

Herne Church of England Infant and Nursery School

Address: Palmer Close, Herne, Herne Bay, Kent, CT6 7AH

Unique reference number (URN): 118710

Inspection report: 6 May 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.

Strong standard ●

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

From the Nursery to the end of Year 2, leaders have designed an ambitious and coherently sequenced curriculum. Throughout the curriculum, staff know precisely what should be taught and when. They place a relentless focus on ensuring that pupils secure the foundational knowledge and skills needed for future success in key stage 2. The environment and resources are carefully tailored to provide the precise scaffolding and challenge that pupils need. Communication and language development are at the curriculum's core.

Staff have expert subject knowledge about the way young children learn. From the Nursery onwards, they use high-quality discussions to check pupils' understanding and move their learning on. Staff skilfully enable pupils to learn through their interests. Pupils make connections across the curriculum and can explain the meaning of technical vocabulary as they confidently discuss their learning.

Leaders continually monitor and refine the quality of the curriculum and teaching in response to pupils' needs. The school adapts the curriculum highly effectively for pupils who have barriers to their learning. Leaders have further refined the phonics curriculum. Current pupils with barriers to their phonics learning in Reception and Year 1 classes are expertly supported to catch up quickly. The schools' phonics outcomes are improving.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

The school places inclusion at the heart of its work. Leaders are highly ambitious for all pupils. Staff quickly identify pupils' needs, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders are highly skilled in designing precisely targeted strategies that enable pupils to overcome barriers. If a pupil finds any aspect of their learning difficult, their provision is adapted to give them the resources and strategies they need to achieve both academically and personally. A carefully planned programme of training ensures that staff are knowledgeable about how to support pupils in overcoming their individual difficulties. The school has introduced several tailored methods of support to provide further levels of support for pupils with SEND. The bespoke support enables pupils with SEND to access the same curriculum as their peers.

Leaders regularly monitor how well additional support benefits pupils and adapt it accordingly. This tailored approach is particularly effective for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. Staff work with external agencies, such as speech and language therapists, to develop effective support programmes.

Pupil premium funding is used purposefully to remove barriers to pupils' achievement and wellbeing. This ranges from ensuring pupils can readily access extra-curricular clubs to providing additional help so that they are well prepared for the transition into the key stage 2 curriculum.

The school's personal, social and health education curriculum includes age-appropriate relationships and health education. From the Nursery, pupils learn how to recognise and manage their emotions. This equips them with the knowledge and skills they need for future learning. The curriculum is tailored to support pupils beyond school in the local area. For example, they learn about the tides and how to stay safe when playing at the beach.

Pupils' spiritual and moral development is a key element of the curriculum. They are taught how to build positive relationships. In school assemblies, pupils reflect on the importance of kindness and being a good friend. Pupils are proud of their roles in the school council and as library and classroom monitors. The school promotes equality and fairness throughout the curriculum and school life. It also develops pupils' understanding of, and respect for, different faiths. Pupils can speak knowledgeably about different faiths' celebrations and traditions.

The promotion of British values is woven into the routines of school life. For example, pupils learn about democracy by voting each morning for the class story of the day. They understand why being 'ready, respectful and safe' matters and how rules help create an environment where everyone can learn and play happily. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. They know never to share personal information and understand that some information online can be misleading. They also recognise the importance of keeping physically healthy through exercise and a balanced diet.

The school nurtures pupils' talents and interests through a range of opportunities. Leaders monitor participation carefully to ensure that rates are high for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils benefit from a variety of curriculum-linked trips, such as visits to the beach, the cinema and the minigolf course.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Right from the start in the Nursery, pupils learn the important knowledge they need in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. The school has a detailed understanding of pupils' starting points. Layers of well-matched support help pupils overcome barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing. Pupils frequently revisit prior learning to help them connect it to new concepts. Leaders' refinements to the phonics curriculum have had a significant impact, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged. However, it is too early to see the impact of the school's work over time on published phonics screening check outcomes.

The school emphasises pupils' personal, social and emotional development. During lessons, pupils concentrate intently on their learning for extended periods of time. They progress through the curriculum very well. Pupils with SEND, those who are disadvantaged and those who are known to social care learn the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils' work is of

high quality across a broad range of curriculum subjects. They are well prepared for Key Stage 2.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders know pupils and their families well. As soon as children start in the Nursery, leaders promote the importance of regular attendance. Leaders have established clear procedures for checking and monitoring pupils' attendance. Overall, pupils attend school at rates close to the national average. Leaders understand the barriers that cause some pupils to be persistently absent and help families to access the support they need. Specific actions taken to support individual pupils' attendance have made a notable difference.

