

Bolton by Bowland Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Address: Gisburn Road, Bolton-by-Bowland, Clitheroe, Lancashire, BB7 4NP

Unique reference number (URN): 119688

Inspection report: 9 June 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' attainment in national tests and assessments differs from year to year due to very small cohorts. Leaders' actions to raise achievement are clearly paying off, with pupils progressing well through the curriculum. Careful attention to supporting disadvantaged pupils and those with additional needs is strengthening their achievement. Pupils are ready for their next steps in education.

Pupils take pride in producing work of a high standard. It is evident that expectations for pupils who face barriers to their learning are high and that effective adaptations enable them to access the curriculum alongside their peers. However, on occasion, pupils make some mistakes in their written work that are not picked up and corrected as swiftly as they could be. Mostly, pupils can recall their prior learning with confidence. In mathematics, for example, pupils showed particular skill in applying effective processes to solve fraction problems independently and accurately.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Most pupils attend school regularly. Leaders have well-established, effective attendance systems in place. They take a proactive and highly-personalised approach when pupils' attendance begins to dip. This ensures that absence is kept to a minimum.

Pupils' behaviour across the school is rooted in kindness. This is underpinned by collective high expectations from staff and respectful relationships. Pupils, including those who face challenges to their learning, listen attentively and are curious in their lessons. They work collaboratively with ease and follow established school routines well. This contributes to a harmonious school environment. At playtimes, older pupils lead skipping and sports games, helping others to join in. They manage any small disagreements with empathy and care. Pupils report that behaviour issues are rare. They say they know each other well and solve problems together. Pupils trust that staff would intervene and take action to deal with any poor behaviour if it arose. Pupils know what bullying is but say it is rare for it to happen.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders are knowledgeable and passionate about their subjects. They have worked effectively to develop curriculums so that they are ambitious and set out concise end points within and across subjects. This ensures that pupils build on prior knowledge and are ready for the next steps in their learning. Staff adapt their teaching successfully to meet the needs of pupils who face barriers to their learning.

Staff receive high-quality training so that they have the subject knowledge and skills to be able to deliver lessons competently. Pupils' books show the curriculum is being delivered effectively and as intended. Staff model content well and give clear explanations, tailoring support to ensure all pupils within the mixed-age classes are supported and challenged.

Whilst the teaching of basic learning in reading and mathematics is secure, leaders have identified that the teaching of handwriting and spelling needs to improve. There is scope to build on the work already underway to ensure that pupils develop secure spelling habits and consistent handwriting styles. Pupils learn phonics daily. Timely interventions happen daily to ensure that all pupils keep up. An enthusiasm for reading is evident across the school.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders set high expectations for children's development and achievements from their first days in school. The curriculum is ambitious and clearly sequenced with an emphasis on teaching early reading, writing and mathematics. The school takes a proactive approach to parental engagement from the outset, laying the foundations for the trusting relationships they maintain throughout school.

From the start of the Nursery Year, a focus on communication, language and vocabulary underpins the curriculum and shapes daily practice. The environment is intentionally organised to promote active learning both indoors and outdoors. Staff make sure that children are well cared for and safe. Children are happy and settled. Those who face barriers to learning access appropriate help at an early stage so that they are well supported to succeed. Staff engage children in high-quality interactions that develop children's conversational skills.

Reading is a priority. In the Nursery year, children enjoy listening to rhymes and stories. This helps them to be ready to learn phonics in the Reception year. Children show increasing independence and resilience as they progress through the curriculum. By the end of the Reception year, they are ready for Year 1.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Recognising the continually changing cohorts in the school, leaders have carefully prioritised support for those pupils who face barriers to learning. Leaders set high expectations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged. Pupils' needs are identified quickly and accurately through a clear approach, with parents and carers fully involved at every stage.

Leaders enlist support from specialist advisors or local outreach services where appropriate. This helps to ensure that pupils' needs are well provided for and barriers to learning are reduced. Pupils' learning plans set out clear targets that are regularly reviewed. Staff receive relevant training to help them implement the approaches needed. For example, they take time to model, explain concepts or provide physical resources, such as ear defenders and sentence strips. Early years staff skilfully involve children with additional needs in conversations and activities, developing their language and confidence.

Leaders have a clear understanding of pupils' needs and track their progress closely. This information is used to inform future teaching for SEND pupils and to evaluate the impact of the pupil premium strategy. Evidence shows that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND are making positive progress from their starting points.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have established an accurate oversight of the school's strengths and areas to develop. They work together to drive improvement across targeted areas, keeping the most vulnerable pupils at the forefront of their thinking. Across school, there is an embedded culture of professionalism and high expectations. Collaboration with other local schools enables leaders and staff to share expertise and good practice.

The governing board brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the school. Governors fulfil their duties in holding leaders to account for pupils' achievement. Governors are proud of the school's warm, family ethos and its position at the heart of the village community. Governors are working creatively with leaders to ensure the school's long-term stability. They also pay close attention to staff's wellbeing, ensuring that everyone feels supported in their role.

