

St Thomas C of E Primary School, Halliwell

Address: Eskrick Street, Bolton, Lancashire, BL1 3JB

Unique reference number (URN): 105218

Inspection report: 10 March 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 ●

Pupils attend school regularly because they know that learning is important. Where a small number of pupils do not attend school regularly enough, leaders do all that they can to help them to improve. Leaders draw on close working relationships, for example with parents and carers, to provide individualised support that removes any barriers to pupils having positive attendance. When improvements do not happen quickly enough, leaders take swift action to provide additional support. Leaders know families very well and personalise the support that they provide to have the most impact.

The school is an oasis of calm. Pupils behave consistently well because they are clear about what staff expect of them. On the rare occasions that pupils do not behave well, staff provide expert support that helps them to improve quickly. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They show high levels of respect to others. They think about the impact of their actions and take their responsibilities seriously to make the school a warm and friendly place to be. Bullying is rare. Social times are harmonious because pupils look out for each other and resolve any conflict with ease. Staff care deeply about pupils' wellbeing. Pupils recognise this and thrive because of the trusting relationships that exist across the school.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have an accurate and detailed view of the quality of the curriculum and teaching across the school. They carry out regular checks to gain the necessary assurances about pupils' learning. Pupils learn a curriculum that is very well matched to their needs and prior knowledge. This is because staff are clear about pupils' starting points and help them to build on their previous learning with success. The development of pupils' communication and language skills is central to leaders' expectations for successful learning. This not only helps pupils who are just beginning to learn English, but also helps all pupils to confidently communicate in spoken and written language. This sets them up very well for their next steps.

Staff confidently explain new learning. They have the in-depth subject knowledge that they need to break down learning into manageable parts. Staff adapt learning effectively for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged. They take care to recap previous learning to help pupils remember more of their learning over time. Consequently, pupils build a rich body of knowledge through a curriculum that interests and engages them and promotes their curiosity.

Early years

Strong standard ●

Staff create a nurturing environment where everyone feels a strong sense of belonging. This helps children to settle very quickly into the established routines of the setting. Clear and consistently high expectations support children to get off to a great start with their learning. For example, 3-year-olds develop an effective pencil grip that prepares them well for early writing. Children in the early years learn an exciting curriculum that promotes curiosity and

makes them think carefully. Leaders' relentless focus on communication and language supports all children to make good progress from their starting points. Children in the Reception Year develop a confident understanding of the sounds that letters make. This, combined with regular shared reading, prepares them well for the next stage of their learning. Children show high levels of enjoyment of early writing. Their writing is proudly displayed around the classrooms and shows how children write with increasing accuracy over time.

Parents and carers appreciate how staff care deeply about children's learning and development. Staff in the early years benefit from ongoing training. This results in highly effective interactions that deepen children's understanding and promote their engagement in learning. As a result, children make secure progress from their starting points across all areas of learning.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have an unwavering commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment. Pupils 'let their light shine' because they know that staff care deeply about them and want the very best for them, both personally and academically. Staff identify any needs that pupils have at the earliest opportunity. They use this to plan support for each pupil that helps to reduce any barriers to learning that they may have. Leaders check the progress pupils make to ensure they can learn with success. Teachers are confident to adapt teaching to meet pupils' needs. Many pupils speak English as an additional language. There are very well-thought-out strategies in place to help pupils to be able to communicate well. Different languages and cultures are fully embraced and celebrated. This makes all pupils feel valued as part of the school community and feel that they belong.

Staff receive the high-quality training that they need to understand how to identify and meet pupils' needs. Consequently, staff skilfully reduce any barriers to learning or wellbeing that pupils may have. Staff work closely with a range of external agencies, such as speech and language therapists, to secure positive outcomes for pupils and families. Leaders make sure that their strategy for using extra funding to enhance the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is successful.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

Leaders and governors know the school in detail. They leave no stone unturned in their determination to provide the highest quality of education and care for pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged. Leaders prioritise developments that will have the greatest impact on pupils' outcomes. They regularly evaluate the impact of their actions and make swift adjustments when necessary.

Staff are extremely proud to work at the school and fully embrace leaders' vision for excellence. They receive the training required to enact this inspirational vision. Up-to-date research that focuses on raising achievement is at the heart of the professional learning programme for staff. Staff meet the high expectations set for them because they feel genuinely valued as members of the school community. Leaders carefully consider the implications for staff workload and wellbeing when implementing improvements. Staff

respect leaders' decisions because they know that leaders place pupils' needs at the centre of their work.

Parents and carers typically describe the school as a special place to learn. They appreciate the time that staff take to build relationships with them and how quickly any concerns are resolved. Governors are very well informed about the school's current effectiveness and the areas identified for further improvement. They possess the knowledge required to support leaders in realising their vision for the school as a place of resilience and aspiration. The shared vision of leaders and governors, 'let your light shine', underpins a community united in care, respect and high expectations for every child.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard 

Pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. They are highly respectful of others, regardless of their background. Pupils confidently know how the school values apply to everyone in the school and how they help them to make the right choices. Diversity is celebrated. Pupils from all backgrounds develop a firm sense of belonging because school events and celebrations recognise the full range of different cultures represented in the school.

