

Southwater Infant Academy

Address: Worthing Road, Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 9JH

Unique reference number (URN): 136866

Inspection report: 23 June 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

Achievement

Expected standard 

In recent years, leaders identified a gap between pupils' attainment in writing and their outcomes in reading and mathematics. Their focused work to develop a more ambitious writing curriculum is now evident in the improved quantity and quality of pupils' writing throughout the school.

In core subjects such as phonics and mathematics, staff use flexible grouping and provide timely, targeted support within lessons. This helps pupils to address gaps in knowledge and secure key concepts before moving on. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check are typically close to the national average, with an increased proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in 2026.

Across the school's broad curriculum, groups of pupils generally achieve well. In some subjects, adaptive approaches are well established and support pupils to make clear progress. However, this practice is not yet consistently applied across the wider curriculum. As a result, some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not always achieve as highly as they could.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

High attendance is a consistent feature of the school and has remained securely above the national average over time. Very few pupils are absent regularly, and this has reduced even further this year. This year, the attendance of key groups, particularly pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, has increased. Leaders routinely review attendance so they can identify and respond promptly to any emerging concerns. They apply tailored approaches to support pupils and families where needed. Pupils' punctuality is also monitored closely.

Pupils are polite and respectful, building positive relationships with adults and their peers. They understand expectations and report that bullying is rare. They have confidence that staff will respond to any concerns and support them with any worries. In lessons, pupils engage well in their learning, supported by established routines such as 'chatting chums'. Social times promote positive and considerate interactions. Transitions around the school are smooth due to well embedded routines. A small number of pupils are given helpful support to manage their behaviour and emotions. Staff provide effective, tailored support, including through the caterpillars provision introduced this year. As a result, suspensions have reduced significantly.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders take a reflective and evaluative approach to curriculum development. They have established effective systems to monitor the quality of the curriculum and teaching, addressing the area for development identified at the previous inspection. The curriculum is ambitious and broad. Knowledge is carefully sequenced into manageable steps which build over time. Leaders ensure that meaningful links are made across subjects. For example, in

English lessons, pupils enthusiastically wear the class 'history hat' as they recall key facts about a local historical event before writing about it.

Leaders rightly prioritise the development of foundational skills. Staff clearly demonstrate how to form letters and practice joins, as well as supporting pupils to develop correct posture and pencil grip. Phonics teaching is consistently well-structured and engaging, with highly effective modelling, repetition and reinforcement. Across the curriculum, teaching is typically consistent, with effective use of modelling, questioning and responsive support.

In some subjects, particularly core areas such as mathematics and writing, staff make effective use of established adaptations to reduce barriers to participation. However, in some wider curriculum subjects, this practice is less consistently embedded. As a result, some pupils do not benefit from the same level of support to access learning as they do in core subjects.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children in the early years demonstrate high levels of independence as they follow well-established routines. For example, they confidently organise their belongings on arrival in the morning. The curriculum is thoughtfully designed, balancing direct teaching with opportunities for independent exploration. Staff create a calm and engaging environment, with careful consideration given to each area of learning.

Staff interactions are generally purposeful and reflect a secure understanding of early years pedagogy. There is a clear focus on developing children's vocabulary, with adults using a range of strategies to support language acquisition. Teaching in phonics and early writing is well structured, with clear modelling that helps children to build key skills. Children apply their phonics knowledge in independent work, and recent initiatives have increased their engagement in writing. As a result, children's work shows improving stamina and quality.

However, there are some inconsistencies in how adults respond to children, including those who are disadvantaged, which can reduce the effectiveness of interactions. In addition, while some areas of the curriculum are well developed, particularly communication and language and mathematics, a clear sequence is not yet consistent across all areas of learning. This limits how securely staff assess and address any gaps in learning.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have a detailed understanding of pupils' needs. Alongside staff, they develop plans which respond well to these needs. Leaders and staff think carefully about how provision should be adapted to support pupils effectively. This means that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, typically benefit from well embedded adaptive approaches. This includes adult support, assistive technology and visual supports. At times, further adaptations are made beyond the classroom. For example, the new caterpillars provision ensures that pupils who need more personalised support receive targeted help to access the curriculum and regulate their emotions.

Leaders use the pupil premium strategy appropriately to fund a range of support, including additional help for pupils and their families in areas such as attendance. Staff work

effectively to support pupils who are known, or have been known, to social care, collaborating across settings and with external agencies to secure the help that pupils and families need. Leaders regularly monitor pupils' progress. However, some aspects of inclusion require further refinement so that leaders can evaluate more precisely the impact of their actions. This includes monitoring and evaluation of the pupil premium strategy and the caterpillars provision.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have embedded a clear and systematic approach to evaluating the performance of the school. This draws on a range of appropriate evidence and includes meaningful contributions from trustees and staff. Self evaluation is honest and reflective, enabling leaders to identify appropriate areas for development. Recent examples include the introduction of the caterpillars provision and initiatives to strengthen writing.

