

Ightham Primary School

Address: Oldbury Lane, Ightham, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN15 9DD

Unique reference number (URN): 151233

Inspection report: 23 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.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils achieve highly across subjects. They produce work of a consistently high standard and develop a deep understanding of the curriculum. Pupils talk with confidence about what they have learned and use subject-specific vocabulary accurately. They recall previous learning in detail and retain knowledge over time. This helps pupils build securely on prior learning as they progress through the curriculum. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve particularly well from their starting points. This is because leaders' expectations are high and staff use adaptations to the curriculum with precision. As a result, pupils are very well prepared for their next steps in their education.

Leaders' highly effective work ensures that all pupils secure foundational knowledge in reading, handwriting, spelling and mathematics. The school's sharp focus on the development of children's vocabulary, communication and language in the early years has an extremely positive impact on their outcomes.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders prioritise securing high attendance for all pupils. They know their community well and understand the barriers that affect regular attendance. Highly effective systems enable leaders to spot emerging concerns quickly and act swiftly. Staff work proactively with families, offering sensitive support or challenge when pupils are absent. Leaders also work closely with external agencies to remove barriers for pupils and their families. As a result, attendance is extremely high across the school, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is very low.

Pupils' behaviour is similarly impressive. They pay close attention in class and show consistently positive attitudes to learning. Pupils who need additional help, including those with SEND, receive tailored support that meets their needs very well. They are polite, kind and courteous. Pupils respect adults and each other. They have no concerns about bullying or unkindness because they trust adults to help them with any worries. Pupils' high levels of self-control and independence mean they make a significant contribution to the school community. This begins in the early years, where children learn to take turns and listen to each other attentively.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have a very clear understanding of the strengths and priorities for development in curriculum and teaching. They continually reflect on and refine the curriculum and how it is being taught. They make very well-judged decisions that ensure ongoing improvement. The curriculum is broad, balanced and highly ambitious. It is designed carefully to build pupils' knowledge progressively over time in all subjects.

Leaders ensure that teachers continue to develop their expertise and subject knowledge. They have created absolute clarity around the most effective teaching strategies. Consequently, the curriculum is taught consistently well. Teachers are highly skilled at explaining new concepts clearly. They check pupils' understanding carefully. Teachers identify gaps and misconceptions swiftly and adapt teaching effectively, including for pupils who face barriers to learning. This ensures that pupils remember what they have learned over time.

There is a sharp focus on ensuring that pupils secure important knowledge and skills in reading, handwriting, spelling and mathematics. Staff emphasise subject-specific vocabulary well, which pupils use accurately to talk about their learning and build on each other's ideas. Highly effective and targeted support is put in place to help any pupil who falls behind to catch up quickly.

Early years

Strong standard 

Children get an excellent start in the early years. Leaders work closely with families, specialists, previous settings and the children themselves to understand each child's needs before they begin school. Staff build warm, trusting relationships with children and get to know them quickly. This helps children to settle, feel safe and build learning in a nurturing, stimulating environment where leaders' high expectations are clear.

Staff teach the ambitious, engaging and skilfully crafted curriculum extremely well. They have a secure understanding of each child's starting point. Staff are quick to spot any children who may have additional needs or barriers to learning and put effective support in place so they learn successfully alongside their peers. They provide a range of activities that are highly effective in sparking children's curiosity and deepening their learning. Staff meticulously check children's learning and address any gaps swiftly and thoroughly. Consequently, children thrive. They achieve highly and are extremely well prepared for Year 1.

Children develop secure foundations in reading, writing and mathematics. Staff use every interaction skilfully to build children's language and vocabulary. Reading is a priority. Staff teach phonics with precision. Children quickly begin to recognise sounds and blend words, and they use this knowledge to read and write simple sentences.

Inclusion

Strong standard 

Inclusion lies at the heart of the school's work. Leaders create a welcoming community where all pupils thrive personally and academically. They swiftly and accurately identify pupils who may face barriers to learning or wellbeing, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), those who are disadvantaged and those known to social care. This work begins before pupils join the school. Leaders work closely with families and external professionals to ensure pupils' needs are understood from the outset.

Leaders share detailed and valuable information about pupils' needs and starting points with staff. As a result, staff know the barriers to pupils' learning extremely well. High-quality professional development equips staff with the expertise needed to support pupils

effectively. Pupils receive precisely targeted support that meets their individual needs. This has a positive impact on their learning and helps them develop greater independence and confidence. Consequently, pupils, including those with SEND, achieve highly.

