standard

Pupils develop strong foundational knowledge, particularly in early reading and phonics, where teaching is systematic and consistent. They read fluently, apply phonics skills confidently and retain key vocabulary. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their learning. They demonstrate secure recall of prior knowledge and concepts across subjects

Achievement is inclusive overall, with disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) accessing learning alongside their peers. Disadvantaged pupils achieve broadly in line with national expectations in reading and writing. Most pupils make steady progress from their starting points. Early intervention, particularly in phonics and mathematics, supports improvements in progress. Pupils with SEND also make progress, where support is well targeted.

Pupils are largely well prepared for their next stages of education. They demonstrate confidence when discussing their learning and make links between subjects and wider experiences. Leaders have strengthened transition processes, including well-planned arrangements from reception through to Year 1, with a strong focus on supporting pupils with SEND.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Pupils enjoy coming to school and do not like to miss out. Attendance is improving. The most substantial gains are seen in persistent absents, where those pupils who were not attending enough are now in school regularly. Leaders prioritise attendance through clear strategic oversight and regular monitoring. They implement systems such as first-day response, home visits and close collaboration with the trust education welfare officer to address absence. These actions are beginning to have a positive impact, particularly for individual pupils who face barriers to attendance.

Leaders have established an environment, where pupils behave well and show positive attitudes to learning. Pupils interact respectfully with staff and peers, and relationships across the school contribute to a sense of belonging. Behaviour systems are clear and consistently promoted, supported by explicit teaching of self-regulation. Pupils report that bullying is rare. When issues of unkindness arise, they are dealt with smoothly. The school promotes a safe environment, where discrimination or harassment are not tolerated. Leaders use detailed behaviour monitoring to identify patterns and provide targeted pastoral and multi-agency support. While attitudes to learning are generally positive, occasional low-level disengagement occurs in some lessons. Leaders adapt support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and other needs. Pupils are given time and space to reflect.

Early years

Expected standard

Leaders create a calm, safe and nurturing environment, where children feel secure and valued. Adults build strong relationships with children and establish clear routines that

support positive behaviour and engagement. Children settle quickly, move confidently between activities and develop independence. The environment is inclusive and language rich, promoting both wellbeing and learning.

Leaders maintain high expectations for all children. Teaching is purposeful and consistent. Phonics is delivered effectively to support children's progression from spoken language to early writing. Adults model language and learning clearly, ask purposeful questions and provide structured support that enables children to engage and succeed. The curriculum ensures that all activities, including independent learning during 'carry on our learning (COOL)' time, are purposeful and aligned to intended outcomes.

Children make good progress from their starting points and develop the key knowledge and skills needed for their next stage. Children retain vocabulary and concepts well and apply their learning during both structured and independent activities. Leaders plan and manage transition carefully from nursery settings to Reception and into Year 1. The school work closely with parents through home visits, workshops and regular communication, building strong relationships that support children's development.

Leaders embed inclusion effectively by ensuring that all children access the same ambitious curriculum. They provide well-considered adaptations, targeted interventions and additional staffing to meet individual needs. Bespoke provision, such as the 'Elm' room, supports pupils to engage and succeed alongside their peers.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

Leaders demonstrate a strong and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Trust support has strengthened leadership capacity through specialist expertise, coaching and collaboration, enabling leaders to implement targeted improvements. Leaders have established clear priorities and communicate these effectively to staff, creating a shared sense of purpose and commitment to improvement.

The trust has moved at pace to implement changes and improvements to the school. Many areas of their work have seen positive developments, such as the early years, phonics, the core curriculum and safeguarding. Governors provide effective strategic oversight. They monitor key priorities through detailed reporting and regular review. Governors have bolstered their capacity, expertise and support, ensuring that systems and processes meet requirements. They possess a clear understanding of the school's context and priorities and contribute effectively to the school's improvement journey.

Leaders prioritise staff wellbeing and manage workload carefully. Staff support the changes here and say it is 'a brilliant school'. Leaders provide clear guidance, access to professional development and opportunities for collaboration, which help staff feel valued and supported. Staff respond positively to the direction of the school and engage with changes constructively.

