

The Cathedral Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Chelmsford

Address: Victoria Road, The Cathedral C of E primary, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1PA

Unique reference number (URN): 115289

Inspection report: 3 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 ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils achieve highly. This includes above-average outcomes in national tests at the end of Year 6. Leaders provide support for pupils who need it to ensure that they achieve well. Leaders are knowledgeable about pupils' starting points. Gaps in learning are narrowing for the majority of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' achievement in other areas, for example in the Year 1 phonics screening check, is increasingly positive over time.

Pupils develop a detailed understanding of the topics and themes they learn across the curriculum. Pupils progress well through the curriculum. Children in the early years acquire the knowledge and skills that they need for later learning. Older pupils can read fluently with confidence and comprehension. Pupils produce high-quality work across the curriculum. They are proud of their work. Pupils' verbal communication, in particular, is excellent. Pupils confidently articulate how their learning connects to prior learning. This prepares them well for the next stage of their education.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Absence is rare. Pupils enjoy coming to school. Leaders track attendance with precision. They analyse patterns closely and work proactively with families to address barriers. Their early intervention approach ensures that pupils who may be at risk of low attendance receive the right support at the right time.

Leaders use the detailed information they gather about behaviour and attendance intelligently. It is highly effective in informing decisions about additional provision. Leaders ensure that their response to barriers to attendance and positive behaviour are personalised. For example, a board games club at lunchtime encourages collaborative play and turn-taking. As a result, pupils feel safe, supported and motivated to attend regularly.

Pupils behave remarkably well. They conduct themselves with high levels of respect and self-discipline. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. This contributes to a calm and purposeful atmosphere across the school. Pupils listen attentively to one another's opinions and collaborate well. Bullying, discrimination and other unkind behaviours are extremely rare. Older pupils act as excellent role models for their younger peers. They help their peers at social times and in lessons. They show maturity, kindness and responsibility through the well-established 'buddy system'.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders have created a safe place where pupils thrive and flourish. Some pupils refer to the school as their 'oasis'. The personal development programme is a crucial part of school life. The school's inclusive culture and its vision of 'flourishing together' help pupils grow in confidence, kindness and self-belief. Assemblies teach pupils about the wider world, including current events.

Pupils develop a deep understanding of relationships through the taught curriculum. This enables them to be understanding, caring and respectful of others' differences. Pupils discuss the importance of celebrating difference and understanding other cultures with respect. Pupils develop a secure understanding of the fundamental British values, diversity and healthy habits. They understand how democracy works through taking part in whole-school elections for the 'head pupils'.

Leaders focus on nurturing the whole child. They make sure every pupil is ready for the next stage of education. The 'public speaking programme' helps pupils to prepare for moving on to secondary school. Pupil leadership opportunities build important lifelong skills, such as teamwork and communication. This prepares them for future responsibilities. For example, Year 5 'play leaders' understand that this role prepares them to be Year 6 'buddies'.

The pastoral support is well developed and highly responsive to what pupils need. The school's 'resilience programme' supports pupils with anxiety or difficulty settling into learning. Staff carry out regular check-ins. This helps pupils feel safe talking to staff they know well. Pupils learn how to stay safe online and offline. They take part in workshops that help to understand local risks, such as road safety.

Leaders ensure that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, can discover and develop their talents. Pupils have access to a wide range of clubs, music, sports and cultural opportunities. They enjoy representing the school at competitions, concerts and local community events at the Cathedral.

Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The curriculum is ambitious and well designed. Pupils build knowledge securely over time. Staff think carefully about what they want pupils to learn. Pupils revisit key ideas and deepen their understanding as they move through each year group. In subjects such as history, pupils learn important skills as well as key knowledge. This allows them to think critically, use evidence and make links across periods of time.

Teachers ask effective questions to check what pupils know and to challenge their thinking. Staff encourage pupils to explain their ideas clearly. Staff model vocabulary with accuracy and confidence. As a result, pupils use subject-specific language accurately in their spoken and written work. Pupils enjoy reading. The phonics curriculum is developed well. This helps pupils learn how to decode text. Pupils show growing fluency, comprehension and a secure understanding of what they read.

Staff adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs. They use ongoing assessment to check what pupils understand and where they need more help. These checks help pupils remember what they have learned. Leaders have prioritised the development of the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, staff spot gaps swiftly and pupils catch up quickly. Adaptations for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with English as an additional language are established but not as effective as they could be. This is because of

school's changing context and the fact that the provision has not been adjusted as precisely as needed.

Early years

Expected standard 

The early years curriculum is carefully structured. This helps children to secure basic skills quickly and build knowledge progressively. Children benefit from well-established routines. For example, they know what to do and where to put all their belongings first thing in the morning without staff directions.

Staff interact positively with children. They model ambitious language structures effectively and reinforce vocabulary well. Children who are in the early stages of language development get the support and time they need to develop their language. Staff give children regular opportunities to speak and join in. For example, during snack time, staff revisit the 'words of the week'. This helps children to use the words in context, such as 'my fruit is tangy'. Children learn phonics in a sequenced way. This helps them to build on the sounds that they already know and apply them successfully to their reading and writing. As a result, children settle quickly and continue to make positive progress, preparing them well for Year 1.

The 'Little Cathedral' transition plan helps families get to know the school and staff before children start. This builds positive relationships with parents and carers and helps children feel safe, confident and ready for school.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders identify pupils' needs quickly and accurately. Staff know pupils well and make sure that pupils typically get the support that they need. Staff are skilled at identifying and assessing pupils' barriers to learning, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders work closely with external professionals. This helps them secure specialist guidance if needed. This ensures that support is appropriate and tailored to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils, including those with SEND, achieve highly.

