

St Vincent's Catholic Primary School

Address: Hammersmith Gardens, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU5 5RG

Unique reference number (URN): 145325

Inspection report: 14 July 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 ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Pupils' attendance overall and for groups such as disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has risen in recent years. It is now above the national average. This is because leaders have intensified their focus on getting all pupils into school as often as possible. They have developed robust systems for tracking pupils' attendance. These enable leaders to spot pupils whose attendance drops. They take swift action when this is the case. Leaders build relationships and put support in place for pupils and their families so that they can overcome any barriers to regular attendance.

Leaders have established a culture of high expectations for pupils' conduct in and out of lessons. Their approach to behaviour management is clearly set out, so that staff and pupils understand it well. Leaders, staff and older pupils are excellent role models. From the early years onwards, pupils learn to recognise and manage their emotions, including pupils whose additional needs make this more of a challenge. Pupils regulate their behaviour and resolve minor conflicts, often independently. As a result, staff hardly ever need to remind pupils about their behaviour, incidents of unkindness such as bullying and discrimination are infrequent. The atmosphere is highly conducive to learning.

Early years

Strong standard ●

Leaders have strengthened the early years curriculum in recent times. They have ensured it sets out clearly the essential knowledge and skills children should learn as they move from Nursery to the Reception Year and then on to Year 1. There is a focus on communication and language, particularly in light of the high number of children entering the school whose first language is not English. Leaders ensure that the curriculum gives children strong foundations in reading, writing and mathematics. Phonics, early writing and number knowledge are taught consistently well. Children are very well prepared for their later learning in key stage 1 and beyond.

Throughout the early years setting, staff know children very well. They look after children's welfare and provide sensitive support that enables children to learn and play happily. Leaders ensure that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who face other barriers to learning receive tailored support. This enables them to progress socially, emotionally and academically. Staff use their knowledge of children's needs to interact positively with them throughout the day. Staff take every opportunity to ask questions, model key language and prompt children to consolidate their learning through play in all areas of the early years curriculum.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders are rigorous in their initial and ongoing assessments of pupils' needs. They waste no time in identifying any barriers pupils face to attendance, achievement or social success. Whether pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are disadvantaged, known to social care or speakers of other languages, leaders set up provision to remove the

potential barriers as quickly as possible. They liaise with parents and carers, involving them in the process of setting and reviewing precise targets for each individual pupil.

Leaders keep a close eye on pupils' progress. They skilfully adjust the support pupils receive as needed. Where pupils are eligible for additional funding, such as the pupil premium grant for disadvantaged pupils, leaders ensure this is used effectively to improve pupils' social and academic experiences.

Staff receive effective advice, support and training that equip them to meet pupils' needs. Often, this involves input from external professionals in specialist areas such as speech therapy, autism and children's mental health. Leaders' effective partnerships, for example, with the local authority for pupils in care, consistently enhance pupils' experiences at school. As a result of leaders' actions, many pupils' attendance improves, their progress accelerates and they thrive in all aspects of school life.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders, including those from the trust, have a precise and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and next steps. They carry out rigorous and regular quality assurance activities. If something needs to improve, leaders act. They focus on the right things at the right time. For example, leaders' actions to improve attendance and behaviour have ensured that most pupils are in school every day, ready to learn. Leaders' more recent work to improve curriculum and teaching has already led to significant gains, including a rise in pupils' achievement.

Governors and the trust board of directors maintain essential strategic oversight of leaders' work. They gather high-quality information and ask challenging questions to help leaders drive continuous improvement. Governors and directors bring valuable experience and additional perspectives to major change projects, such as the creation of a new nursery space and impending admission of 2-year-olds. Trust leaders, directors and governors play an important role in ensuring the school fulfils its statutory duties in relation to safeguarding.

Leaders look after staff wellbeing. They consider workload when making strategic decisions. Continuing staff development is a cornerstone of leaders' improvement work. Staff value the networking opportunities and training they receive from within and outside the trust. In many cases, staff take responsibility for steering their own development, for the benefit of pupils and to extend their expertise. Leaders maintain positive relationships with parents and carers. They work effectively with families and other community groups, always in pupils' best interests.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

The impact of the school's programme for pupils' personal development and wellbeing is visible in pupils throughout the school. Pupils are mature, resilient, respectful and independent. They know how to keep themselves safe in the community, near roads and water, and when online. Pupils of all ages understand what makes a healthy relationship, at an age-appropriate level.

Pastoral care has a high priority. Leaders use their knowledge of pupils and their families to provide therapies and targeted sessions that help pupils overcome any social and emotional barriers they face. This instils a sense of safety and belonging. It supports pupils' readiness for learning and enables them to thrive.

Leaders offer pupils experiences to extend their horizons and deepen their understanding of the world around them. Pupils are enthused by clubs such as gardening, cookery and kick-boxing. Educational visits for example, to the zoo and St Albans Cathedral supplement pupils' classroom learning. Older pupils learn leadership and team-building skills on residential trips, and through their roles as faith ambassadors and house captains.

Pupils value difference. They accept and respect cultural and religious differences within and outside the school community. The fundamental British values of democracy, tolerance, the rule of law and individual liberty are threaded through the curriculum, for example in the texts selected for the new approach to reading. Pupils develop a secure understanding of these important concepts that prepares them well for life beyond school.

