

The Palmer Catholic Academy

Address: Aldborough Road South, Seven Kings, Ilford, Essex, IG3 8EU

Unique reference number (URN): 137088

Inspection report: 3 February 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 well across the curriculum. By the end of Year 11, outcomes in English and mathematics are broadly in line with national averages. Pupils demonstrate secure understanding of what they have learned and are able to apply their knowledge across a range of subjects. As a result, most pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training.

Disadvantaged pupils and those who face additional barriers to learning generally achieve well. In several subjects, disadvantaged pupils achieve consistently, and in some cases significantly, above national averages for disadvantaged pupils. This reflects leaders' effective use of support and high expectations for pupils. However, leaders recognise that for a small number of pupils, learning does not consistently deepen knowledge and understanding over time. This limits how well some pupils build on what they know.

In addition, a small number of pupils are beginner readers, who have not yet secured sufficient fluency or confidence in reading. Leaders have accurately identified this and have begun to take action. They have plans in place to strengthen early reading provision, including appropriate training for staff in the delivery of a systematic phonics programme.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders monitor attendance closely and consistently. They analyse patterns regularly and take timely action, when concerns arise. As a result, attendance remains significantly above national averages, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders know their pupils well and work proactively with parents and external agencies to reduce persistent absence and support regular attendance.

The school actively promotes a positive, respectful and inclusive culture. Leaders and staff set clear expectations for behaviour, which pupils understand and follow. Pupils respond positively to the established routines of the school day, including daily meet-and-greet at the gate, opportunities for prayer and reflection at the start of lessons, and the school's mission, 'to the glory of God and the service of all', which underpins daily practice.

In lessons, pupils behave well and show positive attitudes to learning. They show politeness, follow rules and routines and respond promptly to staff instructions. Most pupils do the right thing and positive behaviour is the norm. Staff apply the behaviour policy consistently, helping to create a safe and supportive environment, where pupils feel secure. As a result, pupils do not typically worry about bullying or the use of discriminatory language.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders identify pupils' needs in a timely way and use appropriate systems to assess and review those needs. They share relevant information with staff so that pupils who may be vulnerable are typically supported in lessons. Leaders provide professional development

that helps staff understand pupils' additional needs and adapt their practice where necessary. Occasionally, teaching is not adapted well enough to meet pupils' needs. Leaders are aware of the need to strengthen the enrichment offer so that disadvantaged pupils can take part in activities that support their wider wellbeing.

Leaders work with external agencies to support pupils who require additional help, including those who are looked after and children in need. Leaders review support regularly to check that it remains appropriate. Support staff provide targeted assistance in classrooms and help pupils to access learning, while encouraging pupils to develop independence over time.

Leaders implement the pupil premium strategy appropriately and maintain high expectations for all pupils. Staff monitor the impact of support and use this information to make adjustments to provision, where needed. Leaders' decisions reflect pupils' needs and support them to make progress.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have identified the right priorities to move the school forward. As a result, the school is a well-organised, safe and calm environment for pupils to learn. Leaders make decisions that are in pupils' best interests. As a result, pupils' behaviour, attendance and the content of the school's curriculum have improved because of these decisions.

Staff, including those new to the profession, are proud to work in the school. They feel very well supported to develop professionally and manage their workload. They value the care and attention leaders and governors give to their work-life balance. Leaders value the views and input of staff. Governors and leaders place high regard on the importance of staff to the improvement journey of the school.

Those responsible for governance are knowledgeable about the school. They recognise the school's strengths, improvements and future priorities. For example, governors understand the need to strengthen provision for pupils who are not yet reading at age-related expectations. They support leaders to secure specialist phonics expertise by working closely with primary colleagues in the trust. They are informed through meetings, documentation and visits to the school. Governors are well trained and offer both support and challenge to school leaders. Governors are knowledgeable about their statutory duties, including around safeguarding.

Needs attention

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Pupils in the early stages of reading do not consistently receive teaching through an effective systematic synthetic phonics programme. Although the school provides reading support, staff currently lack the expert phonics knowledge needed to identify gaps in pupils' reading skills quickly and address them effectively. As a result, weaknesses in pupils' reading persist. Leaders have plans in place to access trust-wide support and training for phonics, but these plans are not yet embedded.

Typically, teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and deliver a broad and balanced curriculum across all year groups. Staff receive effective training to support curriculum implementation. However, teaching quality remains variable. At times, teaching does not build effectively on what pupils already know, nor does it deepen pupils' understanding. Teachers do not consistently check pupils' understanding, and this limits how well teaching responds to pupils' needs. Consequently, some pupils do not secure the essential foundational knowledge they require, including in handwriting and reading.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have clear learning support plans. However, staff do not consistently adapt teaching to meet these pupils' needs. As a result, some pupils with SEND do not access the curriculum as well as they should and do not learn as effectively as they could.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

Many pupils do not develop their understanding of fundamental British values, such as democracy and the rule of law, with confidence or depth. However, pupils generally demonstrate respect and tolerance in their day-to-day interactions. The school offers a limited range of extra-curricular clubs. Leaders do not promote these opportunities effectively. As a result, pupil participation remains low. Consequently, not enough pupils develop their wider interests and talents beyond the curriculum. Leaders recognise this and have plans, for example, to broaden the school's music provision and include a school production. Leaders organise events such as 'Culture Day', which pupils enjoy and which promote celebration of different backgrounds.

