

Hillside Primary School

Address: Belstead Avenue, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP2 8NU

Unique reference number (URN): 140887

Inspection report: 2 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

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have prioritised raising attendance. They are rightly proud of their close work with parents, carers and external professionals and the way this positively impacts pupils' attendance. Leaders accurately identify barriers to attendance and provide effective support where needed. This includes working with external agencies. Attendance has improved over time and is now close to the national average. More pupils attend school consistently and are able to benefit from the school's curriculum.

Leaders have worked closely with staff to emphasise routines and expectations. Staff apply the agreed behaviour approaches with increasing consistency and pupils generally respond positively. This supports the school to be calm and orderly. This includes in lessons, where pupils have positive attitudes to learning and disruption is rare. Pupils appreciate the way their efforts and values are recognised and rewarded in assemblies. Leaders monitor behaviour carefully and provide appropriate support for pupils who need additional help to manage their behaviour. Bullying is rare. However, if it does occur leaders deal with it quickly and fairly.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders have established a well-organised early years provision. The curriculum identifies the knowledge and skills children need to be ready for Year 1. Learning is carefully sequenced, supported by established and rigorous approaches to early reading and mathematics. Leaders place a strong emphasis on children's wellbeing and have developed positive relationships with families. For example, through home visits, workshops and regular opportunities to discuss children's learning. Warm and nurturing relationships in the nursery and the Reception Year support children to feel safe and included.

Children settle quickly into routines and engage positively with the activities available to them. Staff carefully plan purposeful activities to support children's practice and development of a wide range of skills. For example, construction, water play, role play and tasks to support hand strength and letter formation. Children enjoy opportunities to sing and listen to well-loved stories. Staff support children to take turns, share and take care of resources. They check children's learning regularly and use this information to identify next steps. Staff use a range of approaches to support children's needs, including with language development. However, opportunities to extend children's language and deepen their understanding further are sometimes missed.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders identify pupils' needs early and provide effective support to help reduce barriers to learning. The school serves a diverse community and staff work diligently to ensure all pupils feel welcome and supported. For example, helping children who are new to the English language develop language skills from the start of the Reception Year. This helps them settle quickly into school life.

Leaders quickly identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and provide appropriate support. Staff work closely with leaders to develop tailored plans and ensure pupils receive the help they need. Effective pre-teaching and catch-up support helps many pupils, including pupils with SEND, to access the curriculum. However, approaches to classroom adaptation are not consistently embedded. Training and mentoring are strengthening staff expertise, but some adaptations to learning tasks and questioning do not meet pupils' needs as effectively as they could.

Leaders know pupils who need additional support well and work effectively with families and external professional to ensure pupils receive timely help when they need it. Leaders also maintain effective oversight of pupils, who attend alternative provision. The school's nurture provision provides valuable support for pupils with significant needs within a calm, positive atmosphere. The pupil premium strategy is well considered and supports pupils' learning and wider development effectively.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Improvement priorities are aligned closely to pupils' needs. This includes support for pupils who face barriers to learning and action to improve pupils' achievement. Leaders work closely with trust leaders, who provide a range of support, challenge and oversight. This has strengthened quality assurance, assessment and school improvement activity. Leaders make effective use of external networks, reviews and school partnerships to support school improvement and develop professional expertise.

Leaders responsible for governance receive regular information about the school's performance and use this to support improvement priorities and fulfil their statutory duties. Despite some recent changes in staffing and leadership, leaders maintain their focus on improving pupils' learning experiences.

Leaders engage positively with parents and the wider community. They have developed strong relationships with families and have adapted communication to meet the needs of the school's diverse community. As a result, parents value the school's work, attendance has improved and pupils feel and are more included in the day-to-day life of the school.

Leaders provide staff with professional development opportunities and access to training. Staff benefit from support provided by the trust and external partners. Teachers feel well supported and appreciate the support they receive. Some support staff report that they need further training and guidance to help them meet pupils' needs confidently. Leaders are strengthening their support and training.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Personal development is woven through the school's curriculum and wider work. The curriculum, including the relationships education programme, helps pupils develop their understanding of healthy relationships, personal safety and life in modern Britain. Pupils discuss these topics confidently and can explain how the school's values influence their actions and decisions. Leaders ensure that learning reflects pupils' needs and wider issues that may affect their lives.

Pastoral support is a central feature of the school's work. Staff know pupils well and identify emerging concerns promptly. A range of support is available for pupils and families, including targets, pastoral provision and daily opportunities for pupils to seek help and guidance. Pupils are confident that staff will listen to their concerns and help them to resolve difficulties. Pupils feel included and know where to turn, when they need support. This contributes to an inclusive environment, where pupils feel valued and supported.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in both the physical and digital worlds. They understand risks and how to get help from adults. Pupils also develop an understanding of different cultures, traditions and beliefs. They describe the school as a welcoming community, where people are treated fairly and with respect.

