

St Margaret Ward Catholic Academy

Address: Little Chell Lane, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST6 6LZ

Unique reference number (URN): 140149

Inspection report: 27 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, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, generally achieve well from their starting points and are prepared effectively for their next steps. They develop secure foundations in reading, writing and mathematics, and gain appropriate subject knowledge and skills. Key stage 4 outcomes have typically been in line with national averages in most subjects. Leaders have accurately identified causes of underperformance and are addressing these. Leaders' actions, so far, led to improved outcomes in 2025, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, with gaps narrowing in English and mathematics.

Across key stage 3, pupils recall prior learning, use subject-specific vocabulary accurately and build knowledge over time. Pupils typically engage successfully with the curriculum, speak confidently and demonstrate progress in their learning. However, the quality and depth of some pupils written work is not consistently secure.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Behaviour and attendance continue to improve at the school. Leaders embed an effective 'warm-strict' culture in which pupils can flourish. Respectful relationships help pupils feel valued and part of the school community. They want to come to school and attend regularly.

Leaders drive attendance up through robust, sustained action. Clear systems enable rigorous monitoring and the follow-up of any absence. Staff work sensitively with parents and carers, drawing on external support when needed. They identify and address barriers for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, attendance sits above national figures, and persistent absence remains below national averages.

Staff reinforce clear expectations for conduct through well-established routines. Pupils arrive punctually, settle quickly and learn in disruption-free lessons. However, leaders recognise that not all pupils are always fully engaged in their learning. Sixth-form students exemplify the school's standards and act as strong role models. Social times are orderly and calm. Pupils greet visitors with warmth. Bullying and prejudicial behaviour are rare, and leaders deal with incidents swiftly and effectively. When behaviour dips, leaders use restorative approaches to help pupils reflect and improve. Leaders use suspensions appropriately, and their use has declined over time. Staff apply reasonable adaptations where needed. Leaders and staff reward positive behaviour, which is increasingly the norm.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders hold an accurate view of curriculum and teaching. A broad and balanced curriculum reflects high aspirations for pupils. In Years 10 and 11, pupils follow a well-sequenced suite of qualifications, with high entry to the English Baccalaureate, alongside vocational options. Subject leaders identify the essential knowledge pupils need and map it logically across key stages so new learning builds securely on prior knowledge.

Teachers demonstrate secure subject expertise. They explain concepts clearly, model high-quality responses and deliver learning effectively. This allows pupils to access the curriculum and engage in their learning. Teachers use targeted questioning to probe understanding and address misconceptions. Adaptations usually enable disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including pupils who speak English as an additional language, to access the full curriculum. However, checks on their understanding and assessments are not always sharp enough to refine their next steps. When this happens, gaps and misconceptions persist.

Closing reading gaps is a whole-school priority. Staff identify early readers quickly, provide targeted support and strengthen subject vocabulary. Leaders support pupils' literacy and numeracy well through a programme of school-wide interventions.

Leaders monitor the quality of teaching rigorously and provide focused professional development. As a result, most pupils know more, remember more and do more, and are prepared for their next steps.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils and champion an inclusive ethos across the school. Leaders have established effective transition arrangements that enable them to accurately identify pupils' needs. They ensure this information is shared with staff to enable them to put support in place for those with additional needs. The special educational needs coordinator and inclusion team develop staff expertise through guidance that equips teachers with strategies to reduce barriers to learning and wellbeing. In-house support also helps pupils through targeted interventions.

However, teachers do not apply adaptations with consistent precision across all subjects for all pupils. For some disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, guidance remains too generic, and this sometimes leads pupils to leave work unfinished. While leaders have established systems to meet pupils' individual needs, they now need to embed greater consistency in the quality of this support.

Staff identify pupils with English as an additional language through screening and support them effectively with their reading. Leaders deploy additional funding that they receive purposefully. Support for pupils known to social care is well targeted and there are effective relationships with external agencies. Leaders monitor pupils receiving alternative provision closely, with a clear focus on safety, wellbeing and sustaining their education.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders know the school well and are driven by a clear ethical vision. They set high expectations for staff and pupils. They celebrate strengths and target priorities precisely. Leaders have established robust quality assurance processes to drive timely action. This has resulted in improvements in provision for pupils, including for disadvantaged pupils, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and pupils known, or previously known, to children's social care.

The trust and governors provide effective oversight. They share a clear, ambitious vision and fulfil their statutory duties. They understand the local community and offer focused support and challenge in the best interests of pupils.

Leaders ensure that professional learning is an integral aspect of school life and supports ongoing school improvement. A coherent programme of high-quality, evidence-informed training builds subject and pedagogical expertise for early career teachers and more experienced staff. Leaders foster an open culture that, combined with effective pastoral care, prioritises pupils' wellbeing. Leaders consider staff workload and wellbeing. As a result, staff feel valued because of this and are proud to work at the school.

Leaders have positive relationships with parents, carers and the community. They have created a school that is known to genuinely care for pupils, with engagement that contributes to improved attendance and behaviour. Leaders have positioned the school well to sustain improvements.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school's mission to provide pupils with a 'a broad range of choices and opportunities for the future' is evident. Personal development is thoughtfully delivered for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), through the schools 'Touching Hearts' programme. Pupils are supported by responsive pastoral care that underpins the schools culture of care and ambition.

