

# St Catherine's Roman Catholic School

**Address:** Pymore Road, Bridport, Bridport, Dorset, DT6 3TR

**Unique reference number (URN):** 140757

## Inspection report: 13 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

### Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders designed the early years curriculum so that children's knowledge builds logically over time. As a result, children make a positive start to their education. Staff work in partnership with parents and carers to assess children's needs and starting points accurately.

Children's communication and language are a priority. Children learn new vocabulary through high-quality conversations with staff. Children then use these learned words in their play. This helps them to build their knowledge of the world around them. For example, they accurately recall and label body parts using sticky notes, or retell stories using the correct names of African animals from the class book. Leaders prioritise the teaching of early reading and phonics. Children learn the sounds and letters that they need to read and write successfully. They read books that closely match their stage of reading and learn to read well.

Children show concentration and resilience as they engage in well-designed activities. They enjoy completing 'rainbow challenges'. This supports them to develop their independence. Children sustain their focus and develop fine motor skills when they explore sequences by ordering different coloured beads. Children achieve well in the early years and are ready for the challenges of Year 1.

### Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school has established a well-considered personal development offer. Pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of relationships. They learn about changes to their bodies as they grow up and how to lead healthy lifestyles. Pupils understand how to keep safe when using the internet and the risks associated with this. They demonstrate awareness of what to do and steps to take if they feel threatened when using online applications and games.

Pupils build their knowledge of fundamental British values, such as democracy, through opportunities to vote for their peers on the school council. The school takes an active role in the local community. Pupils learn to be good citizens. They support the parish charity. Some pupils sing at the local residential home, others perform at the 'Christmas cracker' night on stage at a local arts centre. These opportunities support pupils to shape their sense of citizenship well.

The school works tirelessly to provide a wide range of opportunities to build pupils' character. For example, pupils have a voice in school life and take on positions of responsibility, such as pupil leaders, house captains or library monitors. The school fosters pupils' spirituality well.

A wide range of popular clubs nurture pupils' talents and interests. Activities include gymnastics, Spanish and art. Staff track participation to ensure that all pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities, participate and are supported.

Leaders enrich the curriculum with trips and visits, both in the local area and beyond. Highlights include theatre workshops, watching a pantomime and 'class sleepovers'. Leaders recognise pupils' achievements, including with weekly certificates and awards, such as 'super citizens' and 'branches of love'. Each class enjoys and benefits from access to the on-site forest school provision, where they explore learning outdoors.

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## Needs attention

### Achievement

Needs attention 

A significant number of pupils, including some who are disadvantaged, are not prepared for the academic demands of secondary school. This is because some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders have not evaluated pupils' outcomes consistently and carefully enough in the past. They have responded with increasing purpose to address weak outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics at key stage 2 in recent years. However, the actions are new and have not had time to have the intended impact.

Despite this, the Year 1 phonics screening check reflects pupils' success in learning to read, with published 2025 outcomes in line with national expectations. Leaders, with support from the trust, have improved the wider curriculum. In history, pupils recall facts accurately and develop a secure sense of chronology. They enjoy sharing what they know and remember. Pupils eagerly explained the impact of 'Bronze Age' tools, used correct terminology such as 'smelt', and named the component metals of the alloy, copper and tin.

### Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Leaders are committed to raising pupils' attendance and reducing persistent absence. The school fosters positive relationships with families and takes a caring approach to identifying barriers and working together to overcome them. However, this work is still recent, and absence and persistent absence remain too high, including for some pupils who are vulnerable. As a result, a significant minority of pupils miss out on important learning.

Leaders establish high expectations for pupils' behaviour in the school. Staff consistently promote the school rules of 'be ready, respectful, safe'. Pupils understand these rules and sensibly follow them. In the classroom, pupils build positive attitudes to learning. Most pupils are keen to participate in lessons. Across all year groups, pupils play happily together. The relationships in the school are built on respect, trust and kindness. As a result, a calm and orderly atmosphere permeates the school. Leaders' approach for dealing with rare instances of poor behaviour or bullying has had a positive impact. Consequently, pupils' behaviour is of a high standard, and the school is a happy place to be.

### Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Some teachers lack the expertise to implement the curriculum in ways that meet pupils' needs. As a result, adaptations for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities do not have the intended impact. Furthermore, some pupils have

gaps in their basic knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics. Until recently, there has not been a consistent approach to teaching letter formation, handwriting and spelling. This slows the pace at which pupils become fluent writers. Misconceptions become established in pupils' understanding and the quality of pupils' writing across the curriculum is not as strong as leaders intend.

Leaders have prioritised developing the curriculum. As a result, they have secured improvements since the previous inspection. The curriculum now identifies the important knowledge and skills that pupils need for their next steps. It is suitable for pupils taught in mixed-aged classes. Teachers generally have secure subject knowledge and explain ideas clearly. They typically use questioning effectively in order to check understanding and address misconceptions. For example, pupils in Year 5 learn how to use noun phrases in their writing. They use thesauruses to look up alternative words and make improvements to their writing.

## **Inclusion**

**Needs attention** 

The provision for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is not consistently effective. For example, although the school's use of extra funding for disadvantaged pupils is well intended, teachers are sometimes unclear about the school's strategies to reduce barriers to learning. As a result, teachers do not routinely adapt the curriculum to help narrow gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. This means some disadvantaged pupils, and pupils with SEND, do not achieve as well as they could.

However, leaders promote an inclusive culture. Some pupils receive effective help. For example, staff provide 'now and next' boards and visual timetables, which help pupils to understand what is happening throughout the school day.

