

Anstey First School

Address: Anstey, Buntingford, Hertfordshire, SG9 0BY

Unique reference number (URN): 117218

Inspection report: 14 April 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 

Pupils generally achieve well from their various starting points. Pupils secure foundations in reading, writing and mathematics because staff teach key knowledge well and check understanding regularly. Pupils' work shows that pupils usually remember what they have learned and use it across subjects. Published data shows that pupils' attainment in phonics has, on average, been above the national average and improving. However, small cohorts mean results can fluctuate. Therefore, in school, information is key for leaders to understand the progress that pupils make. Pupils are confident in talking about their learning, especially when discussing mathematics or history, including what they have learned about the Windrush.

Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities usually progress appropriately because staff know them well and adapt tasks. However, some additional support is not precise enough. Pupils are generally well prepared for the next phase through well-planned transition work.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise attendance. Pupils attend regularly and attendance is broadly in line with national figures. Staff follow up absence quickly through first-day calls. They give clear messages about the importance of attendance. They work with parents to understand barriers and agree support. Pupils who find the mornings difficult use the breakfast club and reintegration planning to help them settle and attend more frequently.

Leaders have high expectations for behaviour, which have been realised. Pupils' behaviour is typically calm, respectful and orderly. There are purposeful routines in lessons and positive play at breaktimes, including older and younger pupils playing together. In pre-school, Nursery and the Reception Year, children settle quickly into clear routines. They choose activities independently and respond well to adults' calm guidance.

Staff use consistent expectations and positive rewards. They help pupils repair relationships when problems arise. Most pupils enjoy learning and are proud of their achievements. Pupils say adults are kind and fair. They know who to talk to if they are worried. Pupils report that bullying is not common and that staff deal with concerns well.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Pupils benefit from an ambitious and broad curriculum. Staff use a shared lesson approach. This helps pupils settle quickly, recap earlier learning and build new knowledge in small steps. Teachers prioritise early reading through a structured phonics programme. Pupils read books that match the sounds they know. This helps them build fluency. Teaching in mathematics reflects a focus on number sense and times-table fluency. In the early years, staff develop children's communication and language and build understanding of number so they are ready for Year 1.

The wider curriculum is organised through big questions and big ideas, helping pupils connect learning across subjects and remember key content over time. Leaders check pupils' work and reading regularly. They visit lessons to see how well pupils learn. Staff check pupils' learning to adjust tasks and help them work towards their targets. Published outcomes give limited assurance because cohorts are very small. Staff know pupils well and adapt teaching through small-group work and tailored resources. However, adaptations are not always precise for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This means some pupils do not secure key knowledge as quickly as they could.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children in the early years follow a carefully considered curriculum that builds the skills and knowledge they need for future learning. Children generally experience a calm provision where staff know them well and help them feel safe, confident and ready to learn. Staff apply daily routines and expectations, which helps children settle and manage transitions. Staff focus on communication and language, particularly in the pre-school. Staff model and extend vocabulary through interaction, songs and rhymes and purposeful questioning. In mathematics, staff rehearse key words such as 'pattern' and 'repeat'.

In the Reception Year, staff teach phonics from the start so children learn to read from the start. Children build independence by choosing activities and managing self-care routines like handwashing. In the pre-school, including 2-year-olds, staff provide nurturing care. Children engage in play and confidently name things they are learning about, such as minibeasts. Welfare arrangements are secure. Staff understand supervision, intimate care and first-aid requirements and organise spaces to reduce risk. Staff work closely with parents through regular communication and transition activities. Staff adapt routines so children with additional needs generally take part fully. Careful checking across the various areas of learning helps children reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders who are new in post have swiftly understand the school's strengths and main priorities for improvement. They are passionate about providing the best educational offer that they can for their pupils. The impact of this work is evident in pupils' achievement. Leaders prioritise strong foundations in reading and mathematics and they continue to refine curriculum planning. Leaders have also strengthened the wider curriculum provision. For example, they have rewritten the personal, social and health education and relationships programme so it better fits the school. This work remains in its infancy and is not yet embedded. Leaders regularly review and evaluate the effectiveness of the education that pupils receive. At times, there are inconsistencies in the support that a small number of pupils who have barriers to their learning receive. These are not identified or addressed as swiftly as they could be.

Governors are experienced, long standing and deeply committed to the school community. Governors record their regular monitoring through minutes and reports, holding leaders to

account. Governors complete relevant training and they use this to test leaders' evaluation and use of resources.

Leaders protect staff wellbeing and workload. Staff unanimously agree the school is well led and managed, matching parents' views. Staff access professional learning, including early career teacher programmes as well as moderation and partnership work that builds expertise. Leaders engage well with parents and the wider community. Parents value improved communication, including weekly newsletters, and staff work with external professionals to support pupils' needs.

