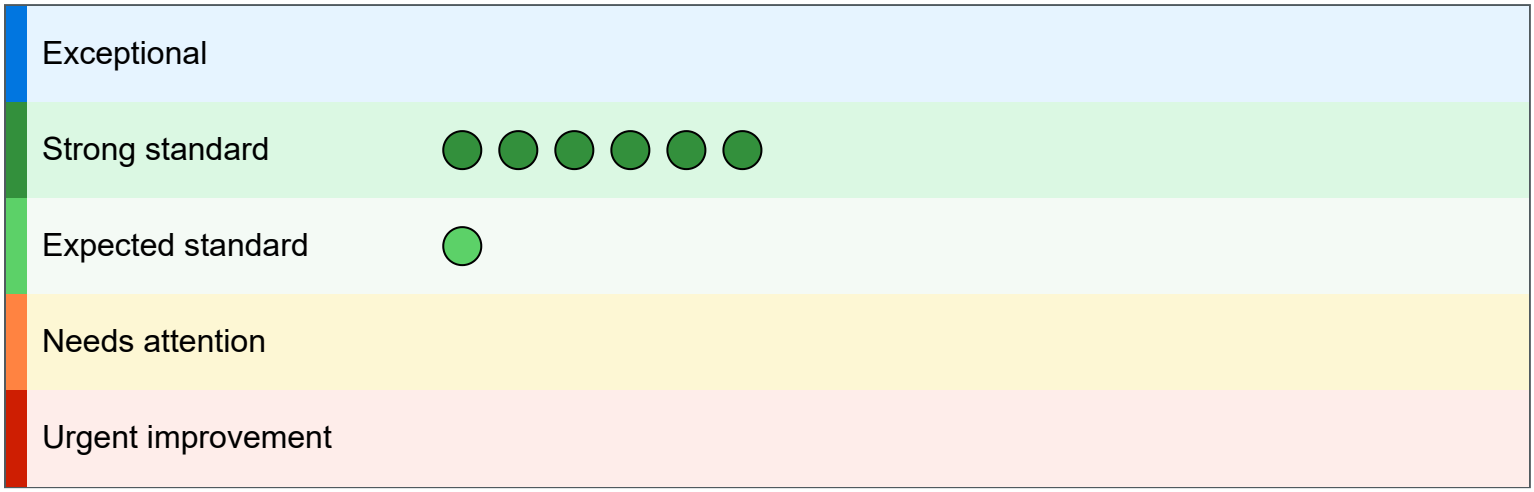
Southill Lower School

Address: School Lane, SG18 9JA

Unique reference number (URN): 109481

Inspection report: 18 November 2025



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

Achievement

Strong standard

Pupils achieve well. Their attainment in national tests show this. Over time, the proportion of pupils passing the phonics screening check has improved and is consistently above national averages. This is because leaders make sure that pupils receive the support they need to catch up and make progress from their different starting points. Leaders act swiftly to recognise and address gaps in pupils' knowledge. For example, their astute checks on pupils' mathematical knowledge, combined with recent developments in the mathematics curriculum, are having a positive impact. The proportion of pupils passing the multiplication check has improved over time and is now above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils achieve consistently well from their starting points and produce high-quality work because of the adaptations put in place to help them succeed. Any gaps in pupils' learning, including reading and writing, quickly close so that pupils are well prepared for their move to middle school.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard

From the outset, leaders set clear expectations for attendance and behaviour. This forms a shared commitment to learning and participation in school life. Leaders build warm, positive relationships with pupils and create a welcoming and nurturing environment, where pupils feel motivated to attend. As a result, pupils arrive punctually, ready to start the school day, and sustain regular attendance. Leaders monitor absences very carefully and quickly spot any decline in pupils' attendance rates. They act swiftly and tailor support for individuals, so pupils' attendance rapidly improves.