Leaders provide a broad range of opportunities that extend pupils' experiences beyond the curriculum. This includes trips and clubs that help pupils develop confidence, independence and responsibility. Leaders emphasise the importance of raising pupils' aspirations. For example, through careers-related events, including a careers fair hosted by a local trust school, transition workshops and encounters with visitors from different professions. These experiences broaden pupils' horizons and help pupils develop an understanding of the opportunities available to them in later life. The school's work to raise pupils' aspirations supports children to understand they can 'be anything they want to be'.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Leaders have prioritised pupils' achievement and published outcomes show improvement. However, pupils' achievement is not typically secure in reading at the end of key stage 2 and in the Year 1 phonics screening check, which remain below national averages. Some older pupils have not secured the important knowledge and skills they should over time. This is most evident in reading and writing. Gaps in basic knowledge in these areas limit how well some pupils access new learning and apply their understanding across the curriculum. Inconsistencies in teaching, of which the school is aware and supporting on, mean that pupils' achievement varies across year groups. Although support and intervention help many pupils to catch up, this is not always embedded over time.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Leaders have established a broad curriculum and use a range of curriculum resources to support lesson sequencing. They have accurately identified areas, where the curriculum and teaching need to improve and are taking action to address these. For example, leaders have reviewed the reading curriculum to better meet the needs of pupils, including those who are new to the English language. However, some older pupils do not yet benefit fully from these developments. Thorough systems help teachers to identify and support pupils who need to catch up.

Teaching is not consistently effective across the school. Where it is strongest, staff explain new learning clearly and check pupils' understanding carefully. This is the case for early

reading, which leaders have rightly focused on. In these lessons, pupils quickly learn the sounds that letters make. However, variability affects the quality of pupils' learning experiences. For example, in explanation, questioning and task design. As a result, learning does not always build as effectively as it should and some pupils show gaps in basic knowledge and skills. These inconsistencies have a greater impact on some groups of pupils, particularly the older pupils.

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

Pupils enjoy attending this welcoming school. They value the positive relationships they have with staff. They appreciate the support available when they need help. Older pupils describe the school as a place where 'everyone is welcome'. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Bullying is rare. Pupils know that staff will help resolve friendship issues if they occur.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of experiences beyond the classroom. They speak enthusiastically about opportunities, such as residential visits, camping and theatre trips. Older pupils enjoy leadership opportunities, including helping younger pupils. A wide range of clubs, including sports, science and environmental activities, helps pupils develop new interests and talents. Pupils benefit from opportunities to learn about future education and careers through transition activities, careers events and discussions from visitors from different professions. These experiences help pupils to develop confidence, raise their aspirations and broaden their understanding of the world beyond their local community.

Pupils generally behave well and understand the school's expectations. Staff teach important routines and expectations to help pupils focus. Pupils attend the school regularly. Children in the early years settle quickly and engage positively with their learning. This is due to staff's caring and nurturing approach. Pupils appreciate the school's diverse community and treat others with respect. They talk confidently about future aspirations and understand that a wide range of opportunities are available to them.

Pupils are keen to learn and value the support that helps them overcome barriers to learning. While pupils develop knowledge and skills across a broad range of subjects, some older pupils have not secured the knowledge they need in reading and writing. Further, the school's work to improve pupils' learning experiences through providing training for staff is underway but not complete. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure consistently high-quality explanations, questioning and task design from all staff to guarantee that pupils benefit from effective learning experiences across the curriculum.
- Leaders should ensure that pupils build, retain and apply secure knowledge and skills over time, particularly in reading and writing.

- Leaders should ensure that staff apply the agreed approaches to adapting learning consistently, so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities access learning successfully and achieve well.
 - Leaders should improve the quality of adult interactions in the early years, so that opportunities to develop children's language, communication and thinking are routinely maximised.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Active Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lynsey Holzer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Claire Heald.

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 chief executive officer, the chair of the board of trustees and a range of trust leaders during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with parents, teachers and pupils.

The school currently makes use of 2 unregistered alternative provisions.

The school also, under the same registration, runs a nursery for 3- to 4-year-olds.

Headteacher: Lucy Wass

Lead inspector:

Hannah Stoten, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Tracy Walker, Ofsted Inspector

Vicki Webber, Ofsted Inspector

Jane Bennett, His Majesty's 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 2 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

421

Above 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

500

Well 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)

45.45%

Well above 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

2.14%

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

13.54%

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

Above 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	43%	61%	Below
2024/25 (final)	53%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	49%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	30%	60%	Below

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	58%	74%	Below
2024/25 (final)	60%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	67%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	49%	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	56%	72%	Below
2024/25 (final)	72%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	61%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	40%	71%	Below

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	61%	73%	Below
2024/25 (final)	74%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	71%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	42%	73%	Below

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	32%	46%	Below
2024/25 (final)	45%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	24%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	26%	44%	Below

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	50%	62%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	55%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	43%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	50%	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	39%	59%	Below
2024/25 (final)	59%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	33%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	26%	58%	Below

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	48%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	55%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	62%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	32%	59%	Below

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	32%	68%	-35 pp
2024/25 (final)	45%	69%	-24 pp
2023/24 (final)	24%	67%	-44 pp
2022/23 (final)	26%	66%	-40 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	50%	80%	-30 pp
2024/25 (final)	55%	81%	-26 pp
2023/24 (final)	43%	80%	-37 pp
2022/23 (final)	50%	78%	-28 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	39%	78%	-38 pp
2024/25 (final)	59%	78%	-20 pp
2023/24 (final)	33%	78%	-44 pp
2022/23 (final)	26%	77%	-51 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	48%	80%	-32 pp
2024/25 (final)	55%	81%	-25 pp
2023/24 (final)	62%	79%	-18 pp
2022/23 (final)	32%	79%	-47 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)	7.8%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	10.4%	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)	21.0%	13.0%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	25.1%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	38.6%	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.

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