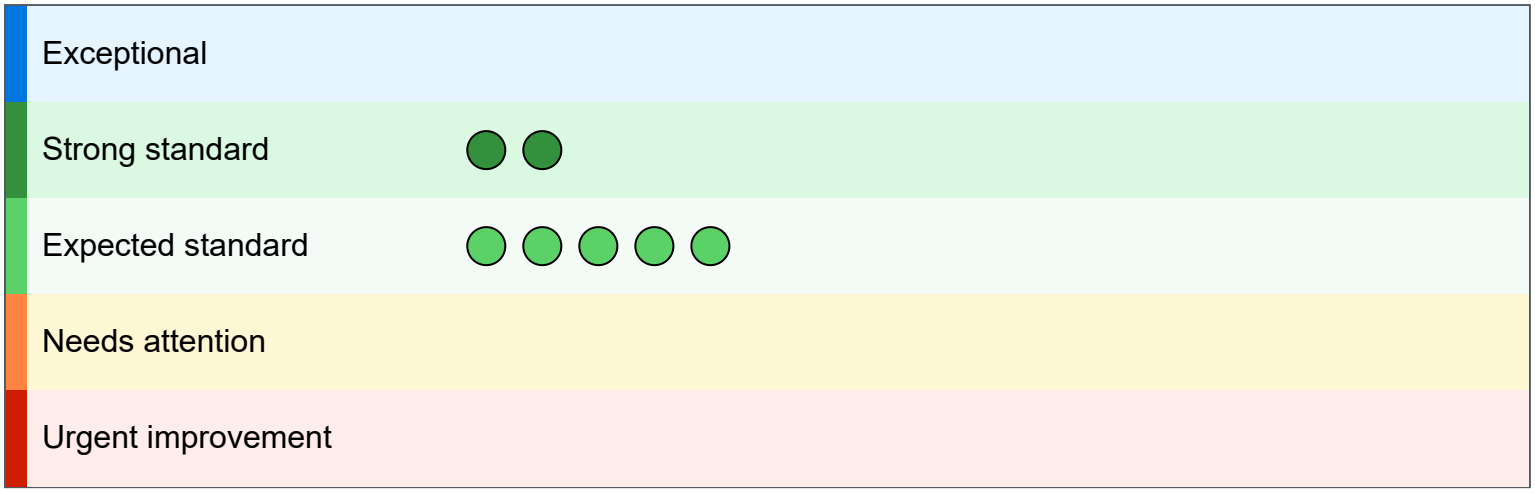
Sherborne Abbey Church of England Primary School

Address: Lenthay Road, Sherborne, Dorset, DT9 6AQ

Unique reference number (URN): 144414

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.

Strong standard

Inclusion

Strong standard

School leaders are ambitious that every child, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), should feel a strong sense of belonging and be able to thrive. Pupils who have barriers to learning are swiftly identified. The support these pupils receive is precise and reviewed regularly. This means that pupils' targets evolve as they progress in their learning. Teaching is appropriately adapted to meet the needs of pupils.

The Dragonfly and Butterfly classrooms enable some pupils with specific needs to access learning in a highly nurturing environment. Staff have bespoke professional development to reflect the needs of these pupils. This means they are highly skilled at ensuring learning is precisely matched to support pupils to progress from their starting points. Pupils with SEND feel cared for and are encouraged to try their absolute best.

Leaders use the pupil premium funding appropriately to support disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have identified that support is needed to improve rates of attendance as well as access to wider enrichment opportunities. Leaders' check regularly that their actions are leading to the intended impact.

The school's use of alternative provision for those pupils who benefit from this support is appropriate.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard

The school's provision for pupils' personal development and wellbeing is a strength of the school and prepares them well for life in modern Britain. Pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils explain the importance of mutual respect and the rule of law. They say that these values 'ensure Britain is a nice place to live and people can feel comfortable in their own skin'. Pupils also have a developing understanding of protected characteristics such as disability and gender. Visitors to school from a range of different faiths support pupils to learn about beliefs different to their own.