Pupils show consistently high levels of self-discipline and commitment to their learning. They rarely need reminding to amend their behaviour. Leaders make sure that pupils develop a deep understanding of respect for themselves, each other and the environment. These values underpin pupils' impeccable behaviour around the school, in lessons and during informal social times. Pupils understand kindness. They play together well and share equipment. Older pupils act as positive role models, as they support younger pupils during social times. Pupils understand what bullying is, and, while rare, pupils trust staff to listen and help if they have any upsets or concerns.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard

The leadership team understands the quality of curriculum and teaching across the school in detail. Leaders continually review what works well and identify areas for development, so the curriculum and teaching are continually improving to meet pupils' needs. Recent fine-tuning of the mathematics curriculum helps pupils build confidence in their knowledge of number and multiplication. The curriculum is well ordered, so pupils build on what they already know and can do. Teachers make learning fun and give pupils time to practise and consolidate what they have learned. They frequently check pupils' understanding of new words and concepts to ensure that they keep up. Pupils work together and talk about their

learning, which helps them explain their thinking. All of these things contribute to pupils confidently remembering what they are being taught.

Pupils develop an enthusiasm for their daily stories and books. Well-embedded approaches result in pupils becoming confident, fluent readers. As pupils progress through the curriculum, they write at length in different subjects because they secure firm foundations in English, spelling and handwriting early on. Teachers routinely adapt lessons so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities learn well alongside their peers. Staff understand leaders' expectations for high-quality teaching and value the professional learning opportunities that help them teach the curriculum consistently well.

Inclusion

Strong standard

Leaders have created a highly inclusive culture across the school. They use established systems to identify and understand the potential barriers to pupils' learning and wellbeing. They work closely with external agencies to strengthen staff expertise and apply specialist advice, making sure the best strategies meet pupils' needs. As a result, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive highly effective support that helps them learn alongside their peers. For example, pupils with SEND develop strategies to become independent learners and manage their own needs such as exercises that help them take appropriate movement breaks so they can refocus on learning.

Staff and leaders check detailed information about pupils' achievement, frequently using firmly embedded systems. Leaders respond quickly to the evolving needs of disadvantaged pupils. When necessary, leaders provide tailored support, so gaps in learning close quickly. Leaders use pupil premium funding effectively to provide well-coordinated pastoral support. This includes targeted programmes to help pupils develop social skills, manage their emotions and support their mental health. Frequent communication with parents and carers sustains a shared understanding of pupils' needs and enables support to be formed in partnership.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard

Leaders, including governors, know the school's context well and are ambitious for all pupils. This ambition is evident in the overwhelmingly positive comments from parents and carers. Leaders work collaboratively as part of the Derwent and Southill Federation. Leaders, including governors, make highly effective decisions that maximise the benefits of this partnership. Shared expertise and staffing create opportunities for professional learning and networking that not only benefit pupils, but also help manage staff workload. This contributes to staff wellbeing and supports the professional development of early career teachers. For example, pastoral support is greatly enhanced by a shared family engagement worker who supports children and families needing extra help.

Leaders take a highly strategic approach to strengthening and developing the quality of curriculum and teaching. They always put pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils, at the centre of decision-making. Regular ‘learning wanders’ by leaders allow them to celebrate what is working well and identify areas for further development. This continual cycle of reflection means leaders act

quickly to make improvements that positively impact pupils' achievement. Astute developments in the early years enrich children's outdoor experiences so they practise and consolidate learning across the curriculum through play. Governors scrutinise the school's performance and check the impact of leaders' work to address priorities.

Personal development and well-being

Strong standard

Leaders have established a rich personal development programme that broadens pupils' experiences and focuses sharply on positive relationships and mental health. Leaders ensure that no one misses out on the carefully planned trips that enrich learning. Pupils gain a deep understanding of fundamental British values by discussing how these apply in everyday life. The school community celebrates cultural diversity through events such as Black History Month and visits from people of different faiths. These experiences encourage pupils to understand the beliefs of others and reflect on their own. Carefully chosen books spark discussion about social and moral issues. These opportunities help pupils develop a secure understanding of kindness and respect, which they consistently show in their social interactions with each other, staff and visitors.