Leaders invest significantly in professional development to strengthen teaching and leadership across the school. They provide ongoing training, coaching and collaborative opportunities through trust networks. While many staff apply training effectively, leaders recognise that this is not yet consistent across all areas and continue to focus on improving precision and impact.

Leaders have strengthened relationships with parents and the wider community, resulting in increasing confidence and engagement. Parents recognise positive changes in school culture, teaching and leadership. Leaders work effectively with external professionals and agencies to support pupils and address safeguarding, inclusion and wellbeing needs.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders place wellbeing, character and readiness for the future at the centre of school life. Leaders ensure that personal development links closely with safeguarding priorities and the local context. They provide a coherent range of experiences through assemblies, themed weeks, leadership opportunities and curriculum links.

The school's personal development programme supports pupils' development through a broad range of experiences, including assemblies, lessons, educational visits and leadership roles. Pupils develop a secure understanding of relationships, consent, mental health and personal safety, and they apply this knowledge confidently.

The curriculum covers key aspects of wellbeing and safety, including online and offline risks, and pupils understand how to seek support when needed. Pupils demonstrate increasing awareness of diversity, inclusion and protected characteristics. Some pupils' understanding of fundamental British values remains less secure. Leaders acknowledge the need to deepen understanding and ensure consistent delivery across all classes.

Pupils love clubs and trips. They talk excitedly about sports clubs and many are part of the 'sports crew'. There are many opportunities to get involved. From craft club to kung fu. Pupils also feel their voice is valued and helps to improve the school. The 'PSHE forum' is a place where pupils can talk about what they would like to learn and know more about.

Leaders promote inclusion effectively by removing barriers and ensuring all pupils access enrichment and wider opportunities. Pupils benefit from a range of leadership roles, such as school council and house captains, which strengthen their sense of belonging and responsibility. Many pupils speak positively about their experiences and demonstrate confidence when discussing personal and social issues.

Leaders have strengthened pastoral support to ensure pupils feel safe, valued and supported. Staff build positive relationships with pupils and respond to concerns effectively, supported by systems, such as the 'worry box'. Targeted pastoral interventions help pupils develop self-regulation, independence and positive relationships, particularly for those with additional needs. Leaders use external agencies and tailored support to address individual barriers and improve wellbeing

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Needs attention

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention

Leaders have established a clearer, more coherent curriculum in English and mathematics. They prioritise vocabulary, oracy and reading. Leaders have identified the need to improve

challenge, adaptation and consistency across subjects. While leadership is driving improvement effectively, they recognise that implementation remains mixed and continue to focus on embedding consistent, high-quality practice across the school.

Leaders secure strong foundations most effectively in early years and early reading, where teaching is structured, consistent and ambitious. Pupils develop fluency and confidence in reading and engage positively in learning, supported by clear routines and effective adult modelling. In these areas, teaching builds knowledge progressively and enables pupils to explain their thinking.

Teaching is strongest where teachers model learning clearly, use purposeful questioning and demonstrate secure subject knowledge. In these instances, pupils engage well and can explain their learning with confidence. However, teaching quality varies across the school. Some teachers do not consistently adapt learning, check understanding precisely or provide sufficient challenge. In some lessons, opportunities to address misconceptions in real time are missed. As a result, pupils often complete tasks successfully, but do not consistently develop deeper understanding or independence.

In some classes, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities rely too heavily on adult support and do not develop independence or secure understanding. Leaders recognise these inconsistencies and are taking steps to improve identification, adaptation and staff expertise.

Inclusion

Needs attention

Leaders identify pupils' needs with increasing accuracy through improved assessment, stronger communication and quicker access to specialist advice. However, leaders have not yet embedded assessment and monitoring systems fully, and inconsistencies in classroom practice limit the precision of support. Staff do not always apply adaptive strategies effectively to address misconceptions, improve access to learning or promote independence.

Leaders have strengthened special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provision through trust expertise, external agencies and additional leadership capacity. Leaders are actively addressing historical gaps in documentation and planning. They introduce targeted interventions, bespoke adaptations and additional staffing to support pupils' access to learning and social experiences. Inclusion is a clear priority, and many pupils with SEND now engage more successfully in lessons and school life.