Needs attention

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Support for pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not yet consistent. This limits its impact. Staff do not always identify pupils' needs clearly. Support plans are not always precise. Some targets are too broad or unclear. Plans do not always show how staff will check progress. As a result, lesson adaptations vary and, at times, additional adults are not used effectively.

Leaders' oversight of alternative provision needs attention. They have not yet set a clear process to check quality of provision or routinely gather information about pupils' progress. Leaders have begun to review this area, and the work is at an early stage. This means they have not regularly evaluated how this support improves learning or wellbeing. As a result, there is limited assurance the provision meets pupils' needs.

Despite this, staff know pupils well. Pupils feel cared for and listened to. Parents receive prompt responses to concerns. Pupils who need extra help often receive pastoral support. This helps them feel safe and attend more regularly. Leaders work with external professionals and involve families. Pupil premium funding supports disadvantaged pupils through breakfast club, clubs and therapeutic support. These actions are positive but uneven in impact.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

The curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE), including relationships and health education, is not currently delivered in a consistent and well-organised way. Leaders paused a previous scheme and only recently created a new 2-year programme using different resources. At the time of inspection, staff had not fully put this programme in place. Teaching was uneven across classes. Some pupils said they had not learned PSHE for some time and were unsure what it included. This means pupils do not yet build their knowledge over time about relationships, health and growing up.

The school does support pupils' personal development through its caring culture and daily routines. Pupils learn in a calm and welcoming environment. Staff know pupils well and help them feel safe and valued. Pupils say staff listen to them and help them sort out problems. They say bullying is rare and trust staff to deal with it quickly if it happens.

Pupils build confidence and friendships through a range of wider activities. These include outdoor learning, breakfast club, after-school clubs and community events. These experiences help pupils develop independence, resilience and social skills. Disadvantaged pupils receive extra support through pupil premium funding. This includes funded access to clubs, breakfast club and therapeutic support. This helps pupils take part and supports their wellbeing.

Pupils learn about online safety through computing lessons. They know how to keep themselves safe when using technology. Pupils also learn about fairness, rules and respect through everyday school life. They take part in school council elections and learn about democracy. They learn about different people and beliefs through subjects such as history and religious education.

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

Pupils experience a calm, welcoming and nurturing school. The values of respect, resilience and responsibility shape their daily life. Pupils speak positively about school. They say that staff are kind and help them when learning feels difficult. One pupil said, 'Everyone is very kind and helps you if you are feeling down.' Another explained, 'I like doing work, all of the work.' These views reflect pupils' positive attitudes to learning.

Pupils generally achieve well from their various starting points. They benefit from clear routines and purposeful teaching. Pupils learn to read early through a structured phonics programme. They read books that match their stage of learning. Pupils build knowledge through 'big questions', which help them remember what they have learned. They are well prepared for their next steps. This includes moving on to middle school, supported by effective transition visits.

Pupils in this small community play together happily across age groups. Bullying is rare. They feel included in all aspects of school life. Pupils take part in wider experiences such as forest school, music, clubs and community events. This helps them build confidence and independence. They would like to learn more about different jobs they could do in the future and to take part in more trips beyond the local area. Pupils in the early years settle quickly. They choose activities independently and develop their language through purposeful interactions with staff.

Pupils behave well. They show positive attitudes to school. They follow clear routines, treat others fairly and resolve disagreements with staff support. Pupils feel safe and know who to talk to if they are worried. They attend regularly. Those who find school difficult receive effective support that helps them attend more often. Largely, pupils achieve, belong and thrive in a school that places their wellbeing and happiness at the centre.

Next steps

- Leaders should rapidly embed the new well-sequenced personal, social and health education programme. They should ensure it is taught consistently well so pupils gain the knowledge needed to understand what it is like to live and thrive in modern Britain.
 - Leaders should improve the identification of pupils who have barriers to their learning. They should provide targeted staff training, including in the early years, to ensure consistent delivery of the graduated approach and strengthen their oversight of any alternative provision use.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Tom Sealy.

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 HMI.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the school SENCO, the Chair of Governors and members of the local governing body during the inspection. Inspectors spoke to a number of parents. Inspectors spoke to pupils throughout the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed.

Headteacher: Richard McKelvey

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Lead inspector:

Sarah Stevens, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Peter Hynes, 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 14 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

44

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: 272

School capacity

70

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)

34.38%

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

4.55%

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

13.64%

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

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 (2 term)	8.1%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	8.0%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	9.9%	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 (2 term)	24.0%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	33.3%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	38.7%	16.2%	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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