

Sutton St James Community Primary School

Address: Bells Drove, Sutton St James, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE12 0JG

Unique reference number (URN): 120420

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

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils achieve well from their starting points. Most pupils reach the expected standard by the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Outcomes are often in line with, or above, national figures. Progress is a strength, especially in reading and mathematics, where many pupils make strong gains over time. They learn to read with confidence and develop fluency as they move through the school. Older pupils read with expression and can talk about texts and their ideas. In mathematics, pupils use appropriate vocabulary and demonstrate growing conceptual understanding, applying their knowledge with confidence.

Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make steady progress. Targeted support helps them access learning and keep up with their peers. This helps many pupils grow in confidence and independence across subjects. Across the wider curriculum, there is evidence of progression, such as developing chronological understanding in history.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders focus on attendance and set high expectations of all pupils. Most pupils attend school regularly. Leaders track attendance closely and act early when concerns arise. They use a clear and supportive approach to help families improve attendance. This includes regular contact, home visits and practical support such as before- and after-school care. Leaders work well with other services when needed. This approach helps many pupils improve their attendance over time. Attendance for disadvantaged pupils is positive, although slightly lower than for others. Leaders understand these patterns and continue to take action to reduce persistent absence.

Behaviour across the school is calm and positive. Pupils follow clear routines and show respect to staff and each other. They take pride in their work and stay focused in lessons. The school uses a clear reward system, which pupils value and understand. Staff use consistent approaches to help pupils manage their behaviour. When issues occur, staff support pupils to reflect and make better choices. Bullying is rare. Staff deal with concerns quickly. Consequently, pupils feel safe and included. Staff adapt behaviour support to meet individual needs, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most pupils show positive attitudes and enjoy learning.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders provide clear direction for the curriculum and teaching. They have put structures in place to support pupils' learning. Children start each day with short tasks that build key skills such as practising correct letter formation. This helps pupils to embed foundational knowledge.

Phonics teaching secures foundations in early reading. Staff teach phonics in a clear and consistent way. This helps pupils learn to decode unfamiliar words and develop reading fluency. Teachers help pupils understand texts through careful modelling and questioning.

Reading has a high priority across the school. The English curriculum helps pupils understand and grasp the foundations of writing. Teachers support pupils to plan, discuss and improve their work. Consequently, in English lessons, pupils use grammar and vocabulary well. However, teachers do not consistently check how well pupils remember and apply these writing skills across the wider curriculum subjects.

Teachers model learning well and use practical resources to support learning. Teachers encourage pupils to explain their thinking and fix errors. The wider curriculum is broad and engaging. Pupils learn key knowledge across subjects. Teaching supports all pupils through clear explanations. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils are supported through the use of adapted tasks.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders create a culture where every pupil feels valued and included. Staff identify needs early and act quickly to reduce barriers to learning. Teachers assess pupils carefully and meet regularly to review progress and set targets. They use a clear assess, plan, do and review cycle. This helps staff adjust support so pupils keep moving forward.

Staff support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities well. Teachers use clear routines, visual resources and small steps to help these pupils succeed. Staff build positive relationships and tailor support to each child, including those with education, health and care plans. Leaders support disadvantaged pupils through a clear pupil premium strategy. Funding is used to help pupils improve in speech and language, reading, mathematics and attendance. Pupils access both learning and wellbeing support, such as emotional literacy and therapy sessions. Many pupils gain confidence, take part more and feel ready to learn. No pupil misses activities because of cost.

Leaders support pupils known or previously known to social care with care and consistency. They work closely with families and other professionals. Plans are reviewed often to keep support effective.

Leaders continue to check the long-term impact of support to ensure that all pupils receive the correct support academically and socially.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leadership and governance provide a clear vision for the school. Leaders keep pupils at the centre of all decisions. Leaders understand the school's strengths and know what needs to improve. They set clear priorities and take the right steps to move the school forward while keeping its positive culture.

The majority of staff feel well supported and valued. They speak highly of leaders and feel proud to work at the school. Leaders take staff's wellbeing seriously. They offer support and flexibility when needed. This helps staff manage their workload and remain positive in their roles. While there have been some challenges linked to staffing, these are being managed appropriately.

Training is a strength. Staff access regular and useful professional development, which helps them improve their practice and support pupils well.

Governors know the school well. They visit regularly and speak with staff and pupils. They check information carefully and do not rely only on leaders' reports. This helps them understand what is working and what needs to improve. Governors provide both support and challenge. They hold leaders to account for key areas such as outcomes, attendance and school improvement. They also ensure that the school meets all legal duties, including regarding safeguarding.

Leaders build positive relationships with parents and the wider community. Parents value the caring ethos and clear communication. A small number of parents raise concerns about consistency of support, which leaders are addressing. Leadership roles continue to develop, and leaders are working to strengthen capacity to support the school's future growth.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise pupils' personal development and wellbeing. The programme is clear and well planned. It supports pupils to grow in confidence and stay safe. The personal, social and health education curriculum is effective. Pupils learn about different types of relationships, health and online safety. This helps pupils understand different risks and know how to ask for help. Assemblies, visitors and workshops build on this learning and make it meaningful for pupils.