Leaders use pupil premium funding more strategically, drawing on school data and evaluation to shape a revised approach. This approach prioritises relationships, readiness to learn and pastoral support. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils access a full range of learning and wider opportunities, including targeted reading, phonics support and small group interventions. Evidence shows positive impact, particularly in phonics, and disadvantaged pupils achieve broadly in line with peers nationally.

Leaders respond proactively to the needs of a range of additional groups, including pupils who are young carers and those who are new to speaking English. They provide tailored support, such as language development programmes, pastoral interventions and targeted

enrichment opportunities. These strategies help many pupils engage more effectively in learning and develop confidence and wellbeing.

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

Pupils at Harlowbury Primary School experience a day that is defined by a strong sense of safety, belonging and positive relationships. They say they feel well cared for. They are supported by a culture, where adults listen and act when needed. Pupils know who to talk to if they have worries, including about bullying. Most trust staff to resolve concerns and keep them safe.

Pupils enjoy their lessons and engage positively with a broad curriculum. They talk enthusiastically about what they have learned and recall knowledge well. This is particularly in reading and writing, where outcomes are strong and above national averages. Early reading is a particular strength, helping pupils build confidence and achieve well. Disadvantaged pupils also achieve positively compared to their peers nationally.

Children in early years get off to a great start. They are encouraged to talk, listen and share frequently. They are curious, which helps develop their understanding. However, older pupils sometimes do not always get enough opportunity to deepen their understanding or tackle more challenging work. This limits how many reach the highest standards.

Pupils understand expectations, move sensibly around the building and show consideration for others. Classrooms are orderly, allowing learning to take place without disruption. This contributes to a secure environment, where pupils feel confident and ready to learn each day. Attendance is improving and pupils say they ‘miss their learning’ when they are not there.

A strong sense of community runs through school life. Pupils feel valued and included, benefiting from leadership roles and enrichment activities. They have a voice and many represent the pupil forums, are house captains or act as ambassadors. Pupil with additional needs participate and learn alongside their peers. They are supported both in and out of the classroom. However, sometimes their precise needs are not always met.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers have the skills and knowledge to successfully adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs, ability and understanding.
- Leaders should ensure the curriculum is sequenced, well planned and suitable for pupils across all subjects, while providing pupils with opportunities to deepen their understanding.
- Leaders should continue to embed new systems and processes to ensure they have an accurate understanding of individual pupils' needs.

About this inspection

This school is part of the NET Academies Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Jo Coton, and is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Peter Shephard.

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 members of the school's leadership, trustees, governors, including the chair, and the CEO.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:
The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Interim headteachers: Leigh Bevan and Monica Holland

Lead inspector:
Louise Cooper, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Jason Carey, Ofsted Inspector
Alastair Heath-Robinson, 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 16 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

198
Close to 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)

14.65%
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

6.06%
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

12.63%
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

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)

Resourced provision and SEN unit

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SLCN - Speech, language and Communication

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (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	67%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	65%	62%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	70%	61%	Above
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	76%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	85%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	77%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	68%	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	80%	72%	Above
2024/25 (final)	85%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	83%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	74%	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	74%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	69%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	73%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	77%	73%	Close to average

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	54%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	50%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	60%	46%	Above
2022/23 (final)	50%	44%	Close to average

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)	63%	63%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	60%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	60%	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	71%	59%	Above
2024/25 (final)	75%	59%	Above
2023/24 (final)	70%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	70%	58%	Close to average

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	61%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	50%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	60%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	70%	59%	Close to average

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	54%	68%	-14 pp
2024/25 (final)	50%	69%	-19 pp
2023/24 (final)	60%	67%	-7 pp
2022/23 (final)	50%	66%	-16 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%	-19 pp
2024/25 (final)	63%	81%	-18 pp
2023/24 (final)	60%	80%	-20 pp
2022/23 (final)	60%	78%	-18 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	71%	78%	-6 pp
2024/25 (final)	75%	78%	-3 pp
2023/24 (final)	70%	78%	-8 pp
2022/23 (final)	70%	77%	-7 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	61%	80%	-19 pp
2024/25 (final)	50%	81%	-31 pp
2023/24 (final)	60%	79%	-19 pp
2022/23 (final)	70%	79%	-9 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)	6.4%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	5.9%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.7%	5.9%	Above

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	13.2%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	15.8%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	19.3%	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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