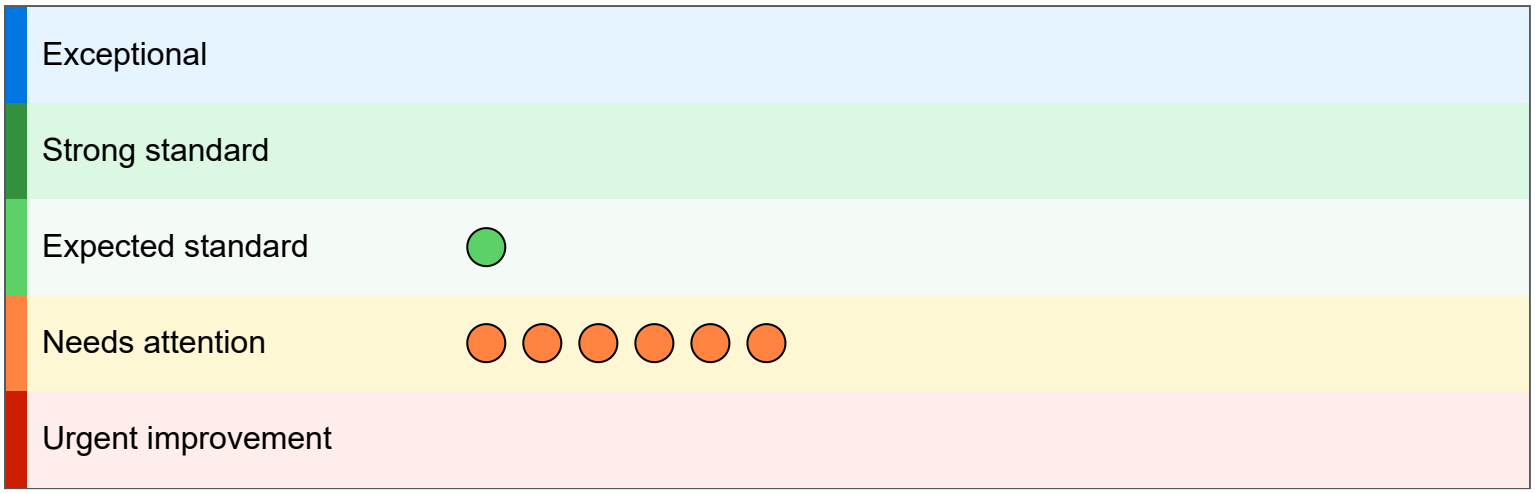
Bowlish Infant School

Address: Bowlish, Shepton Mallet, Somerset, BA4 5JQ

Unique reference number (URN): 123672

Inspection report: 7 July 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

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders have designed a personal development programme that is well considered and tailored effectively to reflect the school's rural context. They ensure that appropriate adaptations and adjustments to remove barriers have been identified so that all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, can fully participate in all aspects of school life.

The personal, social and health education curriculum makes clear the knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils develop as they progress through the school. For example, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe when crossing a road as well as developing an awareness of stranger danger. Pupils know that they should not share any personal information when using the internet.

Pupils understand that everyone is unique and celebrate difference. They recognise the importance of treating others fairly and with respect. Pupils know the importance of friendships and positive relationships and that families can be different. Pupils learn about different world faiths and cultures, including Christianity and Buddhism. They have an age-appropriate understanding of fundamental British values, such as tolerance.

Leaders broaden pupils' understanding of citizenship by participating in events such as ‘charity week’ and fundraising for local causes, including raising money for local firefighters to develop a wellbeing garden at the station. Pupils know that they can make a positive difference to their community and beyond.

The school's pastoral offer enables pupils to acquire an age-appropriate understanding of how to look after their mental wellbeing and their physical health. Pupils know about the importance of exercise and eating a healthy diet. They are confident at seeking support from staff when they need it. Pupils know they will be listened to.

Trips, visitors and clubs provide a range of suitable opportunities which broaden pupils' experiences and widen their horizons. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to perform on stage in front of an audience and to sing to older people at a local residential home.

