

Cardinal Heenan Catholic High School

Address: Honeysgreen Lane, Liverpool, Merseyside, L12 9HZ

Unique reference number (URN): 104714

Inspection report: 27 January 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 ●

Attendance is above the national averages and continues to improve incrementally. Leaders have worked consistently well with pupils whose circumstances make regular attendance difficult. For instance, many pupils join the school partway through the year, often with long periods of absence behind them or with additional needs. Staff invest time in understanding each pupil's needs and work closely with families to help to remove these barriers to attendance. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities often benefit particularly well from this work. Leaders make good use of the information available to them to continually identify and support pupils to come to school regularly.

Pupils benefit from a calm and respectful environment. This is because leaders set clear expectations of pupils' conduct, rooted in the school values of 'respect, believe and achieve'. Pupils understand what is expected of their behaviour, and this is consistently reinforced by staff. Pupils are enthusiastic participants in lessons and school life more broadly. They show curiosity in lessons. Boys organise tennis and board games at break time. Post-16 students work with younger pupils as mentors. Interactions between staff and pupils lead to a positive school environment in which pupils feel safe and happy. The school is an incredibly welcoming place where all pupils feel valued.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have created a highly inclusive culture where pupils are well known, cared for and supported. There are consistently high expectations for all pupils. Leaders identify pupils' needs accurately and at an early stage. They use a wide range of information and work closely with families, primary schools and external professionals. This ensures that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are disadvantaged and those facing other barriers receive effective support that is precisely matched to their needs.

Leaders take a coherent and responsive approach to reducing barriers to learning and wellbeing for pupils. Staff are well trained to implement adaptations to the curriculum for pupils. They change their teaching so that pupils, including those with social, emotional and mental health needs, can access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers.

Leaders monitor pupils' progress closely. They draw on both academic and wider information such as attendance, behaviour and engagement. They evaluate the impact of support carefully and adjust provision where needed. As a result, pupils attend more regularly, engage positively in lessons and develop increasing confidence and independence.

Leaders work effectively with families, external agencies and the virtual school to provide coordinated support. Pupil premium funding is used thoughtfully to remove barriers. This ensures pupils can participate fully in school life.

Leaders have mapped the personal development programme coherently from Year 7 through to Year 13. The 'curriculum for life' is shaped around the local context and helps pupils to learn about keeping safe in the community. Leaders use reflections from the post-16 student advisory panel to ensure that the curriculum is shaped to meet pupils' needs. Pupils and students in the post-16 provision develop a broad and detailed understanding about finance, fundamental British values and healthy living. They recognise risks in relationships and know how to manage online and offline dangers. Pupils have a detailed understanding of issues relating, for example, to human rights, the rule of law and debates around the constitution and make-up of the Houses of Parliament.

Pupils reflect on their beliefs and experiences. They are encouraged to consider different viewpoints. They mark a wide range of religious events and explore diverse cultures through carefully selected texts in the reading programmes. Pupils take part in charitable work and community activities. This helps them to understand the importance of working with others and their role within the wider community. Post-16 students build on this through activities that prompt them to examine ethical issues and cultural perspectives thoughtfully. Membership of subject-specific associations prepares students for university and develops their breadth of experience in particular subjects. Pupils are able to articulate how the extra-curricular clubs prepare them for later life. Teachers encourage participation at specific clubs based on pupils' interests and ambitions. Financial and practical barriers to participation in the school's extensive extra-curricular offer are reduced effectively, for example by assisting pupils with travel.

Pupils benefit from a clearly structured careers programme. Through 'Careers in Cardinal' and 'Industry Day' sessions, pupils learn about a broad range of future options. They also carry out work experience in Years 10 and 12. This helps them to gain meaningful insights into the world of work and leads directly to employment for some pupils and students.

Expected standard ●

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard ●

Pupils benefit from a coherently designed curriculum. Teachers have a clear understanding of the skills and knowledge that pupils need at each stage of their education. At post-16, the curriculum has been revised so that programmes match students' needs and prepare them well for their next steps.

Subject knowledge is built over time in small steps. There are regular chances for teachers to check that pupils are remembering what they learn. This is evident in the work that pupils produce. For example, when pupils are given chances to independently apply the knowledge they have learned, they thrive.

Staff use their subject knowledge well to adapt tasks so that all pupils, including those with additional needs, can participate in lessons. Leaders have recently implemented an assessment system. This allows teachers to design learning activities that enable pupils to

progress well through the curriculum. However, in a small number of subjects, this system is not used consistently.

Over time, leaders have increasingly focused on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills to help pupils access the curriculum. Reading support is carefully targeted so that pupils who need extra help can catch up quickly. Work to develop handwriting and vocabulary skills is also benefiting pupils.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's context and can explain their priorities clearly. Strategies over time have ensured that attendance and behaviour remain incredibly strong areas for the school and build a foundation upon which to develop further. More recently, the work to develop the curriculum, especially to ensure that it is responsive to pupils' needs, is leading to swift changes in the work that pupils produce. Governors hold leaders fully to account and challenge areas of weakness. This helps to bring about positive changes.

Staff feel respected and very well supported to manage their workload. Governors and school leaders are mindful of staff's wellbeing when they introduce change. They use a well-informed professional development programme to build staff expertise. They also support early careers teachers appropriately. Across the school, a strong sense of togetherness and clear understanding of the school's priorities help to build a strong sense of community, underpinned by the school's Catholic ethos.

