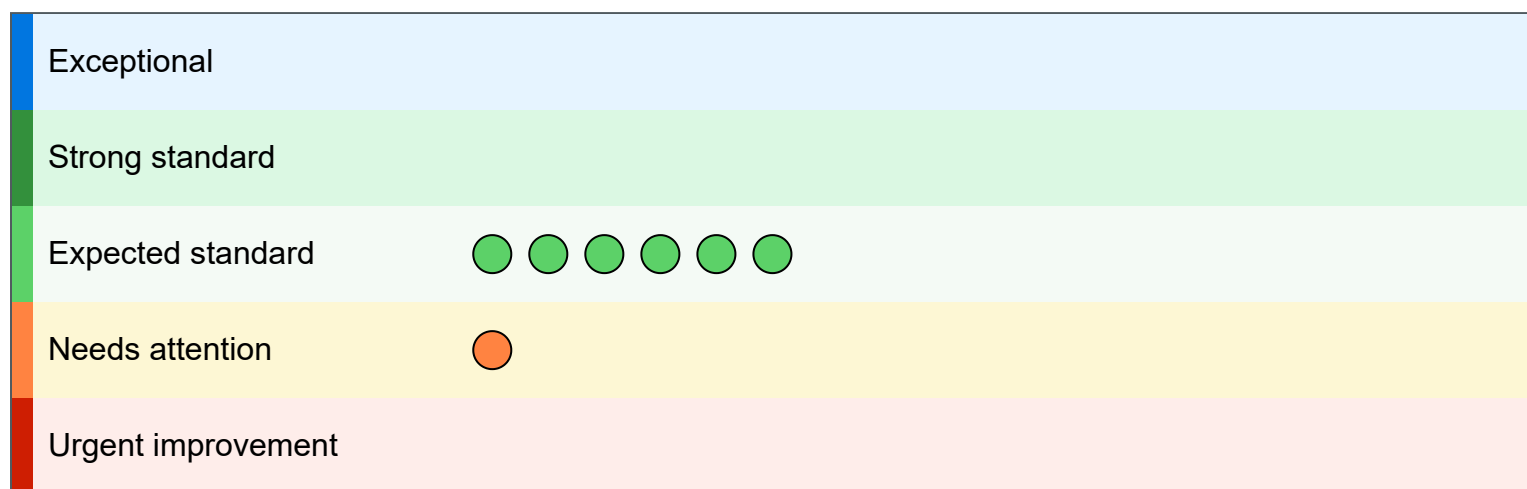


Priory Primary School, Bicknacre

Address: Bicknacre Road, Bicknacre, Chelmsford, Essex, CM3 4ES

Unique reference number (URN): 115000

Inspection report: 3 March 2026



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 

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Most pupils attend well. Leaders carefully track attendance. Their actions to improve and sustain attendance are effective. Staff act with rigour, particularly for vulnerable pupils and those who attend less regularly. Leaders ensure welfare checks and multi-agency engagement support individual pupils and their families effectively.

Pupils' behaviour around school is positive and settled. Pupils describe school as friendly, calm and enjoyable. Relationships between adults and pupils are warm, respectful and trusting. Leaders have established clear routines for behaviour. Pupils greet staff politely, line up promptly and move swiftly and quietly into lessons. They demonstrate positive attitudes and engagement in lessons. Pupils feel they belong here.

Pupils report no bullying concerns. If they are worried, they know who to go to. Leaders' introduction of the 'behaviour blueprint' has had a demonstrable positive impact. Staff are calm and consistent in their expectations.

Staff training to understand autism and sensory needs supports them to make appropriate adjustments. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from strategies to help them with their emotions. The 'zen den' provides a calm and supportive place for pupils, should they need it.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have carefully designed a broad curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils. Some aspects of the school's work on the curriculum, such as writing and phonics, are well implemented. Leaders check how well pupils can read and write. Timely catch-up sessions help pupils to keep up. Leaders' actions to improve mathematics are more recent. Teachers check pupils' mathematical skills with increasing accuracy.

In the early years, children learn letter sounds securely. Training makes sure staff teach reading with expertise. Pupils who need additional help to learn to read progress well with support.

Leaders make sure pupils learn subject-related vocabulary. The clear sequencing of the curriculum means that pupils use their prior learning to help them learn new skills. Pupils speak excitedly about practical lessons in science and learning about different gods and faiths in religious education.