Pupils learn to be responsible, respectful and active members of the school community through participation in the ‘little leaders’ programme and school council membership. These opportunities help to develop pupils' confidence and leadership skills.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention

Some pupils have gaps in the important basic skills in writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils and those with other barriers do not achieve as well as their peers. Despite this, pupils achieve well in the Year 1 phonics screening check.

Pupils make inconsistent progress through the curriculum. The work pupils produce, particularly in the wider curriculum, reflects this. Some pupils confidently recall their previous learning. For example, they share their learning on Isambard Kingdom Brunel and the properties of materials. However, this is not typical for all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with barriers to their learning struggle to recall important number facts and have gaps in their knowledge in other curriculum subjects. These weaknesses limit how well pupils learn and achieve.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention

Leaders prioritise attendance. They have systems to follow up absence. Leaders work closely with families and other professionals in order to provide a package of support for those who need it. For some pupils, this is starting to make a positive impact and attendance is improving. However, leaders' actions have not yet secured the necessary improvements needed so that all pupils attend well over time. For a number of pupils, attendance is too low. This is not improving quickly enough. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent is higher than seen nationally.

Pupils' behaviour is a mixed picture. Where staff have high expectations of pupils' conduct, they respond positively to this and demonstrate the school's 3 words of 'safe, calm, ready'. However, this is not consistently applied and, consequently, some pupils require repeated reminders to stay focused on their learning. At times, where learning does not match pupils' needs, they quickly become disengaged and lose focus. On occasions, this impacts on the learning of their peers. The number of suspensions is high and a concern. Several pupils receive repeat suspensions.

During social times, pupils of all ages play well together. Staff ensure that everyone is included in playground games. Pupils are confident that discrimination of any form is not tolerated.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention

Leaders have a broad understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. Nevertheless, there are inconsistencies in how well staff deliver the curriculum across the school. At times, expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. Further work is required to ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with other barriers learn a curriculum that is suitably adapted to meet their needs and builds on what has come before. Teachers' checks on how well pupils learn the curriculum lack precision and do not inform future learning. Consequently, misconceptions and errors remain. Learning activities do not typically provide opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding. This means that some pupils are not as well prepared for the next phase of their education as they should be.

The curriculum is broad and ambitious. It has been designed to suit the school's class structure. Leaders have rightly focused on developing pupils' handwriting and spelling. They have identified important vocabulary they want pupils to learn across the school. However, limited opportunities for pupils to write independently and across the wider curriculum impact on the progress some pupils make. Leaders prioritise reading. This begins in the early years

where children develop a love of stories. Staff have the skills they need to teach reading effectively. Pupils who need extra support with reading are catching up.

Early years

Needs attention

Staffing changes have had a negative impact on some children in Reception Year. Children do not consistently benefit from high-quality learning opportunities. There is also variability in the quality of staff interactions, including how adults engage in conversations, to extend children's language and understanding. These experiences hinder the progress children make.

Staff have an awareness to any barriers to learning or wellbeing children have, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, on occasions, children's needs are not met well, which results in a loss of learning time.

Some staff do not consistently have high expectations of children's behaviour. At times, classroom routines are not followed by all children. This reduces opportunities for some children to fully participate and practise new learning.

The early years curriculum is carefully designed and meets all statutory guidance. Reading is a priority. Staff support children to develop their knowledge successfully. Children love to listen to stories such as 'The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig'. Staff have the expertise they need to teach phonics well. Children develop the knowledge they need in readiness for reading.

Inclusion

Needs attention

Within lessons, teaching does not routinely provide helpful adaptations to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or pupils known or previously known to children's social care. Pupils who struggle to manage their emotions and behaviour spend too much time outside of lessons and miss learning opportunities. Some staff are not fully equipped with the skills they need to provide the support pupils require. This means that these pupils do not make suitable progress from their starting points.

Leaders generally have an understanding of pupils' individual needs. They work closely with parents, carers and other professionals, such as the occupational therapist and educational psychologist, to identify and build their understanding of pupils' needs. Leaders provide staff with professional learning opportunities in order to develop their expertise. Pupils' individual targets are typically precise and reviewed on a regular basis, alongside parents. However, the way in which staff implement these plans is too variable. This hinders the progress that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND make over time.