Leaders have established a deeply embedded culture of calm, kind and respectful behaviour. The school's underlying philosophy and policies on behaviour are well understood by staff, who have been expertly trained. Interactions throughout the school are extremely warm. Staff model the school's values with pride through well-established daily routines. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and apply themselves maturely during lessons and when playing purposefully with their classmates. The school teaches pupils how to be resilient and independent. Bullying is extremely rare, but if it occurs, staff help pupils to resolve situations quickly. Pupils who struggle with their behaviour are expertly supported to understand their emotions. They are taught how to manage their feelings well.

Early years

Expected standard 

The school works extremely well with parents and carers. Staff get to know pupils and understand their needs. This supports pupils' successful transition into the Nursery and Reception classes. Staff are experts at meeting young children's care and learning needs. Children settle into the school well. Children with possible special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified swiftly, and appropriate support is put in place.

The curriculum focuses on language and communication as a priority. As soon as they start in the Nursery, children begin learning to recognise sounds, a precursor to learning phonics in Reception. Phonics is taught well. Staff adapt their teaching so that any pupils who struggle with phonics can overcome their barriers to learning. Staff place a firm emphasis on reading. Pupils experience a wide range of stories, songs and rhymes. Staff frequently share a book with children, modelling their love of reading. The school has identified the vocabulary children need to understand the curriculum. The environment is designed to promote rich opportunities for reading and talking. Staff model vocabulary during their interactions with children. They use questioning effectively to extend children's thinking and discussion.

Staff are experts at supporting pupils to learn the curriculum through their interests. Pupils explore and learn enthusiastically. Pupils' behaviour is highly focused and conducive to learning, both independently and with peers. Children are well prepared for the key stage 1 curriculum and transition into Year 1.

Leaders and governors have clear, shared values and are committed to equality, which underpin all that the school does. They create a positive, professional culture of kindness and high expectations. Leaders put children first and meet their needs very well. This is particularly so for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are disadvantaged or are known to social care. Together, leaders create a calm, welcoming environment where pupils get off to a great start to their education. Leaders work well with parents and carers, who are overwhelmingly supportive of the school.

Governors are knowledgeable about their statutory duties. They understand their safeguarding responsibilities and ensure they are trained to carry them out. They allocate resources and support in ways that benefit all pupils. Governors support and hold leaders to account effectively. Leaders consider the impact of any changes on staff wellbeing and workload. Leaders ensure that staff have an appropriate programme of professional development. This enables them to carry out their roles well. Staff are unanimously proud to be part of the school.

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

Pupils arrive to a warm welcome from staff every morning. Staff know pupils well and use their expertise to provide precisely the right support for anyone who may need it. Pupils are proud to be part of the school. They particularly enjoy contributing to the school community as library monitors, school councillors, and by helping with worship in school assemblies.

Well-established routines help pupils feel safe, secure and ready to learn. Pupils' excellent behaviour is highly conducive to learning. This positive attitude is instilled from the Nursery and is deeply embedded throughout the school. Staff act as strong role models for the school's values of kindness and respect. Pupils love playing and socialising at lunchtime. The playground is deliberately designed so that pupils can learn and build their confidence through playing and exploring with their friends. Pupils play happily together and know it is right to love and include everyone. Bullying is rare, but pupils rightly trust staff to help them if it were ever to happen. Pupils' attendance levels are generally in line with the national average. When attendance falls below the school's expectations, leaders provide tailored pastoral care and support to help each pupil and their family.

The school has developed a broad and ambitious curriculum, which staff routinely refine in response to pupils' changing needs and interests. Leaders have embedded highly effective strategies to identify pupils' needs and address them swiftly. The school environment is deliberately designed to support pupils' learning and wellbeing extremely well. Communication and language are prioritised from the very start. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, typically achieve well from their starting points. In the past, some pupils with gaps in their phonics knowledge struggled to catch up, which hindered their reading fluency. Leaders identified this and successfully introduced adaptive teaching strategies so that all pupils, regardless of their barriers to learning, now achieve well and become fluent readers.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to embed their adaptive practices so that pupils with low starting points catch up rapidly and are very well prepared for the key stage 2 curriculum.
 - Leaders should ensure that pupils with barriers to learning and/or wellbeing attend school regularly.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Dr Liz Thundow.

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 executive headteacher, the head of school, the assistant headteachers, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority and the diocese of Canterbury during the inspection.

The school is registered as having a Christian religious character.

Executive headteacher Head of school: Elizabeth Thomas-Friend Lucy St John

Lead inspector:

Jo Brinkley, His Majesty's Inspector


Team inspectors:

Gillian Lovatt-Young, Ofsted Inspector

Megan Underhill, 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 6 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

308

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)

11.19%

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

2.92%

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

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).

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)	5.5%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	4.9%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	4.4%	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)	13.8%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	6.1%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	7.7%	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.

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