Pupils take part in a wide range of activities that give them opportunities beyond what they would normally have. The '11 before 11' programme gives pupils a broad range of experiences, such as visiting a theatre and going on a hike, that build their self-esteem, confidence and understanding of the world. By the time they leave the school, pupils' participation in these activities helps them to try new challenges and creates lasting memories. This helps to make learning unforgettable. Pupils learn about healthy relationships. They know how to keep themselves safe online and in daily life.

Pupils receive high-quality pastoral support that helps to reduce any barriers to wellbeing that they may face. For example, pupils who need it receive the help that they need to settle into the school routines and manage their emotions successfully. Pupils hold a wide range of leadership roles, such as being ambassadors for different parts of school life. They take their responsibilities seriously and do their utmost to support the smooth day-to-day running of the school. Pupils see that their voice can make a difference. This prepares them well to be active community citizens. There are a vast range of activities in place for pupils to celebrate and reflect on their learning and personal development, such as the 'let your light shine' festival. These opportunities help pupils to feel proud of their achievements and celebrate their talents and interests.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

The school's published results from national tests are below average. However, the picture of achievement for pupils currently in the school is more positive. Pupils make impressive progress from very low starting points. This begins in the early years, where staff quickly establish the starting point for each child. Many more pupils who attend the school

experience disadvantage than the published information suggests. Leaders put the support in place for disadvantaged pupils to make sure that they make solid progress as they move through the school.

Pupils achieve well in the full range of subjects that they study. Pupils know and remember an impressive body of knowledge. The high-quality work that they produce reflects this. Leaders focus on pupils acquiring the essential reading, writing and mathematics knowledge and skills that they need as soon as they join the school. This prepares them well for their next stage of education.

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

St Thomas is a school where every child is known, valued and empowered to thrive academically, socially and spiritually. Pupils leave as lifelong learners with high aspirations for their future. They demonstrate exceptionally positive attitudes to learning because leaders create a nurturing environment in which every pupil can flourish. Pupils feel safe and secure due to the caring relationships that exist across the school. They know that staff care deeply about their wellbeing and academic success, which gives them confidence that adults will support them with any difficulties they may encounter. Pupils achieve well because staff work diligently to reduce any barriers to learning.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of experiences that enrich their personal development. They view themselves as active citizens within the school community and contribute to making the school a warm and welcoming place. For example, pupils comfort their upset peers and pick up litter without being prompted. They develop a strong understanding of the world around them and recognise that everyone is unique. They celebrate difference and appreciate how the school's values guide them in making positive choices. This prepares them well for life beyond school.

Most pupils attend regularly because they do not want to miss valuable learning. They celebrate their achievements and reflect on challenges with confidence. As they progress through the school, they develop a resilient 'can do' attitude, which helps to equip them for future success. Pupils report that bullying is rare and express confidence that staff would address it swiftly should it occur. Pupils leave the school as confident, capable individuals who are well prepared for their future.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue their focus on improving achievement for all groups of pupils, striving to reach national expectations by the end of key stage 2.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Janet Shallaker-Gill.

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, deputy headteacher, other leaders and staff during the inspection. They also spoke with the governors, a representative of the diocese and a representative of the local authority.

Inspectors met with pupils to discuss what it is like to be a pupil at the school.

The school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. The next Section 48 inspection is due in 2026.

The school does not make use of alternative provision for pupils.

Headteacher: Abigail Fielden

Lead inspector:

Jane Dennis, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Michelle Joyce, Ofsted Inspector

Nichola Tomkow, 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 10 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

365

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

367

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)

31.86%

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: 26.3%

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

2.47%

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

6.85%

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

Well above 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	49%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	50%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	44%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	54%	60%	Close to average

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	66%	74%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	71%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	67%	74%	Below
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	59%	72%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	57%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	49%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	71%	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	71%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	71%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	72%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	71%	73%	Close to average

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	33%	46%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	29%	47%	Below
2023/24 (final)	40%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	29%	44%	Below

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	55%	62%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	65%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	60%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	41%	60%	Below

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	39%	59%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	29%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	40%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	47%	58%	Close to average

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	55%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	53%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	67%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	47%	59%	Close to average

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	33%	68%	-35 pp
2024/25 (revised)	29%	69%	-40 pp
2023/24 (final)	40%	67%	-27 pp
2022/23 (final)	29%	66%	-37 pp

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	55%	80%	-24 pp
2024/25 (revised)	65%	81%	-16 pp
2023/24 (final)	60%	80%	-20 pp
2022/23 (final)	41%	78%	-37 pp

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	39%	78%	-39 pp
2024/25 (revised)	29%	78%	-49 pp
2023/24 (final)	40%	78%	-38 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	47%	77%	-30 pp

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	55%	80%	-25 pp
2024/25 (revised)	53%	81%	-28 pp
2023/24 (final)	67%	79%	-13 pp
2022/23 (final)	47%	79%	-32 pp

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)	5.8%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	6.1%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.7%	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 (2 term)	15.5%	13.3%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	18.2%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	20.8%	16.2%	Above

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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