

St Mary's Catholic Primary School and Nursery, Chorley

Address: Hornchurch Drive, Chorley, Chorley, Lancashire, PR7 2RJ

Unique reference number (URN): 119672

Inspection report: 6 January 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 

Pupils achieve positive results in national assessments for reading, writing and mathematics, matching the national average. In reading and writing, pupils often achieve above the national average, disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities perform well. Over time, the proportion of pupils who meet the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check is higher than the national average.

Pupils generally achieve well across the wider curriculum. Their secure knowledge of the basics enables them to access new learning effectively. Many pupils confidently recall prior learning, which helps them connect ideas when they encounter new concepts in later years. However, some pupils struggle to recall previous learning, which limits their ability to link knowledge across subjects. Despite this, most pupils prepare well for the next stage of their education, carrying forward the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

The school ensures that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, attend regularly. Leaders monitor attendance very closely. They use well-established systems to identify patterns or trends in pupils' absence. When they spot concerns, they take effective action to improve attendance and review these actions to assess their impact. As a result, pupils attend often, and very few miss lessons.

The school sets clear expectations for pupils' behaviour, and staff apply the policies and procedures consistently. Pupils typically respond positively to these high expectations. Their behaviour across the school creates a calm and orderly environment. During breaktimes, on the playground or in the dining room, pupils continue to demonstrate positive behaviour. Pupils and staff maintain secure relationships. Pupils generally follow instructions promptly. In lessons, pupils concentrate on their learning and most sustain focus effectively. Staff address the very few incidents of bullying, discrimination or harassment promptly and effectively, preventing them from becoming commonplace. They know pupils well and provide reasonable adjustments for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, ensuring these pupils engage fully during social times.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The school delivers a broad and balanced curriculum that leaders ensure is sequenced logically. This structure enables pupils to deepen their knowledge and make meaningful connections over time. Many pupils successfully build their learning across subjects and year groups, although some do not yet achieve this consistently. Staff implement the curriculum effectively because leaders provide clear guidance and ensure teachers have the required subject knowledge. When leaders identify gaps in subject expertise, they act promptly to provide targeted professional development, which improves teaching quality.

Leaders prioritise securing pupils' knowledge of the basics to prepare them for future success. Most pupils achieve this well, but some, including pupils with special educational

needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils, still need additional support. Leaders have introduced specific actions to address these gaps, and early evidence shows these measures are improving outcomes.

Leaders evaluate the curriculum and teaching rigorously and implement improvements that are beginning to embed. These changes benefit most pupils, but a minority have not yet fully caught up, particularly in grammar and punctuation. Staff generally adapt teaching effectively to meet pupils' needs. When this does not happen, it reflects gaps in professional development. Leaders know this is an area to work further on. They demonstrate a clear understanding of priorities and act decisively to secure improving provision for all pupils.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children in Nursery and Reception benefit positively from a successful start to their education. The classroom environment supports curriculum delivery and creates purposeful learning opportunities effectively. The curriculum successfully develops children's communication and language skills. Staff engage in high-quality interactions that extend vocabulary and deepen understanding, enabling children to acquire new words confidently. While the provision offers many opportunities to build knowledge in reading and mathematics, the curriculum and its delivery does not give children sufficient opportunities to learn and practise writing skills across the different areas of learning.

The school prioritises reading from the moment children join. Staff immerse children in songs, rhymes and stories to strengthen language understanding. Children secure phonics knowledge early and typically children apply it when they have the opportunity to write. This helps to build confidence as readers and writers. By the end of Reception, children are well prepared for Year 1.

The school communicates effectively with parents and carers, and fosters strong partnerships. It provides targeted support for parents, such as guidance on phonics and number recognition, which enhances children's learning at home.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

This is an inclusive school, where leaders are committed to meeting the needs of every pupil. The school is responding well to the increasing demands for support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have effective systems in place to help them to identify and respond to pupils' changing needs. This includes helpful liaison with families and external professionals as needed. Such collaboration ensures that pupils receive the correct support or adjustment to reduce barriers to their learning. However, leaders do not use their insights from their checks into how well disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND learn to inform staff training. On occasion, this hinders staff's ability to respond effectively to some pupils' changing needs to ensure they access the curriculum well. This is particularly the case for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.

Leaders maintain a clear overview of pupil premium funding and use it strategically. This approach reduces barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. In many subjects, these

pupils often achieve outcomes comparable to others nationally in end of key stage assessments.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders demonstrate secure knowledge of the school. They know where strengths lie and what they need to develop next. Leaders exercise their role with precision. Their insightful evaluation has ensured that they take appropriate action at the right time. Staff feel very involved with the strategic direction of the school. The school places staff wellbeing and workload at the forefront of its culture. Staff voice is overwhelmingly positive, reflecting a workforce that feels valued and supported.

