

St James' Catholic High School

Address: St James' Way, Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 6PZ

Unique reference number (URN): 106142

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.

Strong standard ●

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders have established an ambitious personal development programme. It is overseen by leaders who are driven to ensure it is impactful and that pupils learn, remember and live out fundamental British values. The programme focuses on mental health and wellbeing, with pupils supported to build resilience and develop their sense of self-worth. Regular occasions such as 'thankful Tuesday' promote pupils' moral and spiritual development. Pupils learn about online risks, healthy relationships and how to make the right choices. They can speak in detail about how these issues relate to their lives and the decisions they make. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities, such as poetry by heart, flashcard club and 'knit and natter'. They also have chances for visits abroad, including to France, Germany and Spain. Faith retreats are also part of the school's offer.

Careers education is a significant strength. Leaders have developed strong external partnerships to support increasingly tailored pathways for pupils who want more vocational careers. Older pupils show mature and purposeful attitudes, speaking confidently about exams and next destinations. Leaders listen to what students want and then provide opportunities accordingly. For example, the interest shown in the creative industries led the art department to make links with a local university. Pupils attended the university's degree art show. These actions ensure pupils are well prepared for the next stage of education.

Leaders ensure that staff make suitable adjustments for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This ensures they have access to the same guidance and ambitious destinations as their peers.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Pupils are generally well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training. They develop their knowledge and skills over time. Pupils secure the important basic skills that they need in English and mathematics. This is reflected in the above-average proportion of pupils securing standard passes in English and mathematics in the most recent GCSE examinations. In other subjects, pupils largely achieve results in line with national averages. As a result, they are able to access suitably ambitious courses of study when they leave.

The achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils at this school and non-disadvantaged pupils nationally has widened over the past year. Leaders are monitoring and taking appropriate action to improve this and the small number of subjects where achievement is less positive.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

On the whole, pupils' rate of attendance is above the national average. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils attend at similar rates to comparable pupils at other schools. Effective systems are in place to identify pupils who have barriers to attendance and support them. Adjustments are in place where pupils need them. Staff at all levels are active in promoting attendance. Leaders have implemented effective strategies to reduce occasions of absence. Because of this, the number of pupils who are frequently absent has reduced.

Leaders have established a calm, orderly school environment due to clear routines that are well understood. Leaders have high expectations of pupils' conduct. Most pupils have an ambitious, positive attitude to their learning in lessons. Pupils continue to meet these same high expectations when moving between classrooms and during social times.

Pupils treat each other with respect and rarely disrupt each other's learning. When necessary, staff apply the school's behaviour policies and procedures. Pupils and staff do not tolerate any form of discrimination or abuse. Bullying is rare. When this does occur, staff deal with it quickly and effectively. Leaders ensure that staff make suitable adjustments for pupils who need additional help to manage their behaviour and emotions.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders ensure that an ambitious, well-planned curriculum is in place. They ensure that they have an accurate understanding of how well teachers deliver the curriculum through a robust quality assurance system. This is improving the consistency of teaching across the school and establishing high expectations. Typically, teachers deliver the curriculum well.

Teachers regularly check for gaps in pupils' understanding. They use retrieval strategies to help pupils to remember their prior learning. Teachers use purposeful and incisive questioning strategies. As a result, gaps in knowledge are quickly closed.

Leaders ensure that staff receive the information that they need to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all pupils. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with specific knowledge gaps in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have put in place strategies to address most of these gaps. Pupils at the early stages of reading get extra help to gain the knowledge and skills needed to read well. Leaders' actions to support pupils' writing skills are less well developed.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders identify pupils' additional needs quickly and accurately. This includes disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have ensured that staff have had the training they need to meet the needs of all pupils. This helps staff to choose appropriate ways to adapt learning for the pupils in their classrooms. As a result, most pupils make progress through the curriculum.

Leaders have adopted a 'soft landing' strategy to support pupils who may find transition from primary school overwhelming. In subjects where pupils might struggle to access the curriculum, teachers have made suitable adaptations. Examples include coloured workbooks, electronic devices, such as laptops, and adapted sports equipment. Because of this, pupils are able to access the same curriculum as their peers.

Leaders work with a range of external agencies to provide help for the pupils who need it. They use additional funding carefully to support disadvantaged pupils' attendance and academic outcomes. As a result, most pupils attend regularly and achieve well. Leaders also ensure that disadvantaged pupils have the same access to wider opportunities as their peers.