Trustees fulfil their statutory duties well. They understand their roles, including safeguarding, and typically provide effective challenge. They maintain their focus on long-term sustainability and success of the school. Trustees support leaders in evaluating difficult decisions, such as those linked to changes in the school's context, keeping pupils' best interests at the centre. As a single academy trust, leaders are acutely aware of the potential risks of operating in isolation. They have taken deliberate and successful steps to mitigate this through outward-facing work. Well-established local partnerships, including collaboration within a locality network, support improvements to the curriculum and pupils' transition to their next school.

Leaders ensure that professional learning is carefully targeted to support identified priorities. This contributes to continual development in teaching and curriculum delivery. Leaders engage purposefully with staff to support wellbeing and manage workload, and staff benefit from access to wider pastoral services commissioned by the school. This thoughtful approach helps to maintain a positive working environment and staff's high satisfaction at the school. Parents and carers value leaders' visibility and the positive relationships that staff have with their children.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school's personal development programme is underpinned by its values of kindness, respect and honesty. These values are consistently promoted through the behaviour system and reinforced in assemblies, helping pupils to understand how to treat others and contribute positively to school life.

The well sequenced personal, social and health education curriculum supports pupils to develop a secure understanding of relationships, different families, online safety and how to maintain both physical and mental health. Pupils confidently explain that there are many ways to keep their bodies healthy, for example by not eating too much junk food and making sure they eat fruit. They also understand the importance of looking after their brain, recognising that too much screen time and not enough rest can make them feel unwell.

Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of equality and diversity. They articulately discuss their learning in religious education about different faiths and beliefs.

They understand the importance of tolerance and respect, and can distinguish between right and wrong, linking this to the school's expectations for behaviour. They have a well-developed grasp of democracy. They relate this abstract concept to concrete school systems, for example the democratic election of pupil leaders and voting for classroom incentives like marble jar prizes.

Leaders have established an effective approach to pastoral support, drawing on a wide range of specialist expertise. This support is also available to families and staff, creating wider benefits that positively enhance pupils' wellbeing and outcomes.

Pupils are encouraged to develop their interests and talents, including through opportunities to share achievements beyond school. Leadership opportunities, such as the school council, enable pupils to contribute to school improvement. Leaders recognise that participation in extracurricular activities could be broadened further to ensure that all groups of pupils benefit fully.

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

Pupils at Southwater Infant Academy behave well and understand the importance of following school rules to keep everyone safe. They are kind and supportive towards one another. Initiatives such as playground pals and the friendship bench help pupils who may feel lonely to find and make friends. Pupils in Year 2, who are preparing to move to their junior school soon, know that if they feel worried, they can use their classroom worry monsters or talk to a teacher for reassurance.

Pupils enjoy their learning here. They know that staff provide different types of support to help them in their learning. The school's extensive grounds, including its woodland provision, are used effectively to enhance learning. Children enjoy exploring the natural environment. For example, children in the Reception Year develop their curiosity as they delightedly search for minibeasts and tell their friends about their discoveries. Visits and visitors are remembered fondly, such as trips to the Arundel Wetland Centre where pupils saw lapwings and black headed gulls.

Pupils feel safe at school and demonstrate a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. Staff use the current hot weather as a practical opportunity to teach pupils how to stay safe in a heatwave, including keeping in the shade, drinking water and resting. Pupils also show a clear awareness of online safety. They understand that not everyone online is who they say they are and recognise the importance of telling an adult what they are doing online.

Pupils value opportunities to contribute to school life. School councillors work with leaders to improve provision, for example by introducing popular playground markings, while eco councillors promote sustainability. Pupils also enjoy rewards such as being part of the 'always club'. They receive highly prized certificates from the school's hamster, Dave, for demonstrating the school's values. They love visiting him too.

Next steps

- Leaders should refine how they identify and address gaps across all areas of learning in the early years, so that they inform purposeful staff interactions, including for disadvantaged pupils.
 - Leaders should strengthen their inclusive practice by reviewing the impact of their actions on pupils.
 - Leaders should ensure that effective adaptive approaches routinely seen in core subjects are systematically applied across the wider curriculum.
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About this inspection

The headteacher and chief executive officer of this school is Christie Cavallo. This school is governed by a single academy trust, Southwater Infant Academy Trust, which means other people also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees. The chair of the board is Peter Buckley.

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, other school leaders and trustees during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with the school's improvement partner, staff, parents and carers and pupils during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher: Christie Cavallo

Lead inspector:

Katie Hancock, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Michael Eggleton, Ofsted Inspector

Julie Prentice, 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 23 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

268

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

270

Close to 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)

5.22%

Well 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

2.24%

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

12.69%

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)

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)	3.8%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	4.6%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	4.3%	5.9%	Below

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)	7.1%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	7.5%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.7%	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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