The programme for personal development and wellbeing is very deliberately planned to meet pupils' needs. Leaders ensure that it is highly inclusive by tracking pupils' participation in the various experiences, clubs, trips and activities offered. They use this tracking, and other information they gather on pupils' needs and their views on the school's wider offer to review and refine the programme each year.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils achieve well overall. They progress steadily through the curriculum in all subjects, building their knowledge gradually and learning subject-specific vocabulary alongside each topic. Children in the early years are well prepared for their next steps. The work in pupils' books is often high quality. In some cases, pupils have gaps in their basic skills, such as letter or number formation and spelling. However, these are closing quickly thanks to leaders' focus on building strong foundations in English and mathematics.

In national tests, pupils achieve very well. Year 1 pupils' achievement in the phonics screening check is consistently above average. Last year, Year 6 pupils' results in the end-of-year tests were above the national averages in reading and writing and close to average in mathematics. The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged peers is narrowing. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress well thanks to effective and inclusive teaching.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders maintain rigorous oversight of the quality of curriculum and teaching. They ensure the curriculum is broad, balanced and adapted to suit pupils' needs and the school's context. If leaders find that something is not working as well as they intend, they act decisively to

drive improvements. For example, they have recently revised the curriculum for reading, geography and history in order to achieve even better pupil outcomes.

The curriculum identifies key vocabulary for each subject. This supports pupils' language development. Teachers model new vocabulary effectively. They prompt pupils to use it when discussing their learning. For example, in mathematics lessons, pupils talk readily about regular and irregular polygons, and perimeter.

Overall, teachers deliver the curriculum confidently. They make adaptations for pupils who face barriers to learning, enabling them to access the same learning as their peers.

Teachers prioritise securing pupils' basic knowledge in reading, writing and mathematics. They revisit previous learning often to ensure it is secure. When pupils are ready, teachers challenge them to deepen their thinking and access more complex ideas. Occasionally, in subjects where the curriculum is in the embedding phase, the activities pupils carry out do not support their progress as well as they might.

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

From the early years through to Year 6, pupils are polite, friendly and welcoming. They consistently demonstrate the school's virtues. For example, pupils are loving, honest, tolerant and respectful, whether they are playing football at breaktime, practising writing in Nursery or solving problems in mathematics lessons.

Staff have a deep knowledge of all pupils. They understand how to remove the barriers to learning that some pupils face, for example disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The pupils receive high-quality support that enables them to achieve success, socially and academically.

The school is very calm. There is no disruption to learning because pupils rise to meet staff's high expectations of their behaviour. From the moment children start the Nursery Year, staff establish clear routines. These continue throughout the school, helping pupils to feel safe, understand what is expected of them and learn well.

Pupils' attendance is above the national average and rising. This is because leaders take the time to understand pupils' individual circumstances. If anyone struggles to attend regularly, they receive help to improve.

In national tests, pupils' achievement is close to or above the average in all subjects. Year 1 pupils achieve consistently well in the national phonics screening check and the majority of children are ready for their next steps by the end of the Reception Year. This is a result of an effectively taught ambitious curriculum, with recent refinements that are driving even better pupil outcomes.

Pupils appreciate the many opportunities they have to develop their talents and interests, for example, at gardening, cookery and chess clubs. Pupils participate in sporting events, learn to play musical instruments and perform in shows and concerts. They fundraise for national

and international causes, and play a part in their local community. Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure they continue to review and refine the curriculum in those areas where it is less well embedded, so that the activities pupils carry out are well matched to their needs and enable them to progress.
 - Leaders should ensure they continue to support staff to address gaps in pupils' foundational knowledge and skills so that these close rapidly and achievement overall continues to rise.
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About this inspection

This school is part of St Thomas Catholic Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Mark McLaughlin, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jerzy (George) Brzyski.

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, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher/special educational needs coordinator during the inspection. They spoke with trust leaders, including the deputy director and director of education and the CEO. The lead inspector met with trust board directors including the chair, and with governors including the chair. She also spoke with a representative of the Diocese of Northampton.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. It is in the Diocese of Northampton. Its last section 48 inspection was in October 2024.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher: Amanda Dowling

Lead inspector:

Caroline Crozier, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Ania Vaughan, Ofsted Inspector

Mike McKeaveney, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from [different sources](#). More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

 The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 14 July 2026

School and pupil context**Total pupils**

216

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

210

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)

10.24%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 26.3%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

3.24%

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

11.11%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational needs support 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	63%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	73%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	57%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	57%	60%	Close to average

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	84%	74%	Above
2024/25 (final)	93%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	77%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	82%	73%	Above

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	72%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	80%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	63%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	71%	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	75%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	80%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	73%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	71%	73%	Close to average

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	29%	46%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	47%	S

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	0%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	44%	S

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
2024/25 (final)	S	63%	S
2023/24 (final)	17%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

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	43%	59%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	59%	S
2023/24 (final)	17%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	58%	S

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	36%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	61%	S
2023/24 (final)	0%	59%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	59%	S

‘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	29%	68%	-39 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	69%	S
2023/24 (final)	0%	67%	-67 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	66%	S

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)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	17%	80%	-63 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	78%	S

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	43%	78%	-35 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	78%	S
2023/24 (final)	17%	78%	-61 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	77%	S

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	36%	80%	-44 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	0%	79%	-79 pp

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

‘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)	3.9%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	4.9%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.3%	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)	2.2%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	10.3%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	12.4%	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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