Leaders use alternative provision appropriately and in the best interests of pupils.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders and governors are united in their vision. They have worked in consultation with staff to bring about changes, including reviewing the school's evidence-based approach to teaching. Leaders ensure that teachers have professional learning opportunities through the established 'teaching and learning communities'. Because of this, the quality of teaching is improving over time.

Leaders prioritise the right areas for development. They have successfully raised pupils' achievement in subjects such as science, languages and humanities. For the few subjects in which pupils' achievement is typically less positive, leaders are taking similar actions to address this gap.

Governors have sought external expertise to ensure that they are skilled and knowledgeable regarding their responsibilities. They visit school regularly alongside seeking other assurances that leaders' priority areas are improving. As a result, governors have an accurate and detailed view of the school's improvement journey.

Leaders work in partnership with a number of external agencies, including examination boards and the local authority. Leaders also support other schools by sharing positive strategies.

Leaders work with parents and carers to strengthen communication and relationships in a number of ways, including via social media. They have also established a parents' forum and a working party for parents of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This helps parents to feel fully involved with school life.

Staff are proud to work at St James'. Leaders consider their wellbeing and workload when making decisions that affect them. Staff appreciate this and, as a result, their morale is high.

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

There is a strong sense of belonging within this Catholic school community. Pupils are happy and benefit from positive relationships with staff. They demonstrate the school's values of family, faith and excellence. Pupils value the support that staff offer them academically and pastorally. They know where to access help if they need it. This helps them to feel safe. Pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning. Because of this and the support they receive, most pupils achieve well. Those who have additional barriers to learning, such as special educational needs and/or disabilities, are quickly identified and given appropriate help.

Pupils benefit from an impressive offer to further their personal development, from trampolining to 'Dungeons and Dragons' club. They understand fundamental British values such as democracy and tolerance and how these values are relevant in their own lives. Pupils develop a secure knowledge of the range of post-16 options open to them. They leave the school ready for their next steps into further education, employment or training.

Pupils understand what behaviours are expected of them. In lessons and at social times, they behave well. Pupils are polite and courteous. When issues such as bullying occur, they know that staff will deal with these quickly and effectively. Most pupils attend school regularly. When there are barriers to their attendance, leaders put in place effective support to help pupils overcome these.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the strategies they are using to close gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils nationally are effective.
 - Leaders should ensure that the strategies they use to improve attendance rapidly lead to high attendance for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
 - Leaders should ensure that gaps in knowledge and skills in writing are quickly identified and addressed for all pupils in all year groups.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Julie Johnson.

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 school leaders during the inspection. They also spoke with governors, representatives of the local authority and a representative of the diocese.

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.

This school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. It is in the diocese of Shrewsbury. The school's last section 48 inspection took place in November 2024.

The school currently makes use of 4 alternative provisions, all of which are registered.

Anthony Pontifex: Headteacher

Lead inspector:

Lisa Corrigan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Timothy Long, Ofsted Inspector

Paula Crawley, Ofsted Inspector

Sue Farrimond, Ofsted Inspector

Rebecca Smith, 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

824

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: 1,067

School capacity

825

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: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

15.29%

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: 28.9%

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

3.03%

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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

7.65%

Well below 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 (final)	46.1%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	58.9%	45.9%	Above
2022/23 (final)	54.5%	45.3%	Close to average

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 (final)	51.1	46.1	Above
2023/24 (final)	52.9	45.9	Above
2022/23 (final)	51.5	46.3	Above

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)	0.23	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.23	-0.03	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' 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 (final)	16.0%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	48.0%	25.8%	Above
2022/23 (final)	25.0%	25.2%	Close to average

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 (final)	36.1	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	45.0	34.6	Above
2022/23 (final)	34.6	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)	-0.10	-0.57	Above
2022/23 (final)	-0.66	-0.57	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' 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 (final)	16.0%	53.1%	-37.1 pp
2023/24 (final)	48.0%	53.1%	-5.1 pp
2022/23 (final)	25.0%	52.4%	-27.4 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 (final)	36.1	50.4	-14.3
2023/24 (final)	45.0	50.0	-5.0

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	34.6	50.3	-15.7

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)	-0.10	0.16	-0.26
2022/23 (final)	-0.66	0.17	-0.83

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 (revised)	95%	92%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	95%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	96%	94%	Average

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)	6.6%	8.4%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	5.6%	8.9%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.0%	9.0%	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 (3 term)	14.4%	23.4%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	14.3%	25.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	15.8%	26.5%	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 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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