The school is held in high regard among parents and in the local community. Much of this is underpinned by leaders' proactive and effective work with external partners, including local authority networks and post-16 providers. Furthermore, leaders act in pupils' best interests and ensure that families are supported well. For example, they successfully engage in projects that focus on removing barriers to learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Much of this work is helping to raise standards across the school.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders have acted appropriately to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding in the subjects they study in the sixth form. For example, the assessment systems used throughout the school are well embedded in the sixth form. Students produce work that shows they can independently apply what they have learned. Timely feedback on work produced in lessons allows students to quickly understand where they need to improve. This is helping students to develop a breadth of understanding across subjects and is addressing the variable picture in published outcomes.

Students benefit from a wide range of opportunities. They enjoy taking part in activities such as sports, cooking and school performances. Many students also value the chance to participate in trips abroad. Disadvantaged students are supported through scholarships and external programmes so that they can access these experiences fully. These activities help students to develop their confidence, independence and broader skills for life.

Leaders design careers provision around students' needs. They ensure that students receive tailored guidance to support successful transition into their next stage in education, employment and/or training. This helps many students move confidently to appropriate next steps.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' attainment in national tests has been variable. There are areas, including in post-16 subjects, which are below the national averages. Leaders are aware of these issues and have taken appropriate steps to address this underperformance. For example, work to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is having a positive impact in lessons. The work that pupils produce in lessons, across subjects, now demonstrates that pupils are learning and remembering the most important knowledge. Pupils' differing needs are known and understood by teachers, and appropriate support is offered in lessons so that all pupils can access the curriculum.

Despite some of the weaknesses in outcomes, pupils receive appropriate support for their next steps. Post-16 careers guidance is tailored carefully. This helps many students to move on successfully in their next stage of education, employment and/or training.

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

Pupils enjoy their lessons. They show curiosity for the topics being studied and benefit from well-established routines in lessons and around school. This helps them to develop a sense of security and belonging that runs from Year 7 through to Year 13. Pupils joining post-16 from other local schools are made to feel immediately welcome. Despite this, in some subjects, there are areas of weakness in pupils' performance in national examinations, including at post-16. However, pupils now receive much better support to understand how they can improve.

Pupils value the warm and welcoming atmosphere that pervades the school. They behave incredibly well and feel safe. Staff set clear expectations and respond promptly when concerns arise. This helps pupils to feel supported. Pupils appreciate the positive and respectful relationships with staff. They feel confident to approach staff if they need help. Pupils attend school regularly, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This reflects the positive work that leaders carry out with pupils and their families to address barriers to attendance.

The school's Catholic ethos underpins the sense of community and belonging that pupils feel. Mature attitudes in pupils are developed through the trust that staff place in them. Pupils take part in wider school life and value the broad range of activities on offer. They enjoy preparing for their school performances, attending engineering club and taking part in racket sports. Some pupils relish opportunities where they expand their experiences through

international travel. Students in the post-16 provision enjoy taking part in leadership roles. For example, they value opportunities where they can help younger pupils through mentoring positions. These activities help them to build their confidence and self-esteem. They support them to develop skills that prepare them for life beyond school.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is taught consistently well across the school, particularly with regard to the impact of assessment procedures, so that pupils are enabled to achieve well in all the subjects they study.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is David Glover.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The inspection started on 27 January 2026. Inspectors returned on 24 March 2026 to gather additional evidence in line with Ofsted inspection and visits: Deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence policy.

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, school leaders, school governors, the archdiocese, the school improvement partner, the virtual school head and representatives from alternative providers during the inspection.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school uses 5 registered and 2 unregistered alternative provision settings for a small number of pupils.

The school is a Roman Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The most recent section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character took place in November 2023. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place in 2028.

The school has a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leaders provide after-school care for pupils.

The school has a joint post-16 provision with Broughton Hall Catholic High School.

Lead inspector:

Matthew Vellensworth, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Amina Modan, His Majesty's Inspector

Barbara Dutton, Ofsted Inspector

David Woolley, Ofsted Inspector

Chris Meldrum, Ofsted Inspector

Sue Farrimond, Ofsted Inspector

Rob Hackfath, His Majesty's Inspector

Chris 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 27 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,324

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: 1,067

School capacity

1,394

Above 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: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

35.96%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 28.9%

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

4.68%

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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

20.54%

Well above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

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).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	28.8%	45.2%	Below
2023/24 (final)	43.1%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	34.0%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	40.6	45.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	43.6	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	41.6	46.3	Close to average

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.41	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.57	-0.03	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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	11.2%	25.6%	Below
2023/24 (final)	23.5%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	10.5%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	32.3	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	35.4	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	32.2	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.11	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.12	-0.57	Below

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	11.2%	52.8%	-41.6 pp
2023/24 (final)	23.5%	53.1%	-29.7 pp
2022/23 (final)	10.5%	52.4%	-41.9 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	32.3	50.3	-18.0
2023/24 (final)	35.4	50.0	-14.6
2022/23 (final)	32.2	50.3	-18.1

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.11	0.16	-1.28
2022/23 (final)	-1.12	0.17	-1.28

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	85%	91%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	92%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	95%	94%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	28.22	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	28.78	34.38	Below
2022/23 (final)	30.25	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.4	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	-0.3	0.0	Below

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)	7.2%	8.1%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	8.3%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	7.9%	9.0%	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)	21.9%	21.9%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	25.4%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	25.5%	26.5%	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.

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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