Teachers provide simple instructions and frequently check understanding. This supports pupils well. Leaders ensure that training is used to refine teachers' practice and improve their curriculum knowledge. Adaptations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are typically effective. Where needed, pupils have adapted curriculums. This includes initiatives such as 'Explorers' Club', focusing on life skills, motor skills, vocabulary development and pre-learning for the wider curriculum. This approach supports pupils well.

Early years

Expected standard 

The early years curriculum is planned well. Children are suitably prepared with the skills they need for key stage 1.

Children typically settle quickly into calm, purposeful routines. They are supported by staff who facilitate smooth transitions between staff-led learning and child-initiated learning. Leaders ensure a clear focus on developing children's communication and language skills. Children love books and excitedly share stories with one another. They use their phonics knowledge to accurately sound out words from these. Staff and child interactions are frequent, purposeful and language rich.

Children confidently articulate their learning, especially during phonics and early writing. Most children show age-appropriate handwriting, with additional support provided for some that find this a challenge. However, the work to support early mathematics is a less secure feature. Leaders' tracking systems are robust, enabling staff to identify trends and act swiftly on early emerging needs.

There are clearly defined learning areas for role play, problem-solving and construction. Learning activities are planned and rotated based on themes, ensuring children access a broad range of opportunities across the week. Staff interactions support children's wider development, for example managing emotions and forming positive relationships during activities such as den building. Leaders communicate positively with parents and carers. This supports better attendance and engagement with children and their families.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders' actions to assess the specific needs of pupils are timely and thorough. Leaders plan training and information for staff which informs and supports their classroom practice. Staff develop their expertise through training, such as managing pupils' emotional and sensory needs. In subjects where there is work to prioritise improvement, such as mathematics, leaders are focusing on identifying gaps in pupils' learning. Leaders are ensuring that targeted teaching addresses those gaps.

Inclusion is at the heart of the school's ethos. Leaders prioritise support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils with barriers to their learning. Pupils receive well-matched adaptations to support them. These include sensory breaks, structured routines and effective one-to-one support. The adaptations help pupils to participate alongside their peers. Additional learning, such as 'explorers club', pre-learning vocabulary and life-skills sessions, also helps pupils to participate alongside their peers.

Leaders work well with multi-agency partnerships, including educational psychologists and autism specialists, to shape the provision for pupils. They work with the local authority effectively when external provision or resources are appropriate. Leaders make decisions in pupils' best interests, with additional funding for disadvantaged pupils supporting the most pertinent needs.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leadership is cohesive and purposeful. Leaders have brought about clear improvements across many aspects of the school. They have a clear strategic direction. Leaders accurately reflect on their strengths and are clear about the areas for continued work to keep strengthening the school.

Leaders have ensured that there is a sharper focus on curriculum development, behaviour, safeguarding and the early years. Curriculum leadership is typically strengthened through responsive action plans, shared subject responsibilities and improved monitoring. Leaders make purposeful use of external support to help address areas in the early stages of implementation.

Curriculum leadership is strengthened through targeted staff training. This has been effective particularly in early reading, where professional development has resulted in consistent practice and improved outcomes. All staff appreciate the support for their development and wellbeing. They report that leaders are approachable, supportive and responsive.

Leaders prioritise inclusion and ensure provision is carefully matched to what pupils need. This means that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and additional vulnerabilities can access learning and remain regulated. Leaders prioritise pupils' welfare, maintaining focus on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

The governing body is a knowledgeable and skilled team. Members demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to driving improvement. All leaders are aligned around a shared vision, committed to sustained improvement in standards, curriculum and outcomes. There is unity in the drive to make Priory the best it can be.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The personal, social and health education curriculum is well implemented and supports pupils in their wider development. Pupils understand values such as tolerance and respect. They speak with confidence and maturity about differences. Older pupils articulate ethical concepts such as equality, rule of law and respect. Teachers adapt difficult concepts to make sure all pupils develop their understanding appropriately.

The school seeks to broaden pupils' horizons further through the assembly programme. This enhances pupils' understanding of others and helps to develop morals. Pupils receive stories about equality, disability and diverse worldviews; they show great interest. They explore a range of cultures, families and identities, fostering inclusivity.