Pupils develop aspirations by learning about careers such as working in the fire service or the legal profession. Pupils learn about healthy relationships in an age-appropriate way and understand how to keep themselves safe, including not sharing personal details or passwords online and protecting their 'body bubble'. Pupils build resilience through sports events and outdoor activities, which also increase their enjoyment of physical exercise and fitness. Pupils understand the importance of rest and staying active. Leaders make great use of the surrounding natural environment to promote positive attitudes toward nature and its impact on mental health.

Expected standard

Early years

Expected standard

Children in early years get off to a great start. They settle quickly because staff know them well through home visits and settling-in sessions with parents and carers before starting school. These visits help staff build positive relationships with children, who then join the school happy and eager to learn. Familiar routines help children grow in confidence and independence. For example, children manage their own hygiene and understand why they must wash their hands before snack times.

Leaders prioritise teaching early reading and writing from the start. They ensure that phonics is taught well. Children form strong foundations in reading, writing and mathematics early on. This is because teachers model learning well and give children time to practise new skills so they gain mastery and confidence. Children learn about different artists and creative techniques, refining their coordination and dexterity as they paint. Teachers use stories to bring learning to life and promote discussion about the topics they have been learning. This makes learning more memorable and broadens children's language and vocabulary. Children usually benefit from high-quality interactions with adults. However, some children

who engage less readily with others do not consistently receive the frequent, high-quality interactions that would strengthen their learning and develop language skills. Overall, children are well prepared for Year 1. When required, leaders share any gaps in children's learning with the Year 1 teacher so that children receive the support they need to catch up quickly.

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

From the moment children join this welcoming and nurturing school, they develop an enthusiasm for learning. Pupils feel safe and listened to. Many pupils travel from the surrounding local area, so leaders act quickly to help them build positive relationships in this small school community. As a result, pupils happily come to school and develop a genuine sense of belonging through whole-school events and outings to the local area. Older pupils take pride in being positive role models, caring for younger children and contributing to the life of the school through the school council or as playtime ambassadors. Service children enjoy their lunchtime club, where they can discuss topics relevant to their family life. Pupils know that staff and leaders prioritise their wellbeing. Through carefully planned pastoral support, pupils develop resilience and positive self-esteem, overcoming barriers to learning and wellbeing. Pupils learn to express their feelings and talk openly about their emotional health.

Pupils behave consistently well throughout the school. They live by the school’s core value of respect. They treat staff, visitors and each other with kindness; they are polite. Poor behaviour is rare. When it does occur, pupils trust staff to resolve issues quickly. These factors create a calm, happy environment where pupils socialise and learn, motivating them to attend school regularly.

Staff and leaders keep a close eye on pupils' progress through the curriculum and act quickly if pupils start to fall behind. They make sure that pupils get the support they need to prepare them for the next stage in their education. Consequently, pupils achieve well, notably in the early stages of reading. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully included in school life. They learn alongside their peers because leaders use highly effective strategies to remove any barriers to their learning.

Next steps

• Leaders should ensure that staff maximise opportunities to engage children in the early years in frequent, high-quality interactions to improve the communication and language skills of those who engage less readily with others.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Neil Parsons.

The school is part of a federation called Derwent and Southill federation.

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 executive headteacher, the head of school, the school's special educational needs coordinator, representatives of the governing board, including the chair of governors, a representative of the local authority, staff, pupils and parents during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school has undergone a significant change in its leadership structure since the last inspection.

Head of school: Sonya Read

Lead inspector:
Mireille MacRaild, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Jessie Linsley, 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 18 November 2025

School and pupil context

Total pupils

75
Well 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

75
Well 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)

6.78%
Well 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

6.67%
Well 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

2.67%
Well below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

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).

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 (1 term)	4.7%	5.1%	Close to average
2023/24	5.8%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23	5.0%	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 (1 term)	12.5%	14.3%	Close to average
2023/24	14.0%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23	9.4%	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 standards expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standards 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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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