Pupils learn how relationships can change over time. They explain the importance of keeping mentally and physically happy and how this is linked to maintaining a healthy diet. Pupils also learn how to stay safe on-line and in the community.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of different trips and experiences. Visits to the theatre in London support pupils to develop a love of the arts and culture. Whereas visits to the British Museum help pupils to deepen their knowledge of what they are learning about ancient Egypt. The school uses residential visits to outdoor education centres to develop pupils' confidence and resilience through activities such as caving and canoeing. The school's activity passport supports pupils to develop new skills such as bird watching and baking. Pupils develop a sense of leadership and responsibility through their roles as worship ambassadors, playground leaders and house captains.

Pupils participate in a wide range of clubs, such as athletics, art, football and musical theatre that develop their talents and interests. School leaders ensure that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities have the opportunity to access this provision.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Historically, the published outcomes of Year 6 pupils have not been high enough. New school leaders acknowledge this and have raised the expectations of what pupils can achieve. These high expectations are reflected in the quality of the work that pupils produce. Leaders ensure that pupils develop the foundational skills and knowledge they need to be successful. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress well from their starting points. Pupils who fall behind are quickly identified and benefit from personalised support that addresses gaps in their knowledge.

Pupils have a secure understanding of what they are currently learning. They recall confidently what they have learned in the past. For example, they explain their learning about geography with clarity and accuracy, and recall how the shifting of tectonic plates can lead to volcanic eruptions.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard

Historically, rates of attendance have not been high enough and too many pupils have been persistently absent. However, school leaders have now addressed these issues to ensure more pupils are attending school regularly. Rates of attendance for all groups of pupils are now either in-line or above the national average. School leaders have established effective systems that help them to regularly review any pupil who might be vulnerable to low attendance. The school builds close relationships with pupils and parents and carers. This helps leaders to provide personalised solutions to ensure pupils attend regularly.

School leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils rise to these expectations and behave well. They are polite and kind to each other and to visitors. In lessons, pupils engage positively with their learning. They are supported to become independent learners who take responsibility for their own behaviour. Pupils and staff share a mutual respect. This means that pupils are quick to follow instructions from staff, including responding quickly when whistles are blown in the playground. The monitoring of behaviour is effective. Incidents of bullying are rare. If an incident occurs, pupils know that staff will deal with it swiftly and support all pupils involved.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

New school leaders have undertaken a comprehensive review of the curriculum and have an ambitious vision for the quality of teaching. Pupils benefit from a well-designed curriculum and lessons that are knowledge rich. For example, staff teach mathematics with

precision and set high expectations so that pupils secure the number facts they need to develop as mathematicians.

The teaching of phonics is effective. Staff accurately model to pupils how to segment and blend sounds. The books pupils read precisely match their reading ability. For children who do not read outside of school, the school provides extra opportunities for these pupils to practise reading during the school day. Teachers impart a love of reading by carefully selecting a range of ambitious, high-quality texts that they read with their classes. Teachers skilfully question and check pupils' understanding. Pupils answer in full sentences, often drawing from other books they have previously read. This supports pupils to discuss a range of complex topics.

The wider curriculum is well planned. Pupils enjoy learning a broad curriculum. They recall diverse subjects such as the Shang Dynasty and the source of rivers around the world. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities access the same curriculum as their peers.

The use of assessment is embedded across the school. Teachers regularly identify when pupils make mistakes or have misconceptions. This generally supports pupils to make corrections and secure their knowledge, leading to improvements in their future work.

Early years

Expected standard

School leaders prioritise the early years and as a result many children are well prepared for the demands of Year 1. Children in the early years are happy and generally calm. They learn to share and support each other in their learning. Those children who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve well from their starting points.

The curriculum is appropriately ambitious. Children successfully develop their handwriting skills and number formation. This leads to many children being able to write independently and order numbers to twenty with confidence. Staff effectively model and extend children’s learning through high quality questioning and probing of understanding. This supports the majority of children to show sustained levels of attention in their learning.

The early years provision offers a wide range of experiences that support children to develop their fine and gross motor skills. However, some of the planned activities are not always as precisely linked to what pupils know and are able to do. This means that sometimes activities do not support children to deepen their knowledge or provide the appropriate level of challenge.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

The new school leadership team has set high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. This vision is shared by staff, governors and trust leaders. There has also been a review of teaching and the curriculum to ensure there is rigour and purpose in all that takes place at Sherborne Abbey. Leaders understand the school’s context and are addressing the areas for development systematically. As a result, pupils' learning is ambitious and purposeful with pupils progressing well from their starting points.