Leaders have established robust procedures to check the impact of support for individual pupils. They use this information to make adjustments, where necessary, to ensure that support continues to be highly effective. Leaders also use additional funding such as the pupil premium effectively to successfully reduce barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders are united in their vision that all pupils feel included, achieve and thrive. Their commitment to pupils' success is clear. Leaders work with purpose to remove barriers to pupils' learning. They maintain a highly inclusive culture for pupils and staff. Leaders' determined approach makes a significant difference to pupils' lives by providing high-quality education for all. The trust's mission statement, 'safe, happy, learning', shines through in this school.

Leaders at all levels know the school well. They have an accurate understanding of its strengths and how best to support its continued improvement. The school's priorities have informed a carefully planned programme of professional learning. This has a clear, positive impact on the quality of teaching and supports staff at all stages of their careers, including early career teachers, to continue to enhance their expertise.

Trustees and local governors are highly skilled and knowledgeable. Trustees provide extremely effective professional challenge and support while holding leaders to account. They use robust systems to monitor the school's performance carefully. Those responsible for governance have a precise understanding of the actions that leaders are prioritising to ensure the provision continues to go from strength to strength. This ensures that resources are managed consistently well and decisions are made in the best interests of pupils.

Staff describe a culture built on trust, open communication and supportive teamwork. Morale is high. Leaders consider staff wellbeing and workload when making decisions. Parents and carers value the school's warm, welcoming atmosphere and the positive effect it has on their children's learning and development.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Pupils' personal development and wellbeing are at the heart of this school. Pupils understand and demonstrate the school's values very well, acting in ways that reflect its caring ethos. For example, pupils are respectful, honest and tolerant in their interactions, show real aspiration in their work, take responsibility for their actions and demonstrate genuine care for others. They learn about different religions and cultures in depth and celebrate their own differences. Pupils have a secure understanding of right and wrong and articulate their thinking with maturity. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Pupils develop a detailed understanding of the personal, social and health education curriculum. They know how to manage risks and stay safe online and offline. Pupils learn

how to manage their emotions, look after their wellbeing and make healthy choices about diet and exercise. The school's age-appropriate relationships education programme is highly effective in equipping pupils with the knowledge they need to make safe and informed decisions.

Support for pupils' wellbeing works extremely well. Leaders and staff develop a thorough understanding of pupils and their families and provide proactive, bespoke pastoral support. Pupils who face barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing benefit from well-considered adjustments that ensure full access to the school's personal development offer.

Pupils appreciate the wide range of opportunities on offer. Leaders ensure that educational visits, including trips to the beach, places of historical interest and the local area, enhance learning across the curriculum. A broad range of clubs, such as choir, cricket and art, helps pupils develop teamwork, perseverance and responsibility.

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

Pupils thoroughly enjoy attending this school. They develop a deep sense of belonging. A palpable sense of care and respect permeates here. Everyone is proud to be part of such a vibrant and harmonious place. It is full of happy smiles and thoughtful words. Pupils feel safe because of the positive relationships they form with caring staff. Pupils' attendance is excellent because they are 'inspired to learn'. Each morning, confident and resilient pupils arrive eager to start their learning. This is a community where pupils flourish.

Leaders and staff are ambitious for all pupils. Pupils take pride in their learning and achieve highly. They show great enthusiasm and approach their work with real commitment. Children in early years become curious and confident explorers of the world around them. Staff know pupils' barriers to learning extremely well. They use this knowledge to make careful adaptations that help pupils access the well-designed curriculum successfully. Pupils receive expert support, which helps them to learn very well across the curriculum.

Behaviour is highly positive. Pupils are very well mannered and polite in lessons and around school. Should any bullying or unkindness occur, pupils are confident that staff will deal with it fairly and quickly. Pupils value the wide range of rewards on offer, including postcards and the 'golden cup'. Weekly celebration assemblies recognise their achievements and positive attitudes. These assemblies build pupils' confidence and reinforce high expectations.

The range of opportunities provided to extend pupils' learning is a strength of the school. A wealth of clubs and visits enhances their interests and harnesses their talents. Leadership roles, such as sports captain, science ambassador and school councillor, allow pupils to be responsible, active citizens. By the time they leave Year 6, pupils are confident, articulate and independent young people who are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Next steps

- Leaders and those responsible for governance should continue to ensure ongoing developments to the school's provision leading to exceptional standards of teaching which has a transformational impact on the achievement of all pupils, particularly those who face barriers to their learning.
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About this inspection

This school is part of The Pioneer Academy 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), Lee Mason-Ellis, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Joanne Bouwens.

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 headteacher, other senior leaders, the trust's regional director, staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with the CEO for the trust. She also spoke with trustees, members of the local governing board and the trust's governance professional.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

The headteacher took up her role in September 2025.

Headteacher: Sue Earl

Lead inspector:

Louise Walker, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Graham Chisnell, Ofsted Inspector

Martin Hacker, 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 23 June 2026

School and pupil context

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

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

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