

Pilling St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Address: Ladies Hill, Pilling, Preston, Lancashire, PR3 6HA

Unique reference number (URN): 119555

Inspection report: 6 May 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

Achievement

Expected standard 

By the end of Year 6, pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well when compared to the same group nationally. Leaders' actions ensure that in these subjects, disadvantaged pupils have the knowledge they need to get off to a positive start in secondary school. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities typically progress and achieve well from their individual starting points. In subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics, pupils achieve well in different year groups. Across the school, pupils are well prepared for their next stages of education.

Leaders are ambitious to ensure that all pupils develop detailed knowledge across the curriculum and consistently achieve better than other pupils nationally. They have established a secure platform on which to build towards these ambitions, but further work remains to fully realise them.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have established effective systems that quickly identify attendance concerns. High expectations and well-established processes help to ensure that pupils typically attend school regularly. Very recently, levels of attendance have increased even further, although this remains at a relatively early stage. Leaders have been especially successful in ensuring that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) attend school as often as they can. Attendance for pupils with SEND has been greater than the national average for several years. The additional impact of leaders' positive work around attendance is also reflected in other areas. For example, over the past three years, there has been a marked reduction in persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders have created a calm, safe environment for pupils to learn and play in. Pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning. Behaviour in lessons is typically consistent and pupils benefit from classrooms where they are generally able to fully focus on the task in hand. Pupils benefit from caring relationships with staff. Pupils are very assured that help is there when they need it. Leaders have established a school environment where bullying and any other forms of unkind behaviour are not tolerated.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed a curriculum that is ambitious for all pupils. Careful consideration has ensured that learning is sequenced in a way that meets the needs of the mixed-age classes. Leaders have successfully established approaches to give all pupils equitable access to the curriculum. When needed, well-chosen resources and adjustments help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities learn the same curriculum alongside their peers.

Leaders have an effective approach to overseeing the curriculum and teaching. Since the last inspection, leaders have established a consistent approach to how teachers identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge in subjects across the curriculum. Leaders provide

appropriate support and training to give staff the knowledge they need to deliver the curriculum effectively. This includes a focus on pupils building up the important knowledge they need in reading, writing and mathematics. Where pupils have gaps in this knowledge, they are identified and addressed in a timely manner. Across the curriculum, teachers typically design learning activities that help pupils to build on what they already know. Across subjects and from the early years onwards, there is a consistent focus on developing pupils' understanding and use of vocabulary.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders and staff have designed an effective curriculum in the early years that carefully builds up children's knowledge and skills. This begins in the Nursery Year and progresses through to the Reception Year. Staff successfully deliver the curriculum for both age ranges in the mixed-age class. Across the different areas of learning, activities provide children with the opportunity to build on what they already know and to develop their independence. Children learn new and interesting words, using them in their creative play. Children benefit from tasks that help them to build up their coordination. They make the most of opportunities to solve problems through cooperation with one another. When needed, staff make considered and purposeful adjustments that enable children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to fully access learning. Children confidently seek out an adult when needed because they know support and care will be provided.

Staff support children very well when it comes to learning to read. Children benefit from phonics teaching that quickly enables them to learn the sounds that different letters make. Typically, children are supported well to develop other important knowledge and skills in mathematics and writing. Overall, children leave the Reception Year well prepared for the demands of Year 1.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have any additional needs quickly identified. This is aided by the effective systems that leaders have put in place. Leaders take timely actions to pinpoint how best to support pupils with SEND. They work closely with parents and carers through this process. When needed, leaders reach out for additional support from external partners. This also helps to inform staff training and develop expertise in supporting pupils with SEND and other barriers to learning. Overall, staff use their training and what they know about pupils' needs to adjust their teaching appropriately.

Leaders monitor the impact of the support that is in place for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. When needed, adjustments are made in a timely manner. Leaders ensure that additional funding, such as the pupil premium grant, is used well to benefit disadvantaged pupils. For example, some disadvantaged pupils benefit from extra sessions to help address gaps in their knowledge. Furthermore, leaders pay careful consideration to pupils' wellbeing. Effective systems in school help to identify any potential wellbeing concerns. A range of social and emotional support is available through targeted interventions. These effectively help to further reduce the barriers to learning that some pupils have.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Since the last inspection, the school's leadership has been through periods of change. During these times, leaders and governors have been mindful of staff wellbeing. This has built a positive sense of teamwork, coupled with a collective ambition to help pupils get off to the best possible start in education. Staff feel trusted and valued. Leaders at the school work well together. They understand the strengths of the school and where improvements are needed. Leaders and governors have appropriately prioritised how the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are met. Collectively, they have responded in a timely manner to ensure that these varying needs are appropriately provided for in school. This includes access to appropriate training for staff which has developed their expertise in helping pupils overcome different barriers to learning. Across the school, leaders make well-informed decisions that are in the best interests of pupils.