Pupils take on a variety of leadership roles. Roles such as school councillors, librarians and bronze ambassadors help pupils develop responsibility and cooperative skills. The school behaviour charter, 'ready, respectful, safe', supports pupils to demonstrate positive conduct and social interactions. Pupils show positive attitudes, expressing pride in friendships and opportunities for teamwork. Pupils have previously expressed a desire for broader enrichment and activities, which leaders are actively addressing.

Celebratory initiatives such as 'butterfly book' help pupils reflect on life experiences and personal stepping stones. Leaders support the wellbeing of pupils through structured social opportunities. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from flexible adaptations to help them manage their wellbeing.

Teachers use accurate and appropriate language to teach relationships and health education. Pupils speak knowledgeably about online safety, healthy relationships, different families and managing arguments. Pupils with SEND are helped to understand more tricky topics through simplified language, clarification and support. This work is helping all pupils to become prepared well for their next steps.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Although at the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading and writing is close to national averages, mathematics is not. Work to improve outcomes here is underway. Although this is appropriate, the school has not had time to embed these new practices fully.

Children in the early years learn the skills they need to prepare them for key stage 1. Teachers use accurate checks and well-matched resources to help pupils achieve well in reading, vocabulary and structured writing. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress steadily from their various starting points. Leaders are supporting disadvantaged pupils to help improve outcomes.

In some parts of the curriculum, pupils' work shows their increasing independence and progress. Pupils take pride in their work and show an improving grasp of key knowledge in most subjects. However, currently, pupils progress less well in mathematics. Leaders are aware that this is a priority. Plans to support staff to improve their practice here are in their infancy.

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

Pupils arrive happily to school. They are welcomed by staff who know them well. Belonging is an important part of school life. Pupils feel supported and valued by staff who know them as individuals. Pupils are positive about their learning and find lessons enjoyable. They take pride in their work. Children in the early years make a positive start when they learn to read and write. This helps them to feel confident from the very start. The curriculum generally prepares pupils well for the next stages of their education. However, some groups of pupils do not yet make the progress they should in mathematics.

Whether through pastoral support, adaptations or resources, staff identify and remove barriers to pupils' learning. This helps pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to make appropriate progress from their individual starting points.

Pupils use the 'butterfly book' to share things they feel proud of or are important to them. Staff praise and recognise these accomplishments.

Friendships between pupils are positive. If pupils fall out or need support, staff respond kindly and sensitively. Pupils know staff will help them and that any worries are quickly and effectively dealt with. Pupils' behaviour is calm, respectful and guided by the clear routines established by leaders. Pupils feel safe. Pupils typically attend school regularly. Staff work closely with pupils and their families when their attendance is low.

Leaders plan a growing number of leadership opportunities for pupils. This helps them to contribute their ideas to the school community. Pupils are proud about their roles as councillors, ambassadors or librarians. Pupils take part in a broad range of experiences. These include sports clubs, music, coding and enrichment days. Through the personal development programme, pupils learn about and understand how to stay safe. They talk confidently about respect, equality and the diverse world they are growing up in.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that actions to improve pupils' achievement, especially in mathematics, are well implemented so that by the end of key stage 2, all pupils achieve as well as their peers nationally and are ready for secondary school.
 - Leaders should continue to develop the personal development programme, particularly around engagement in opportunities beyond the classroom, to maximise pupils' school experience.
-

About this inspection

The headteacher of this school is Claire Laver.

The chair of the board of governors is Michael Simmonds.

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 members of the school's leadership, the virtual school, alternative providers and the local authority.

Information about this school:

The school makes use of one unregistered provider.

Headteacher: Claire Laver

Lead inspector:


Louise Cooper, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Sarah Stevens, 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 3 March 2026

School and pupil context**Total pupils**

142

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

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)

11.97%

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

1.41%

Below 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

11.97%

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).

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	52%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	63%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	46%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	50%	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	72%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	83%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	77%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	59%	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	72%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	75%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	65%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	75%	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	60%	73%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	67%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	50%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	63%	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		46%	
2024/25		47%	

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		62%	
2024/25		63%	
2023/24 (final)	33%	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		59%	
2024/25		59%	
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		60%	
2024/25		61%	
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		68%	
2024/25		69%	
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		80%	
2024/25		81%	
2023/24 (final)	33%	80%	-46 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		78%	
2024/25		78%	
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		80%	
2024/25		81%	
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 (2 term)	5.2%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	6.6%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	6.5%	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 (2 term)	8.7%	13.3%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	14.1%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	17.1%	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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