Staff benefit from a well-structured professional development programme that aligns to the school's strategic priorities. Staff value this and feel well supported and genuinely cared for by leaders. Staff are proud to work at the school. Leaders recognise that staff take on multiple roles in this small school and are careful to protect their workload.

Leaders, staff and governors maintain this rural school community through building trusting relationships with parents and carers. Pupils and their families who attend here describe a deep sense of belonging.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders provide a coherent and well-designed programme of personal development and wellbeing that is carefully shaped around the school's context. They ensure that all pupils, particularly those who face challenges, benefit from the school's offer. Pastoral care is a mainstay of the school. Staff build warm, trusting relationships with pupils and families, ensuring that everyone feels comfortable asking for help when they need it.

The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum covers appropriate content that prepares pupils well for their futures. For instance, pupils learn how to form healthy relationships with others. They develop knowledge of physical health and nutrition. Many pupils recognise that working outside on the farm contributes positively to their fitness. Pupils learn to understand and manage their emotions and to look after their mental health. In addition, they learn about safety in the community. Those who cycle regularly know that helmets and high-visibility vests are important.

Pupils develop respect and tolerance for other cultures through the curriculum and assemblies. Visits to other places of worship, such as a mosque and a synagogue, help to deepen their understanding. Pupils also enjoy a wide range of other trips, for example, to the woods, zoo, museum and for older pupils, a residential trip to Coniston Water. These rich experiences help broaden pupils' horizons and bring the curriculum to life.

Pupils are proud to take on responsibilities such as mini mentors, reading buddies and school council members. Pupils talk confidently about organising the summer fair and other

fundraising events. They recognise the value of their contributions to the school community. Pupils' talents and interests are nurtured through regularly timetabled 'flourishing days', during which they engage in enrichment activities in the arts, music and creative pursuits. These complement the wide range of extra-curricular clubs on offer. Overall, pupils are well prepared for life beyond school.

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

Nestled in the countryside, Bolton by Bowland school offers a picturesque setting where pupils thrive. Pupils are warmly welcomed through the gate each morning by staff who know them extremely well. Staff ensure that pupils feel valued, safe and well cared for. Parents and carers value this small school's warm, family atmosphere and the positive communication they enjoy with staff.

Pupils develop a deep sense of belonging and attend school well. They make the most of their school grounds, embracing being in the fresh air in the newly designed outdoor learning areas. Pupils mix happily across age groups, with older children supporting younger ones. They show kindness and a sense of responsibility. Pupils embody the school's motto to 'Belong, Believe and Blossom'. They value the friendships they form. Pupils know that if they have a concern they can't resolve, staff will help. As a result, incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are extremely rare and dealt with swiftly.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' achievement. Leaders' work on redesigning the curriculum ensures that the wide age range within each class is well considered. Pupils, including those who face barriers to their learning, consistently achieve well. Whatever their starting point, they make suitable progress as they move through the curriculum. Overall, pupils complete each stage of learning ready to move on confidently to their next.

The community's strong farming roots shine through in pupils' play, conversations and discussions about future farming careers. Pupils confidently discuss national and global issues such as equality and discrimination, using their recent work on Harvey Milk and the pride flag to demonstrate their understanding. Pupils can explain fundamental British values and give real-life examples, such as voting for which sport to play. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that staff's checks on learning are further developed to identify and address pupils' misconceptions in a timely manner and ensure that they are not repeated.
 - Leaders should support teachers to make highly-effective choices when teaching writing and spelling so that pupils apply their skills more consistently.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Jeanne Bishop.

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.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and staff. The lead inspector also met with members of the governing board, including the chair of governors, a representative from the local authority and a representative from the diocese.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. It is in the Diocese of Blackburn. The school's last section 48 inspection was in June 2025.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher: Joanne Abram

Lead inspector:

Ruth Moran, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Ray Rudd, 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 9 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

29

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

58

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)

7.41%

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

0.00%

Well below 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

20.69%

Above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Well 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	72%	61%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	62%	S
2023/24 (final)	67%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	89%	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	78%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	S	75%	S
2023/24 (final)	67%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	100%	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	78%	72%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	72%	S
2023/24 (final)	83%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	89%	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	83%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	S	74%	S
2023/24 (final)	83%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	89%	73%	Above

‘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

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		46%	
2024/25		47%	
2023/24		46%	
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		62%	
2024/25		63%	
2023/24		62%	
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		59%	
2024/25		59%	
2023/24		58%	
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		60%	
2024/25		61%	
2023/24		59%	
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		68%	
2024/25		69%	
2023/24		67%	
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		80%	
2024/25		81%	
2023/24		80%	
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		78%	

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25		78%	
2023/24		78%	
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		80%	
2024/25		81%	
2023/24		79%	
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)	4.8%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.3%	5.5%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23 (3 term)	3.8%	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 (3 term)	7.1%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	7.1%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.1%	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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