

# Leedon Lower School

**Address:** Highfield Road, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, LU7 3LZ

**Unique reference number (URN):** 109509

## Inspection report: 28 April 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.

## This school requires significant improvement

His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires **significant improvement** because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

### Needs attention

#### Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Attendance overall has been historically low and remains below national averages. However, there has been a reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent, especially for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or who are eligible for pupil premium funding. Leaders have achieved this through closely tracking pupils' attendance. They work closely with families to identify and address barriers to attendance. Leaders have put in place effective strategies at the start of the day, for example, to help pupils with SEND feel more settled and less anxious. However, leaders know that improving attendance is an area that still needs focus.

There is also an improving picture of behaviour. Suspensions have reduced significantly recently, as pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs are being more carefully addressed. In class, many pupils do get on with their work well and follow what is expected of them. However, there are still some pupils who quickly disengage, without much consequence. There is a new reward system in place, but this is in its infancy. Breaktimes are lively. When there is a lack of structured activities, pupils soon start to become over-zealous in their play. It does not make pupils unhappy or unsafe, but some find it unnerving. They would like playtimes to be calmer and less noisy. Leaders do monitor and effectively address any bullying or discriminatory behaviour if it occurs.

#### Early years

Needs attention 

Currently, the pre-school curriculum is not detailed enough about what children should know in readiness for learning in Reception. This limits how well staff know what children can already do to ensure they extend their learning as soon as possible. For example, it is not evident what children should know in pre-school about sounds to be ready to start phonics in Reception.

Learning activities pique children's interests, such as about dinosaurs and butterflies. Children enjoy learning new words linked to their topic, such as 'abdomen' and 'thorax'. Staff ensure pupils use important vocabulary, such as 'bigger than' and 'smaller than'. However, the use of ambitious vocabulary is not consistent, limiting some children's language development.

Staff ask children pertinent questions to move their learning on. However, there are occasions where staff's interactions do not help deepen children's understanding. This means some children complete tasks they can already do.

For a small number of children in early years with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), a quieter, sensory classroom supports them to manage their emotions. However, in the main provision, there are fewer suitable adaptations for children with SEND, so they do not achieve as well as they could.

Overall, children in pre-school and Reception are happy, safe, confident and curious. They follow set routines and work well together. They develop the necessary pencil grip and fine motor skills. However, some pupils start Year 1 with gaps in their early reading, writing and mathematical knowledge.

## **Inclusion**

**Needs attention** 

New leaders have worked at pace to accurately identify pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). While the school has ensured that systems and processes are in place to oversee how well these pupils are achieving, these are not working as well as leaders intend. Pupils with SEND are set targets that are too broad. This limits how well they overcome their barriers to learning. Leaders are aware of this. They have started to look at ways to enhance provision to support pupils with the most significant needs. This approach is showing early success, but it is still in its infancy. Staff are not sure how best to support these pupils in class.

Leaders' actions have seen pupils with SEND increase their attendance at school, reduce anxiety about being in the classroom and have more settled behaviours. These pupils have access to visual cues, communication boards and specialist equipment to support them. The school liaises well with external agencies to request specialist advice.

Leaders are determined that all pupils who face disadvantage can succeed. This includes pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding, who are looked after or known to social care. Through weekly meetings, leaders ensure that they review how safe, cared for and engaged in learning these pupils are. While these pupils receive high-quality pastoral support, staff are not implementing strategies in class to support these pupils effectively. This limits these pupils' achievement.

## **Leadership and governance**

**Needs attention** 

The school is emerging from a period of turbulence regarding leadership changes. The current senior leadership team has only been in post for a short time. Leaders are working effectively and at pace to improve the school, ably assisted by an external advisor and the local authority. They all have a very accurate picture of the urgent action needed to improve the school and the training staff need. Leaders are prioritising the right improvements in the right order. Leaders' actions have had a positive impact in a short space of time, for example on behaviour and attendance.

Governors are aware of the need to improve their oversight. They have recently had a review of their effectiveness. They are in the process of making necessary changes to improve how they hold leaders to account. These are at an early stage. Governors fulfil their statutory duties.

Leaders acknowledge that some aspects of their monitoring could be sharper. This includes how subject leaders check how effectively their subject is being taught. Within safeguarding, while there is no risk to pupils, leaders know that their checks on how consistently staff report concerns could be more frequent.

Staff find new leaders approachable and mindful of their workload. Overall, parents are also supportive of the school.

## Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

While the school has a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum and relationships and sex education curriculum in place that meet statutory requirements, these are generally not taught as well as leaders intend. Pupils have a limited understanding of concepts such as democracy or why it is important to challenge stereotypes. They are uncertain about what different world religions exist and life in other cultures. This limits how well they are prepared for life in a diverse world. Staff do not routinely check how much pupils have remembered in PSHE lessons. However, pupils can recall how to stay safe online, about healthy lifestyles and what different types of bullying to be aware of. They can explain confidently what 'ready, respectful and safe' means regarding how well people should interact with each other.

There are limited wider opportunities for pupils to develop their talents and interests or leadership skills. While a lot of sport is offered, such as football and cricket, there are fewer opportunities for music, art and digital technology experiences. Leaders do not check how many pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are in receipt of pupil premium participate in the wider opportunities that are offered. This limits how well these pupils are able to broaden their horizons. There are visits planned to support curriculum learning. The residential in Year 4 is a much-looked-forward-to and memorable experience.

A strength is the pastoral care the school offers. It has a nurturing approach. Pupils can access different therapeutic programmes and specific lunchtime clubs to support sensory needs. There is a range of interventions to support pupils who need help to manage their emotions and feelings. Pupils who have accessed these have seen improvements in their wellbeing, attendance and behaviour.