Governors actively support leaders while holding them rigorously to account. Statutory duties are met with diligence, and governors have a clear grasp of the school's priorities. This insight drives decisions that consistently focus on pupils' best interests, including for those who are disadvantaged or with special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND). These decisions have delivered measurable improvements in achievement. For example, the school has strengthened phonics provision, which has led to notable gains in pupils' achievement.

Governors and leaders are uncompromising in their commitment to high-quality professional development. This has successfully enhanced teaching expertise, ensuring pupils achieve increasingly well. However, provision for SEND-specific training has not kept pace with the evolving range of pupils' needs. This gap has, at times, limited staff capacity to provide optimal support for a small number of pupils.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school promotes pupils' wider development effectively. Through the curriculum, pupils have opportunities to learn how to respect diverse values and viewpoints across wider life. Pupils show a secure understanding of right and wrong and engage thoughtfully with ethical issues. Pupils raise money for different charities to support those less fortunate than themselves. They participate actively in school and community initiatives, such as local litter picking, which enhances their sense of responsibility in looking after their local area. Pupils connect with other pupils in a school in Malawi and meet a range of visitors, including a Paralympian. These opportunities broaden pupils' understanding of fundamental British values and inclusion. Leaders ensure that pupils have opportunities to develop their leadership skills in different roles. This gives pupils more confidence in speaking in different contexts and helps to develop their sense of responsibility.

Leaders ensure that the relationships and sex education and health education programme is appropriate and delivered sensitively. The curriculum prioritises pupils' mental and physical health and equips them with strategies to stay safe online. Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including yoga and movement sessions, which support their wellbeing. Leaders provide diverse clubs and enrichment experiences and maintain systems to record participation.

The personal development programme supports disadvantaged pupils well. Where necessary, the school ensures that all pupils can access the wider curriculum, trips and

experiences on offer. This includes residential trips to London or Lake Windermere.

The wider provision is effective in helping pupils to appreciate cultural diversity and heritage. Pupils benefit from a range of creative, artistic and cultural experiences that broaden their horizons and foster mutual respect for others. For example, pupils often visit the local theatre or go to see the orchestra play.

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

Pupils feel safe and appreciated in this warm and welcoming school. Staff care deeply about pupils' wellbeing. This creates a peaceful, focused environment for learning. Pupils trust staff fully to address any concerns or worries they may have. They know exactly who to turn to if they need help, including their peers who act as 'wellbeing ambassadors'. Relationships are supportive and pupils interact positively. This makes bullying unusual. Pupils are certain that if it did occur, staff would take their concerns seriously and resolve them.

Pupils enjoy their learning. As a result, they attend school often. Pupils are enthusiastic about discovering new knowledge and developing new skills. The curriculum is carefully structured to help them succeed. Pupils aim to produce the highest quality work. In this tight-knit school community, staff and parents and carers work collaboratively to ensure pupils receive ongoing encouragement with their work.

The array of activities that pupils engage with, both inside and outside of school, helps to prepare them effectively for life in modern Britain. The offer includes cultural experiences that broaden their horizons and fosters mutual respect for others. Many activities enrich pupils' overall school experience. For example, they engage in a junior version of the Duke of Edinburgh award or take part in sporting opportunities, such as fencing or judo.

Overall, pupils behave well. In lessons, they remain focused on and engaged in their learning. Pupils demonstrate courtesy and consideration towards each other, staff and visitors. From the moment they join the school, pupils are supported by staff to settle in and feel at ease in their classroom. To help pupils reach their potential, the school provides targeted support that successfully removes barriers to learning. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who are disadvantaged. As a result, pupils are well equipped for the next stage of their education.

Next steps

- Leaders should make sure that they provide staff with more targeted professional development so that they can respond swiftly and effectively to the school's changing special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND) context.
 - Leaders should ensure that they embed the new strategies to support pupils' composition, grammar and handwriting development so that it benefits all pupils, including those with SEND.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Matthew Simpson.

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 and other senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator, during the inspection. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority and diocese. He also spoke with a group of governors that included the chair of the governing body.

The school makes use of no alternative provision.

The school is registered as having a Catholic religious character. It is part of the Diocese of Liverpool. The last section 48 inspection took place in September 2023.

Headteacher: Patrick Smyth

Lead inspector:

Stuart Perkins, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Gaynor Rennie, Ofsted Inspector

Clare Lightbown, 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 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

202

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

210

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)

5.45%

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

2.48%

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

7.92%

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

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

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	66%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	59%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	73%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	67%	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	82%	74%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	75%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	90%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	80%	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	83%	72%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	84%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	80%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	83%	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)	72%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	87%	73%	Above
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	33%	46%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	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	67%	62%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	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	50%	59%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	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	67%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	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	33%	68%	-34 pp
2024/25 (revised)	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	67%	80%	-13 pp
2024/25 (revised)	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	50%	78%	-28 pp
2024/25 (revised)	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	67%	80%	-13 pp
2024/25 (revised)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S
2022/23 (final)	S	79%	S

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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)	2.5%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	3.5%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	3.5%	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)	1.6%	13.3%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	6.0%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	4.4%	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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