Governors are proud of the school, especially the provision for pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They know the positive actions of the school and its highly inclusive nature help to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils remain in education within their community. This supports these pupils and families to build close and meaningful relationships in and outside of school. Governors know the school well and carefully triangulate information they get from school and trust leaders. This supports them to have an in-depth understanding of the school's strengths, areas for development and the progress leaders are making.

Staff are highly positive about the support they receive from leaders. They say their workload and wellbeing are considered carefully. Staff are proud to work at the school and the team spirit that it brings. Staff appreciate the opportunities for professional development as well as the range of leadership opportunities.

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

Pupils at this school thrive from a culture of high expectations and inclusivity for all. Pupils and staff say they are proud to be members of the school community.
Pupils are happy and say they feel safe. They know that staff will listen to them if they have any concerns. Pupils explain how the school's values of trust, hope, integrity and spirituality support them in how they contribute positively to school life and their community.

The highly inclusive nature of the school means that pupils who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities flourish under the guidance of highly skilled staff. All pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities that support their character development. Trips to the Brecon Beacons support pupils to develop an appreciation of the natural world, while being challenged in testing environmental conditions. Whereas learning to sail on the south coast of England enables pupils to learn new skills. These experiences support pupils to build resilience.

Pupils behave well. Throughout the school pupils are kind and polite. Classrooms are focused learning environments. Teachers captivate pupils' attention through well-planned lessons that build pupils' knowledge over time. Pupils enjoy coming to school which is reflected in the high rates of attendance.

Pupils build a strong sense of responsibility and seek to support their local community. For example, pupils donate to the local food bank and raise money for charities. Older pupils are proud to be role models to the younger children. Pupils also regard their teachers as role models.

The majority of parents are positive about the school. They say that their children are supported by staff who bring joy and positivity to children's learning.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to improve pupils' achievement so all pupils consistently reach the standards they are capable of by the end of Year 6.
- Leaders should make sure that in the early years, children benefit from activities and resources that help them to deepen their learning.

About this inspection

This school is part of the Sherborne Area Schools' Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, David Watson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Middleton.

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Revd Lesley McCreadie.

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 (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the head of school, executive headteacher, the CEO, the interim Director of Education, subject leaders and the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator team.

The inspectors gathered parents' views by considering the responses to Ofsted Parent View and by talking with parents and carers. The inspectors also reviewed responses to Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys.

There is a before- and after-school club for pupils who attend the school.

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

The school currently makes use of three unregistered alternative provisions.

Head of School: Lisa Thompson

Lead inspector:
James Gentile, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Neil Swait, Ofsted Inspector
Susannah Hill, 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

339
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

420
Above 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)

22.42%
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: 26.3%

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

3.54%
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

19.47%
Above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Close to 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	49%	61%	Below
2024/25 (final)	48%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	45%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	53%	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	65%	74%	Below
2024/25 (final)	60%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	73%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	64%	73%	Below

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	67%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	66%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	53%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	77%	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	62%	73%	Below
2024/25 (final)	54%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	63%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	68%	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	35%	46%	Below
2024/25 (final)	38%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	20%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	45%	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	57%	62%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	44%	63%	Below
2023/24 (final)	60%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	65%	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	57%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	50%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	40%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	75%	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	47%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	44%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	40%	59%	Below
2022/23 (final)	55%	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	35%	68%	-32 pp
2024/25 (final)	38%	69%	-32 pp
2023/24 (final)	20%	67%	-47 pp
2022/23 (final)	45%	66%	-21 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	57%	80%	-23 pp
2024/25 (final)	44%	81%	-37 pp
2023/24 (final)	60%	80%	-20 pp
2022/23 (final)	65%	78%	-13 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	57%	78%	-21 pp
2024/25 (final)	50%	78%	-28 pp
2023/24 (final)	40%	78%	-38 pp
2022/23 (final)	75%	77%	-2 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	47%	80%	-33 pp
2024/25 (final)	44%	81%	-37 pp
2023/24 (final)	40%	79%	-39 pp
2022/23 (final)	55%	79%	-24 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)	5.8%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	6.9%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	6.2%	5.9%	Close to average

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	16.9%	13.0%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	19.7%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	18.5%	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.

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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