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## Urgent improvement

### Achievement

Urgent improvement 

Pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Pupils' outcomes for phonics at the end of Year 1 and for the multiplication tables checks in Year 4 are significantly below those of pupils nationally over the last 3 years. Pupils' work across the curriculum shows that achievement remains low.

Pupils have major gaps in their reading, writing and mathematical knowledge. These gaps are not being closed quickly or with any urgency. This includes for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils often have reading books that are not well matched to their phonics knowledge.

Pupils frequently make repeated errors in spelling, grammar and letter and number formation. Some pupils do not gain the basics of letter formation, so their handwriting is hard to read. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have targets set that are not matched to their needs or have repeated, unmet targets. This means pupils with SEND typically make very little, or no, progress over time.

Pupils struggle to recall much about what they have learned across a range of subjects. Most pupils are insufficiently prepared for middle school.

## **Curriculum and teaching**

**Urgent improvement** ●

There are too many weaknesses in how well pupils are taught. There are low expectations for all pupils. The intended curriculum is followed but not taught well. Teachers' checks on learning are not robust and do not inform next steps in teaching. Pupils lack sufficient guidance on how to improve their work, so it is of poor quality. Staff do not adapt learning activities to match pupils' varying needs. Pupils with gaps in reading, writing and mathematics knowledge are not supported well to overcome these gaps. Staff do not proactively address these gaps, nor with any urgency. Staff have started to follow newly introduced teaching strategies. However, they are not applying these in the way leaders intend.

New leaders have a very accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum. They are prioritising the right actions to improve the quality of teaching. However, most leaders are still new to the school. Their work is too much in its infancy to have had an impact. The current curriculum is less ambitious than leaders would like. There is an appropriate curriculum approach in place for the teaching of phonics. However, the teaching of phonics is not consistently effective.

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

For too long, pupils have not had a good enough standard of education at this school. They do not achieve well, as expectations are not high enough. Pupils have gaps in reading, writing and mathematics knowledge that are not addressed quickly. Pupils do not secure enough detailed knowledge to be sufficiently well prepared for middle school. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make suitable progress from their starting points.

Pupils are starting to benefit from the necessary changes new leaders are making to improve the school. Leaders are working hard to make sure pupils get the education and provision they deserve. Leaders know exactly what needs to be done. However, it is still too early to see the full benefit of this work on pupils' outcomes.

Leaders' actions have resulted in pupils behaving better overall. Pupils like the new reward systems and the support they receive for their wellbeing. Most pupils are happy coming to this school and make friends. However, there are still some unwelcome behaviours that pupils would like to stop. Pupils have staff they trust to help them if needed.

Attendance is now improving, but it needs to be higher. Some pupils still miss too much school and therefore miss key learning.

Children in pre-school and Reception generally make a positive start to school life. They settle well into routines. Children enjoy learning all of the different topics. However, the current curriculum design in early years does not clearly link what children learn in pre-school with what they go on to learn in Reception. This means there is not enough precision over how well children's knowledge builds over time.

Pupils love sport and playing team games. Pupils would like it if there was more to do at lunchtime. Wider opportunities to develop pupils' interests or broaden their horizons are limited. When they are offered, such as visits or the residential, pupils relish these experiences.

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## Next steps

- The school needs to significantly raise the expectations of what pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils, can achieve so that gaps in reading, writing and mathematics close quickly. Leaders, including governors, need to check that this is happening.
  - Leaders need to ensure that teachers use assessment to inform the next steps in teaching and adapt learning so that pupils succeed across the whole curriculum.
  - Leaders should ensure that pupils with SEND have targets set that are specific and matched to their needs so they make suitable progress from their starting points.
  - Leaders should ensure that their strategies continue to improve attendance, especially for persistent absentees.
  - Leaders need to ensure that the order and detail of what children in early years need to know is explicit from the start of pre-school to the end of Reception to ensure that staff build and extend on children's prior learning more precisely.
  - Governors need to tighten their strategic oversight and strengthen how well they hold leaders to account for all aspects of the school's work, especially standards in education, pupils' wider opportunities and preparation for life in modern Britain.
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## About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Sam Russell.

There has been a complete change of senior leaders since the previous inspection. The current interim headteacher was appointed in February 2026. A previous interim headteacher was in post from November 2025. The current deputy headteacher has been in post since April 2026.

The current chair of governors has been in post since January 2026.

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.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other school leaders during the inspection. They also spoke to the school's external advisor and the senior school improvement adviser from the local authority. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils. They reviewed the results of the parent and staff surveys. The lead inspector spoke to members of the governing board, including the new chair of governors.

Inspectors gathered the following information about the school:

The school also, under the same registration, runs a pre-school for children aged 2 to 4.

The school currently runs its own breakfast club.

The school currently does not use any alternative provision.

Interim Headteacher: Jen Lloyd

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### **Lead inspector:**

Sara Boyce, His Majesty's Inspector

### **Team inspectors:**

Emma Breckenridge, Ofsted Inspector

Jamie Nairn, 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 28 April 2026

## **School and pupil context**

**Total pupils**

**366**

Above 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**

**360**

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)**

**17.81%**

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**

**3.28%**

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**

11.20%

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 (3 term) | 6.8%        | 5.2%             | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (3 term) | 7.1%        | 5.5%             | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (3 term) | 7.1%        | 5.9%             | Above                          |

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) | 15.9%       | 13.0%            | Close to average               |
| 2023/24 (3 term) | 17.0%       | 14.6%            | Close to average               |
| 2022/23 (3 term) | 18.3%       | 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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