Leaders use additional funding appropriately to support disadvantaged pupils. For example, catch-up sessions support pupils with gaps in their phonics knowledge. Staff make suitable adjustments to help disadvantaged pupils and those with other barriers to feel valued and fully involved in the life of the school.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention

The school has been through a challenging period. This has hindered the school's rate of ongoing improvement. Leaders have an overall understanding of the school's strengths and areas to develop. Nonetheless, some of the actions taken to improve priority areas have not been precise enough. This has had unintended consequences for pupils. For example, the narrow focus on transcription skills means that pupils do not develop the necessary independence in their writing skills, including across the wider curriculum. Consequently, some pupils are not well prepared for the transition into the junior school.

Leaders provide staff with the professional learning they need to develop their expertise across the curriculum and how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, this has not improved the consistency in teaching or effectively reduced barriers for some pupils. Consequently, a number of disadvantaged pupils do not progress as well as they should.

Governors fulfil their statutory duties effectively. They check aspects of the school's work. At times, governors provide challenge and support to leaders. However, this is not completed with enough rigour. High suspension rates, inconsistencies in teaching and inclusion, and rising persistent absenteeism are not addressed effectively enough.

All staff are proud to be part of the school and its community. Some feel well supported by leaders to manage their workload and wellbeing. Most parents are positive about the school. Warm relationships contribute to a caring culture.

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

Bowlish Infant School is a small school in the heart of the community. Pupils value the warm and caring relationships they have with staff. They arrive to school feeling happy and curious. Staff greet pupils with a welcoming smile. They know the pupils well and notice small changes. This helps pupils to feel safe.

The school has been through a period of turbulence, which has impacted on its improvement journey. Pupils' attitudes to learning are variable and some do not attend well enough. At times, pupils concentrate and follow the school's routines. However, some staff do not routinely insist on high expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning. When staff apply the school's agreed behaviour policy, pupils respond well. This means that some classes are calm and purposeful, while in others, low-level disruption sometimes impacts on learning. Pupils know the difference between bullying and falling out. They are confident that bullying is uncommon and know that adults around them would help to solve any worries or concerns they may have.

Staff identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who have other barriers. However, they do not adapt the curriculum, teaching or provision well enough so that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND consistently achieve well across the curriculum.

Published outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check are consistently in line with the national average over time. However, some pupils have gaps in important knowledge such as spelling, letter formation and number facts. As a result, some pupils are not well prepared for the next stage of their learning journey.

Pupils benefit from the school's wider offer. Opportunities to develop pupils' interests and talents are carefully designed. The 'Make the sun shine' music workshop enables pupils to build their confidence, develop their drama skills and perform for an audience. Pupils know that everyone is unique. They celebrate difference and treat everyone as an equal.

Next steps

- Leaders should strengthen their oversight of inclusion and ensure staff are trained well to fully understand the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to make consistently suitable adaptations that enable these pupils to achieve well.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers consistently check pupils' understanding so that misconceptions are identified quickly and accurately so that pupils develop a depth of knowledge across the curriculum.
- Leaders should ensure that staff take pupils' starting points into account to make consistently suitable adaptations to the curriculum so that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, progress well through the curriculum.
- Leaders should ensure that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils who are disadvantaged, develop the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to be well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Leaders should ensure that attendance improves and absence reduces, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Leaders should ensure that all staff consistently implement the school's agreed behaviour policy so that all pupils can learn without disruption and maximise learning time.
- Leaders should support staff to strengthen the quality of their interactions with children in the early years so that these consistently build on children's knowledge and extend their learning.
- Governors should ensure that they have secure oversight of the school's work in order to provide appropriate support and challenge.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Claire Hitt.

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 spoke with the headteacher, senior teacher, special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, a group of staff and pupils. The lead inspector also met with members of the governing body, including the chair. They also met with a representative of the local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

The school has undergone significant changes since the last inspection. This includes several changes to staffing.

Headteacher: Rebecca Eldred

Lead inspector:
Wendy D'Arcy, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Julie Barton, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from different sources. More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 7 July 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

113
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

117
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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

13.27%
Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 26.3%

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

2.65%
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

10.62%
Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

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).

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)	6.2%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	5.2%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	5.3%	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)	14.5%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	9.6%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	9.9%	16.2%	Below

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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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