Leaders check the impact of strategies and support that are used by staff to meet pupils' needs and overcome barriers to learning. Staff adapt their teaching and routines so that pupils access learning successfully. Pupils' needs are changing as the school context is changing. Leaders are responding to this proactively. For example, leaders have made ongoing professional learning a priority in relation to the barriers faced by some disadvantaged pupils and pupils with English as an additional language. The impact of this staff development is not fully embedded and is not making the necessary impact on some groups of pupils.

Leaders use additional funding effectively in order to support disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have clear oversight of this and evaluate what works best, adjusting provision as needed. Partnership working with parents and carers supports meeting pupils' needs and removing barriers to learning. Many parents are positive about the impact the school has on their children.

Leaders make sure that pupils achieve, grow and feel they belong. They set clear and high expectations. Leaders' work results in steady improvements based on the school's main priorities. They understand the school well and act quickly when needs change. For example, leaders have developed strategies to support the rising number of families who speak English as an additional language. Leaders know that families value the guidance they provide. For example, leaders run workshops to help parents and carers with safety, behaviour and emotional development.

Leaders have worked quickly to improve their oversight of the school's strengths and areas of focus. These changes help leaders check the impact of the curriculum more effectively. Leaders respond quickly to pupils' needs. Training for staff and governors is a key part of their work. As a result, teaching is clear, ambitious and well designed.

Governors have a solid understanding of the school. They hold leaders to account. They typically ask questions about how priorities are moving forward. However, for some groups of pupils, this is not as rigorous as it needs to be. Training has helped governors feel more confident. As a result, governors work successfully in partnership with school leaders towards school improvement priorities.

Staff feel valued and supported. Leaders make sure staff workload is manageable and wellbeing is a priority.

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

Pupils at Cathedral School take pride in being part of the school community. They approach each day with excitement and enthusiasm and have high attendance. Pupils enjoy the lessons that staff prepare for them. They enjoy learning a wide range of subjects. Pupils who find learning tricky are quickly identified and given the support they need. As a result, pupils develop detailed knowledge as they progress through the curriculum. This helps them to progress well from their starting points and achieve highly.

Pupils enjoy coming to school because they feel happy and valued. Pupils are greeted warmly by staff. Pupils build secure, positive relationships with both staff and their peers. These relationships include spending time with the guinea pigs 'Boudica and Blossom'. This helps them to regulate their emotions. Pupils also learn important skills about taking care of animals and others. Pupils talk confidently about their school values of 'courage, wisdom, hope and compassion'. They demonstrate these in all that they do. Older pupils explain that 'wisdom is important because knowledge is powerful'.

Pupils speak openly with staff. They confidently share their worries and concerns. They know that staff listen carefully and respond with care. These relationships create a community where everyone feels safe and supported. Staff manage behaviour incidents quickly and effectively. This includes any rare incidents of unkind or discriminatory behaviour. From the Reception Year onwards, pupils learn the high expectations and follow them diligently. As a result, pupils' behaviour is exemplary.

Pupils embrace the many leadership roles throughout the school, such as 'play leaders' and 'friendship buddies'. Pupils take on responsibilities with energy. They recognise how these opportunities help them grow as individuals. They understand that leadership experiences strengthen their confidence, independence and readiness for later life. Through these roles, pupils share their views about how they can improve their school. The 'eco council', for example, is fundraising for the garden through its own initiatives.

Next steps

- Leaders, including those responsible for governance, need to ensure that they continue to increase the precision of information gained from systems and processes to analyse school performance, especially for some disadvantaged pupils, and monitor the impact closely to accelerate closing attainment gaps.
 - Leaders need to continue to strengthen staff development by deepening teachers' expertise to adapt content and teaching to respond with increasing effectiveness to the school's changing context and pupils' needs.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is James Tyrrell.

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

Following our updated 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 representatives of the governing board, including the chair of governors. They met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator, the designated safeguarding lead and other school leaders.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. The school is part of the Diocese of Chelmsford. The last section 48 inspection was carried out in June 2019. The school will have its next section 48 inspection next academic year.

The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The current headteacher started in September 2024.

Headteacher: Gemma Smith

Lead inspector:

Nerrissa Bear, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Alice Early, Ofsted Inspector

Ceri Jones, 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 3 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

313

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

315

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)

9.58%

Well 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: 26.3%

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

2.24%

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

10.22%

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	71%	61%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	74%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	71%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	68%	60%	Above

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	88%	74%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	94%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	84%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	85%	73%	Above

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	76%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	74%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	80%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	74%	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	88%	73%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	94%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	91%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	81%	73%	Above

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	53%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	63%	47%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	S	46%	S
2022/23 (final)	43%	44%	Close to average

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	84%	62%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	100%	63%	Above
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23 (final)	71%	60%	Close to average

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	58%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	63%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S
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	74%	60%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	100%	61%	Above
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23 (final)	57%	59%	Close to average

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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	53%	68%	-15 pp
2024/25 (revised)	63%	69%	-7 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
2022/23 (final)	43%	66%	-23 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	84%	80%	5 pp
2024/25 (revised)	100%	81%	19 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
2022/23 (final)	71%	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	58%	78%	-20 pp
2024/25 (revised)	63%	78%	-16 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S
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	74%	80%	-6 pp
2024/25 (revised)	100%	81%	19 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	57%	79%	-22 pp

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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)	4.0%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	4.1%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	4.0%	5.9%	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 (2 term)	7.9%	13.3%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	8.0%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	8.7%	16.2%	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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