

St Stephen's CofE Primary School

Address: Manchester Road, Astley, Tyldesley, Manchester, M29 7BT

Unique reference number (URN): 106482

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.

Expected standard

Early years

Expected standard

Leaders have designed an exciting curriculum that engages children well. They have set ambitious milestones across the Nursery and Reception classes so that children build knowledge and skills that will support future learning. Staff develop children's vocabulary precisely. They model language and engage children in high-quality talk that builds their communication skills effectively.

Children play alongside their friends and engage happily with learning activities that are carefully selected for them. They settle well and feel secure due to the positive relationships they build with staff. Children learn to be independent, supported by consistent routines. Staff know the children well and know what they need to achieve in their next steps in learning. They provide suitable and challenging opportunities for children to practise skills across the curriculum both inside and outside the classroom. Children develop a love of books. This starts in the Nursery Year through rhymes and familiar stories. In the Reception class, children quickly learn to read and write through effective phonics teaching. They are well prepared for Year 1.

Staff build effective partnerships with parents and carers to engage them with their child's learning journey. They quickly identify any barriers to learning and/or wellbeing so that children receive the support they need to thrive.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders ensure that when children first join the Nursery class, staff identify any special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or barriers to learning. Pupils, including those with SEND, receive well-considered support to reduce any challenges they may have. Leaders review plans for pupils with SEND to measure the small steps of progress that they make, such as reducing absence or increasing participation in sports. Leaders know what is working well and carefully monitor any changes in pupils' needs. Alongside a range of external agencies, leaders and staff provide extra support when it is needed. For example, leaders use alternative provision to provide short-term support in the best interests of pupils.

Leaders ensure that staff develop expert knowledge in ways of adapting learning for disadvantaged pupils. Teachers make thoughtful changes so that lessons are accessible for pupils with SEND. They provide resources such as visual prompts and alternative ways of recording work. Leaders have oversight of how additional funding makes a positive difference to disadvantaged pupils. They work closely with virtual school leaders and colleagues in the local authority to make sure that pupils known to children's social care have their needs met.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders enhance the personal development programme to meet the ever-changing needs of pupils and society. It is linked to the schools' ethos and rooted in the local community. Assemblies and a wide range of opportunities that put pupils' learning into a real-life context

supplement the curriculum. The weekly 'windows on the world', alongside a range of visitors to school, engage pupils in thoughtful reflections about the world around them. Pupils learn the importance of valuing and accepting everyone. They talk about cultural diversity and equality with maturity.

Staff teach relationships and sex education and health education effectively. Pupils learn to keep themselves safe, such as with regard to basic first aid and age-appropriate access to online content. They record their learning in class books, which helps them reflect on their learning over time.

From the early years, children's emotional development is a priority. Children learn to be good friends and talk about their feelings. Older pupils use this language to reflect on their behaviour and manage conflict sensitively. They benefit from additional pastoral support and targeted guidance. This helps pupils to regulate their emotions and build strategies to manage their mental health and wellbeing.

Pupils understand fundamental British values of individual freedom and democracy by voting for pupil leaders in school and choosing classmates to receive awards. They develop their character through overnight trips in Year 4 and Year 6. Pupils value these experiences to build their independence and social skills. The range of clubs and experiences support pupils to master talents beyond the curriculum, such as competing in sports events, singing in their community and learning to play a brass instrument. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities fully participate in wider opportunities. This ensures that pupils are well prepared for life beyond the school.

Needs attention ●

Achievement

Needs attention ●

Leaders do not ensure that pupils gain sufficient knowledge and skills across the wider curriculum. Many pupils struggle to recall prior learning and do not build a deep body of knowledge in some subjects. The picture is more positive in English and mathematics. In national tests at the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics remains close to the national average. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged.

Year 1 pupils reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check in line with their peers nationally. Across school, pupils develop appropriate spoken and written communication skills. This is typically reflected in the high-quality work produced in their books. Generally, pupils are prepared for their next stage in education. Leaders check the positive small steps of progress for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with an education, health and care plan.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention ●

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' attendance. This includes disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders monitor patterns of

absence closely. Staff identify concerns quickly and support families to remove any barriers. Attendance rates continue to improve and are above the national average. Many pupils attend the free 'Bee Ready' breakfast club, encouraging punctuality and a positive start to the school day. This approach continues to reduce persistent absence for a number of pupils.

Pupils generally behave well. The start of the day is calm and orderly. Typically, this helps pupils to settle to their morning work without distraction. Most pupils show positive attitudes to learning. On the whole, in lessons, teachers apply the school rewards and consequences fairly, and they remind pupils of these when needed. However, on the playground, some staff do not have the same high expectations for pupils' behaviour. This can lead to some unsafe behaviours. Leaders have made recent changes so pupils can enjoy organised and structured playtimes. This is reducing the occurrence of more serious behaviour incidents.

Pupils learn about the importance of treating each other with respect. They say that bullying is rare. Pupils and staff build close relationships. Staff provide tailored support when pupils find it difficult to manage their behaviour. This support helps pupils to improve their behaviour over time.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Some teachers do not have the expertise to ensure that pupils build knowledge and skills well across some subjects. Leaders do not ensure that teachers routinely use the best ways to teach so that pupils know and remember more over time in the curriculum. Despite this, leaders have put in place a well-structured curriculum linked to their school values. This means that teachers are clear on the most important knowledge and vocabulary pupils should secure in each subject and year group.