Leaders' belief in personal development begins before pupils enter the school. A comprehensive summer school programme supports a smooth transition from primary school for pupils. A well-sequenced personal, social, health and economic programme is delivered through lessons, assemblies and form time. Staff teach key concepts clearly and revisit them to deepen understanding. Pupils develop an understanding of equality and diversity; they explore different cultures, faiths and religions, and apply fundamental British values meaningfully in school life. Consequently, the curriculum has a positive impact on pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing. Pupils develop the knowledge and confidence to manage their mental health, make safe choices and protect themselves in the community and online. Through age-appropriate relationships, sex and health education, pupils learn about consent and healthy relationships, which helps them build respectful relationships and feel safe, informed and prepared for life beyond school.

Leaders provide a wide enrichment offer, including leadership roles, charity projects and clubs such as orchestra, robotics and drama. These activities are open to all pupils, particularly those disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Participation reflects the school cohort and is tracked to ensure those who need it most are able to take part.

Careers education is impartial, meets national requirements and offers personalised guidance and meaningful opportunities for pupils across their time in school. Overall, pupils broaden their horizons and leave well prepared for life in modern Britain and their next steps.

Leaders are aspirational and deeply committed to ensuring that students receive a high-quality sixth-form experience. The sixth form has a strong sense of community, described by both staff and students as 'caring'. The sixth form's small size enables close monitoring and individualised support for students. Students enjoy attending the school and develop effective study habits and growing independence.

The curriculum offers broad academic and vocational routes, with opportunities that build communication, teamwork and leadership. Subject specialists teach effectively, know students well and use assessment to keep learning on track, including for disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students explain their learning clearly and how teachers help them remember more over time.

Published outcomes have varied over time and trail classroom performance. A dip in 2025 outcomes has been addressed through tightened entry criteria and enhanced academic monitoring. Lessons reflect that students typically achieve well. All students go on to further education, employment or training.

Personal development and safeguarding are strengths. Sixth-form students act as role models and mentors for younger pupils. These leadership opportunities exemplify the support and care students and pupils receive. Careers education is impartial and tailored to students' ambitions; they are well prepared for their next steps.

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

This is a welcoming school where pupils' best interests are nurtured. Pupils benefit from a strong culture of care that is evident across the school. Pupils feel safe and valued. They speak confidently about the warm relationships they have with staff. Positive interactions between staff and pupils are a notable feature of the school.

Expectations for behaviour and conduct are clear and understood by all. Pupils rise to these high standards and take responsibility for helping one another meet them. Pupils enjoy calm, orderly classrooms where learning is the focus and disruption is rare. Pupils enjoy being part of the school community and attend very well. They want to be in school and trust staff to respond quickly and effectively to any concerns. Bullying is rare and dealt with swiftly and effectively when it does occur.

Teachers know pupils well and act when pupils face barriers to learning or wellbeing. Support is timely and effective, ensuring that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, can access the curriculum. Pupils appreciate this help and improve their outcomes from their starting points. Most pupils achieve well in line with national averages. However, some pupils and sixth-form students do not make as much progress as they should. Leaders have addressed this and pupils are benefiting from improved teaching and clearer guidance from staff.

Pupils value a range of extra-curricular and co-curricular opportunities. They represent the school as mentors and prefects and enjoy theatre visits and residential trips to Scotland.

Pupils respond well and take pride in earning reward points for positive contributions. They develop leadership through roles such as the school council, and sixth-form students acting as positive role models who support younger pupils.

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils. Pupils benefit from a culture of high expectations that prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers consistently identify and meet the precise needs of all pupils so that misconceptions are addressed swiftly.
 - Leaders should ensure that assessment is used consistently and effectively across all subjects so that gaps in pupils knowledge are identified accurately.
 - Leaders should ensure that recent actions to strengthen achievement in the sixth form are fully embedded and lead to consistently positive results for all post-16 students.
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About this inspection

This school is part of St Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Toni Ellis, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Julia Bridgewater MBE.

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 principal, leaders from the school and from the trust, governors, members of teaching and non-teaching staff and several groups of pupils during the inspection. An inspector spoke with the chief executive officer of the trust.

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.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is registered as having a Catholic religious character. The schools last Section 48 inspection was in November 2019.

The school makes use of 4 registered alternative provisions.

Principal : Dominic McKenna

Lead inspector:

Andrew Washbourne, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Martin Spoor, Ofsted Inspector

Sara Arkle, Ofsted Inspector

Sarah Godden, Ofsted Inspector

Michael Scott, 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 27 January 2026

School and pupil context**Total pupils**

1,139

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

1,200

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)

37.64%

Above 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

3.07%

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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

12.20%

Close to average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

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)	39.8%	45.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	35.1%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	42.6%	45.3%	Close to average

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)	42.9	45.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	41.2	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	44.8	46.3	Close to average

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)	-0.44	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.25	-0.03	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' 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)	29.9%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	18.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	30.0%	25.2%	Close to average

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)	36.0	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	31.2	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	41.0	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)	-1.02	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.45	-0.57	Close to average

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)	29.9%	52.8%	-23.0 pp
2023/24 (final)	18.7%	53.1%	-34.5 pp
2022/23 (final)	30.0%	52.4%	-22.4 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)	36.0	50.3	-14.3

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	31.2	50.0	-18.8
2022/23 (final)	41.0	50.3	-9.3

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)	-1.02	0.16	-1.19
2022/23 (final)	-0.45	0.17	-0.62

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)	92%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	94%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	94%	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)	27.91	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	31.55	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	29.69	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)	-0.4	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	0.1	0.0	Close to average

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)	6.8%	8.1%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	8.1%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	8.3%	9.0%	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 (2 term)	19.3%	21.9%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	24.9%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	26.7%	26.5%	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.

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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