The personal development programme is designed to help pupils understand how to stay emotionally safe, including when online. The school's ethos and values support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across academy life, rooted in Catholic social teaching. Pupils learn about relationships, sex and health education in an age-appropriate way alongside the school's values. The school provides pupils with regular opportunities to reflect on their faith and engage thoughtfully with ethical issues.

Pupils benefit from an increasingly well-organised careers programme. This includes one-to-one guidance, work experience and opportunities to engage with employers. While this programme continues to develop, pupils successfully move on to education, employment or training.

Leaders ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as well as those facing other barriers to learning, take part fully in the personal development programme. These pupils receive additional support, when making choices about study options and careers. This support helps them engage more positively in wider school life and strengthens relationships with families through regular and purposeful communication about pupils' future pathways.

Post 16 provision

Needs attention 

Despite some students progressing well from their low starting points, historically, students have not achieved well. Students' achievement of higher grades in national examinations has been low over time. Leaders have recognised this and have begun to review key

aspects of the post-16 curriculum to identify the causes of underperformance. This work is at an early stage and it is, therefore, too soon to see a sustained impact on students' outcomes.

While some subjects achieve more positive results, there is too much variability in the quality of teaching and learning across the sixth form. In lessons, students' verbal responses often lack sufficient depth and do not consistently demonstrate the subject-specific vocabulary needed to support higher levels of achievement. Leaders recognise the need to raise expectations for the level of challenge in students' responses.

Students attend regularly and typically engage positively in lessons. Leaders have begun to develop the personal development programme for sixth-form students. Some students contribute to the wider life of the school, for example, by acting as academic or pastoral mentors for younger pupils. Students also access enrichment opportunities, including employer taster days, science, technology, engineering and mathematics trips and online courses. Leaders ensure that students receive appropriate careers guidance to help them make informed decisions about their next steps. Students have regular opportunities to meet employers and education and training providers.

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

The Palmer Catholic School is a modern school with traditional values. Pupils interact harmoniously and benefit from a strong, caring ethos. The school actively embraces the rich diversity of its community. Pupils report that they feel safe in school, know exactly who to speak to if they have concerns and are confident in how staff address any unkindness or bullying.

Pupils enjoy their learning and follow agreed school routines, demonstrating positive attitudes towards their work. In some lessons, pupils build effectively on prior knowledge to access more advanced topics. This helps them develop the skills needed for the next stages of their education. However, there is too much variability in how effectively this is done. In some lessons, assessment is not used consistently to check pupils' understanding and guide next steps. This limits the progress that some pupils make through the curriculum. Similarly, some students in the sixth form are not challenged sufficiently well to achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are disadvantaged, and those known to social care follow the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. In most cases, they receive appropriate support. This enables them to access learning and make secure progress. However, staff are not currently well trained to provide phonics support for pupils that struggle to read. Leaders have plans to address this, but these are yet to be embedded.

Pupils feel a strong sense of belonging and grow into thoughtful, confident young people, who contribute positively to their school community. For example, the school council secured

the introduction of a halal menu. In their daily interactions, pupils bring the school's mission fully to life.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that they develop staff's expertise in phonics so that staff can support weaker readers effectively.
 - Leaders should ensure that teaching builds consistently on what pupils already know and can do and that assessment is used reliably to check pupils' understanding and inform next steps.
 - Leaders should ensure that their planned actions to improve the school are implemented with precision and clarity.
 - Leaders should ensure that pupils develop their understanding of fundamental British values and that the school's enrichment offer improves so that pupils benefit fully.
 - Leaders should ensure that strategies to improve learning and achievement in the post-16 provision are fully embedded. Leaders and governors should continue to exercise robust oversight and act swiftly, where improvements are required.
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About this inspection

This school is part of The Good Shepherd Catholic Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief accounting officer, Michael Corcoran, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Anthony.

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

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior leaders, a representative from the trust and the chair of governors during the inspection.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Headteacher: Paul Downey

Lead inspector:

Lisa Smith, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Katerina Christodoulou, Ofsted Inspector

Vikram Gukhool, Ofsted Inspector

Sarah Fowler, Ofsted Inspector

Debbie Lebrecht, 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 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,155

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: 1,067

School capacity

1,174

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: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

29.19%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

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

1.73%

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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

7.88%

Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well 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

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	46.9%	45.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	54.3%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	72.2%	45.3%	Above

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	48.7	45.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	50.4	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	54.8	46.3	Above

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	0.49	-0.03	Above
2022/23 (final)	0.72	-0.03	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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	33.3%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	44.0%	25.8%	Above
2022/23 (final)	66.1%	25.2%	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	42.1	34.9	Above
2023/24 (final)	45.5	34.6	Above
2022/23 (final)	54.6	35.0	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	0.20	-0.57	Above
2022/23 (final)	0.80	-0.57	Above

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	33.3%	52.8%	-19.5 pp
2023/24 (final)	44.0%	53.1%	-9.1 pp
2022/23 (final)	66.1%	52.4%	13.7 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	42.1	50.3	-8.1

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	45.5	50.0	-4.5
2022/23 (final)	54.6	50.3	4.3

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	0.20	0.16	0.04
2022/23 (final)	0.80	0.17	0.64

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	95%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	96%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	95%	94%	Average

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	30.87	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	31.10	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	28.89	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.1	0.0	Close to average
2023/24 (revised)	0.2	0.0	Above

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)	6.7%	8.1%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	7.1%	8.9%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.9%	9.0%	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)	21.7%	21.9%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	22.3%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	21.9%	26.5%	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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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