Leaders prioritise the teaching of mathematics and English basic skills. This helps pupils to gain the essential knowledge to communicate well, read, write and use number securely from an early age. The teaching of phonics provides children in the early years with knowledge of letter sounds so they begin to read and write with confidence. The recent changes to the school's approach to handwriting prepare pupils to write with accuracy and fluency. Typically, teachers check on pupils' understanding and identify if they need extra help. Where older pupils have not mastered writing skills, there is additional support in place to make sure they catch up quickly. Staff present learning in different ways to make sure that it is accessible for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Weaknesses are not identified precisely or addressed quickly enough. This is because the checks leaders make on the quality and impact of teaching and the accuracy of reporting and record-keeping for behaviour incidents are not sharp enough. Despite these deficits, leaders are dedicated and proud of their school. They understand that areas of the school's work need to further improve. Leaders usually take appropriate action to make positive changes, for example those evident in the development of the early years provision and inclusive practices.

Staff benefit from training that develops practice, such as adaptive teaching. However, the professional learning programme is not sufficiently focused on strengthening teachers' subject knowledge and classroom practice. This limits the impact that training has on the quality of teaching.

Governors understand their statutory duties and ensure that they are met. They are committed to making decisions in the best interests of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Those responsible for governance have the knowledge and skills to support and challenge school leaders effectively. However, on occasion, they do not have accurate information relating to child-on-child violence incidents in school or the quality of education to be able to address potential weaknesses in practice.

Staff are proud to work at St Stephen's. Leaders consider their workload and wellbeing. Engagement with parents, carers and the community is a strength of the school. Many parents are overwhelmingly positive about how leaders and staff provide a nurturing school with a genuine family feel for their children.

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

St Stephen's provides a welcoming school where everyone feels valued. Pupils, especially those who experience barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, receive tailored support to reduce difficulties that they may face and build their sense of belonging. They know that pastoral support, alongside Herbie, the school dog, is always on hand to help them with any worries they may have. Staff know pupils well through trusting relationships. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are thoughtfully considered by staff so they benefit from all aspects of school life.

Pupils have an interest in learning and typically achieve well. However, teachers do not consistently make sure that pupils remember the most important knowledge and skills across subjects. While changes have been made in the curriculum, the variability in teaching hinders pupils' progress. Leaders have not acted quickly enough to make sure this improves. Despite this, pupils leave school well prepared for secondary education.

Pupils are happy in school and attend regularly. They generally behave well within the classroom and at social times. Recent changes to playtime are steadily reducing incidents of unacceptable behaviour. However, not all staff in school have the same high expectations for behaviour. Leaders do not have a clear oversight into serious incidents in order to prevent them. Although bullying is not frequent, pupils know that adults are there to help and would not allow it to continue.

Pupils relish opportunities to have their voices heard in their school and local community through roles such as school councillors and play ambassadors. They thrive in working hard to receive their school award for modelling positive cooperative behaviour. They learn to keep safe, including when using the internet, and are well informed about ways of forming healthy relationships. Pupils are fully prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that they have a clear oversight of all areas of the school's work so that, where an area falls short of the expected standard, they are able to address the precise issues in a timely and effective way.
 - Leaders should develop teaching expertise so that pupils are consistently taught in a way which supports them to build knowledge and skills across subjects and year groups.
 - Leaders, including governors, should ensure that they have a robust oversight of incidents of child-on-child violence and that accurate reporting and record-keeping facilitate their monitoring to reduce incidents.
 - Leaders should ensure that all staff share the same high expectations for behaviour and consistently apply the behaviour policy to swiftly address unacceptable behaviour and ensure a calm and orderly environment across the school day.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Janet Pollard.

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 school leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, and governors, including the chair, during the inspection.

The lead inspector also spoke with representatives from the local authority and a representative from the Diocese of Manchester.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. Its most recent section 48 inspection was in November 2024.

The school currently makes use of one alternative provision.

Headteacher: Jill Southern

Lead inspector:

Emily Morris, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Lisa Woolley, Ofsted Inspector

Janette Walker, 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 10 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

213

Close to 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

236

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)

19.25%

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

2.82%

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

11.27%

Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

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	61%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	63%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	60%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	60%	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	78%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	77%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	80%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	77%	73%	Close to average

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	81%	72%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	80%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	77%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	87%	71%	Above

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	78%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	80%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	77%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	77%	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	52%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	50%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	50%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	57%	44%	Above

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	70%	62%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	60%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	70%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	86%	60%	Above

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	70%	59%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	80%	59%	Above
2023/24 (final)	70%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	57%	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	70%	60%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	70%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	70%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	71%	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	52%	68%	-16 pp
2024/25 (revised)	50%	69%	-19 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	67%	-17 pp
2022/23 (final)	57%	66%	-9 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	70%	80%	-9 pp
2024/25 (revised)	60%	81%	-21 pp
2023/24 (final)	70%	80%	-10 pp
2022/23 (final)	86%	78%	7 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	70%	78%	-7 pp
2024/25 (revised)	80%	78%	2 pp
2023/24 (final)	70%	78%	-8 pp
2022/23 (final)	57%	77%	-20 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	70%	80%	-9 pp
2024/25 (revised)	70%	81%	-11 pp
2023/24 (final)	70%	79%	-9 pp
2022/23 (final)	71%	79%	-8 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)	3.8%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	4.8%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	5.6%	5.9%	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)	8.7%	13.3%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	8.7%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	13.2%	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.

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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