Pupils speak very positively about their school. They describe it as kind, friendly and welcoming. They feel safe and supported by staff. Pupils trust adults to listen and take their concerns seriously. Pupils show a well-developed understanding of how to stay safe online and in daily life. Pupils respect others and value different backgrounds and beliefs. They learn about equality and British values, such as respect and fairness, and show this in how they treat each other. Opportunities to experience different cultures, careers and environments further broaden pupils' horizons and prepare them well for life beyond school. Pupils' knowledge of world religions and protected characteristics reflects the effectiveness of the wider curriculum in promoting tolerance and understanding.

The school offers a wide range of experiences beyond the classroom. Pupils take part in clubs, sports, trips and creative activities. These opportunities help pupils build confidence, resilience and ambition. Pupils also take on leadership roles. These include school council, shell bankers and playground leaders. Pupils enjoy these roles and take pride in them.

Staff provide pupils with effective pastoral care by supporting pupils' emotional and physical health. Pupils learn how to manage their feelings and make healthy choices. The school supports all pupils who need extra help with anxiety or social skills. This includes those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and those known or previously known to social care.

Needs attention ●

Early years

Needs attention ●

Early years provision needs developing so that all children achieve as well as they should. Leaders have begun to strengthen this area. They have adapted the curriculum to place a stronger focus on communication, language and early skills. However, teaching is not consistent. Some staff use questions well to develop children's thinking and language. Others do not interact as effectively, particularly in outdoor provision where support is more supervisory. This limits learning. Children do not have enough chances to practise writing on their own. This slows their progress and leads to reliance on adult support.

Transition into Reception Year works well. Staff identify needs early and provide some targeted support.

The learning environment is positive and well resourced. Children access a range of activities that support imaginative play, exploration and physical development. Staff build warm relationships so children feel safe and cared for. Resources reflect different cultures and support inclusion.

Expectations of children's behaviour and routines vary. Instances of low-level inappropriate behaviour are not always addressed, and transitions between activities can be noisy and disorganised, reducing learning time and limiting children's readiness for the structure of Year 1.

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

Pupils enjoy coming to this school. They describe it as friendly, caring and safe. Pupils know that adults listen to them and take their worries seriously. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online, and they trust staff to help them if they need support.

Pupils behave well. They follow routines, settle quickly to learning and take pride in their work. Classrooms, especially in older year groups, are calm and purposeful. Pupils respond well to the school's rewards system and enjoy earning shells and taking on responsibilities, for example as librarians or shell bankers. When behaviour falls short, staff help pupils reflect and improve.

Pupils learn a broad range of subjects and enjoy their lessons. They speak positively about reading. Pupils use phonics well in the early years and key stage 1, and older pupils read with increasing fluency and expression. In mathematics, pupils show confidence and often try to challenge themselves. Most pupils achieve well and make good progress from their starting points. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities learn alongside their classmates and receive support that helps them take part in lessons and school life. Disadvantaged pupils benefit from a range of support and wider opportunities.

Pupils value the chance to join clubs, trips and activities, from sports and creative clubs to residential visits. These experiences help pupils build confidence and develop new interests. Pupils take pride in contributing to school life. They take on leadership roles, raise money for charities and take part in community events. Pupils attend school regularly.

Children in the early years enjoy playing, exploring and beginning to learn key skills. However, the quality of support they receive is not always consistent. At times, learning activities do not help them deepen their understanding or prepare them fully for Year 1.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teaching in the early years consistently builds on what children already know, with clearly defined learning purposes so that all children, including the highest attaining children, are suitably well prepared for their next stage.
 - Leaders should ensure that the learning environment in the early years consistently supports children to learn, with clear and well-established routines, expectations for behaviour and noise levels that allow all children to engage fully in learning.
 - Leaders should ensure that teachers across all subjects consistently identify and address gaps in pupils' foundational skills, including spelling and handwriting, so that pupils build securely on prior learning in all areas of the curriculum.
 - Leaders and governors should continue to strengthen leadership at all levels, developing the senior team further to secure consistency, build capacity and sustain improvement across the school.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Vicki Newton.

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 pupils, staff, senior leaders, governors and a representative of the local authority during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher: Claire Willows

Lead inspector:

Luella Dhoore, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Debonair Brown, 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 2 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

130

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

140

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)

27.69%

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

5.38%

Above 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

17.69%

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

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	71%	61%	Above
2024/25 (final)	77%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	68%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	69%	60%	Above

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	77%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	92%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	68%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	75%	73%	Close to average

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	71%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	77%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	68%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	69%	71%	Close to average

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	77%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	85%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	68%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	81%	73%	Above

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	44%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	S	47%	S

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	S	46%	S
2022/23 (final)	50%	44%	Close to average

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	56%	62%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	S	63%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23 (final)	63%	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	44%	59%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	59%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S
2022/23 (final)	50%	58%	Close to average

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	50%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	61%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23 (final)	63%	59%	Close to average

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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	44%	68%	-23 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	69%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
2022/23 (final)	50%	66%	-16 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	56%	80%	-24 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
2022/23 (final)	63%	78%	-16 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	44%	78%	-33 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	78%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S
2022/23 (final)	50%	77%	-27 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	50%	80%	-30 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	63%	79%	-17 pp

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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)	5.4%	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)	5.9%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	7.8%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	14.0%	16.2%	Close to average

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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