Governors carry out their duties effectively. They use their visits to St. John's, along with a range of other information, to understand the different aspects of the school's work. Governors use this knowledge to provide leaders with focused levels of challenge and support. They have a clear understanding of the community that the school serves. Parents and carers appreciate the ways in which leaders and staff engage with them. These include community events in school and workshops on how best to support their children in learning phonics.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, benefit from a carefully considered approach to personal development and wellbeing. In the early years, children are supported well to develop their understanding of personal health and hygiene. For example, they learn about the importance of brushing their teeth and minimising their consumption of drinks that are high in sugar. Pupils develop their knowledge of personal safety and how to take care of themselves in the community. This includes road safety and being aware of the risks associated with places of open water such as the nearby beaches or rivers.

Leaders ensure that pupils, as well as parents and carers are kept up-to-date and aware of how to be safe online. Pupils learn an appropriate relationships curriculum. They have a well-developed sense of moral responsibility and understanding about what is right and wrong. Pupils have an appreciation of fundamental British values, but at times the depth of knowledge that some pupils have is limited. Pupils learn about the different cultures that make up modern-day Britain. Leaders' recent actions to develop pupils' knowledge around this further are beginning to have an impact. However, some variability remains.

Pupils benefit from a broad range of clubs. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities access them. Clubs such as archery, chess, media and team sports allow pupils to develop their talents and interests. The array of culture on offer in the surrounding towns and cities is opened up to pupils through school trips. These include visits to the theatre, museums and an observatory to name a few.

Leaders provide a range of pastoral support, for example targeted therapy sessions for pupils. This provides tailored help and guidance for pupils during times of need.

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

Children in the early years quickly learn the school's Christian value of respect. They demonstrate this in the calm and considerate way in which they interact with one another and with staff. As pupils progress through the school, they learn first hand the meaning of responsibility by taking on different leadership roles. These include being members of the school council, eco-committee or worship leaders. Charitable work, such as providing toy donations to a refuge for women and children, helps pupils to develop their understanding of compassion. Overall, pupils' personal development is carefully considered, however there remain some limited aspects where their knowledge could be more detailed.

Pupils typically leave Year 6 with the knowledge they need across the curriculum. This prepares them well for the start of their secondary school education. Pupils achieve in line with the national average for reading, writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils achieve well across the curriculum. In many cases, they achieve just as well as their non-disadvantaged peers. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported in school and make positive progress from their individual starting points. Children in the early years get off to a positive start in their education. Leaders are ambitious for children in the early years and older pupils to achieve even more. A secure platform on which to build towards this ambition is in place, but further work remains to fully realise it.

The vast majority of pupils attend school regularly. Typically, behaviour is positive around the school. Pupils enjoy learning. They appreciate the need to treat others in a way that they would like to be treated themselves. On the rare occasion that bullying occurs, leaders deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils trust that staff will support them in times of need. This helps pupils to feel safe at school.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that children in the early years develop a detailed understanding across the required areas of learning and development, resulting in them being exceptionally well prepared for Year 1.
- Leaders should ensure that pupils develop a secure and detailed knowledge across the PSHE curriculum.
- Leaders should ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND and those known to social care consistently achieve well, develop detailed knowledge and skills, and produce high-quality work across the curriculum. Where applicable, this should typically lead to above-average results in national tests over time.

About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Nigel Whittle.

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 (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

The inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other school leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. He also spoke with representatives of the local authority and the diocese.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. The last section 48 inspection took place in November 2024.

The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Since the last inspection, a new headteacher and chair of governors have taken up post.

Headteacher: Jonathan Ratcliffe

Lead inspector:

David Robinson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Rebecca Gough, 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 6 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

104

Well 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: 272

School capacity

105

Well 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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

16.47%

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

2.88%

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

10.58%

Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Close to 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	68%	61%	Above
2024/25 (final)	71%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	64%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	69%	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	83%	74%	Above
2024/25 (final)	100%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	73%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	75%	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	71%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	71%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	64%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	75%	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	85%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	93%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	82%	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	67%	46%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	47%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	46%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	44%	S

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	83%	62%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	63%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

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	67%	59%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	59%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	58%	S

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	83%	60%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	61%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	59%	S

‘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	67%	68%	-1 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	69%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	66%	S

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	83%	80%	4 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	78%	S

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	67%	78%	-11 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	78%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S

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

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	83%	80%	4 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	79%	S

‘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 (3 term)	4.7%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.5%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.1%	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 (3 term)	10.7%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	15.4%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	16.9%	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.

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