Staff know pupils well. Leaders provide training that helps staff to develop their expertise around pupils' wellbeing and anxiety. They meet pupils' social and emotional needs very well through the school's nurture provision. The school provides a range of emotional support, including sensory areas and quiet spaces. This helps pupils to reduce their anxiety. Leaders have established constructive partnerships with a range of experts and therapists who provide specialist help for pupils and their families if necessary.

## **Leadership and governance**

**Needs attention** 

In some aspects of the school's provision, there is a lack of strategic oversight, and priorities are not clearly identified. When this is the case, the school cannot bring about the necessary improvements. For example, in relation to pupils' achievement. Previous weaknesses in the curriculum mean that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have gaps in their knowledge, which have not been addressed effectively enough. Leaders continue to refine school systems and processes to improve how well pupils are taught and attend. However, it is too early to see the long-term impact of these changes on pupils' attendance and outcomes.

Leaders at all levels understand the school's strengths, context and challenges. Governors and trust directors understand their roles and the school's priorities. Leaders are committed

to the school and take decisions with pupils' best interests in mind. Leaders know that there is further work to do. Aspects of school improvement identify the actions needed to achieve this, but the impact has not been realised.

Staff report feeling well supported by leaders and the trust. They describe leaders as approachable, caring and say that they listen to their views. Staff value the professional training provided, which helps to strengthen their expertise to deliver the curriculum. They also recognise leaders' attention to managing staff workload and supporting their wellbeing.

Parents and carers speak positively about the support that the school offers their children. Many parents commented on the improvements they have seen at the school, including leaders' open and warm manner.

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

Pupils at St Catherine's Roman Catholic School benefit from a warm, caring environment where the community values and spirit shine through. Children make a confident start in Reception, responding well to routines and settling quickly. Pupils enjoy their learning throughout the school. However, low attendance and persistent absence mean that some pupils miss valuable opportunities to learn.

Nurturing relationships between staff and pupils help to ensure that bullying is rare and never tolerated. Pupils feel safe and trust adults to support them. Older pupils interact positively with younger pupils during social times and throughout the school day. Pupils work and play in a calm, respectful environment. This helps build a sense of belonging and identity. Pupils feel proud of their school and show high levels of self-discipline and maturity.

The school welcomes everyone. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities participate fully in school life. However, at times, these pupils do not receive well-adapted tasks that meet their needs, which slows their progress.

Historically, published outcomes show that pupils in key stage 2 have not been well prepared for the next stages of their education. Furthermore, current standards remain low. Leaders have begun to address this, and some improvements are evident. Recent changes have not been in place for long enough to have secured better achievement.

Pupils live out fundamental British values by contributing actively to their community. They develop mutual respect and tolerance. Pupils understand the impact of small acts of kindness and support national charities and local initiatives such as the food bank. Sport plays a central role in school life, and pupils relish representing the school in activities such as cross country, rugby and netball.

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## **Next steps**

- Leaders should ensure that staff know how to adapt learning and provide targeted support more consistently so that pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged are better

supported to achieve well.

- Leaders should ensure that the teaching of writing develops pupils' foundational spelling knowledge and improves the quality of their handwriting and written work across the curriculum.
  - Leaders should closely analyse and act on the performance outcomes of vulnerable groups of pupils so that these pupils achieve well.
  - Leaders should ensure that the work they have begun to improve attendance continues and consistently improves pupils' attendance and reduces rates of persistent absence.
  - Leaders at all levels need to sharpen their strategic oversight so that work is systematic and leads to rapid improvement.
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## About this inspection

This school is part of Plymouth CAST, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Zoe Batten, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ruth O'Donovan.

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, senior leaders and other school staff during the inspection, including the special educational needs coordinator.

The lead inspector met with a director of the trust board, the chair of the local governing committee and spoke with trust leaders.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. It is part of the Diocese of Plymouth. It received a section 48 interim monitoring inspection for schools of a religious character in February 2022.

A new headteacher took up their post in September 2023.

The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Paula Fearn

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### Lead inspector:

Gavin Summerfield, His Majesty's Inspector

### Team inspector:

Adam Matthews, 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 13 January 2026

## School and pupil context

### Total pupils

**118**

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

**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)

**22.03%**

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: 26.3%

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

**3.39%**

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**

**16.10%**

Close to average

### **What does this mean?**

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

National average: 15%

## **Location deprivation**

**Close to average**

### **What does this mean?**

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

## **Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)**

**No resourced provision**

### **What does this mean?**

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

## **All pupils' performance**

**Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics**

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

| Year                  | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Latest 3 year average | 40%         | 61%              | Below                          |
| 2024/25 (revised)     | 30%         | 62%              | Below                          |
| 2023/24 (final)       | 50%         | 61%              | Below                          |
| 2022/23 (final)       | 38%         | 60%              | Below                          |

**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 | 60%         | 74%              | Below                          |
| 2024/25 (revised)     | 55%         | 75%              | Below                          |
| 2023/24 (final)       | 71%         | 74%              | Close to average               |
| 2022/23 (final)       | 52%         | 73%              | Below                          |

**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 | 62%         | 72%              | Below                          |
| 2024/25 (revised)     | 60%         | 72%              | Below                          |
| 2023/24 (final)       | 63%         | 72%              | Below                          |
| 2022/23 (final)       | 62%         | 71%              | Below                          |

**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 | 48%         | 73%              | Below                          |
| 2024/25 (revised)     | 40%         | 74%              | Below                          |
| 2023/24 (final)       | 58%         | 73%              | Below                          |
| 2022/23 (final)       | 43%         | 73%              | Below                          |

**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 | 24%         | 46%              | Below                          |
| 2024/25 (revised)     | 14%         | 47%              | Below                          |
| 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 |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Latest 3 year average</b> | 47%         | 62%              | Below                          |
| <b>2024/25 (revised)</b>     | 29%         | 63%              | Below                          |
| <b>2023/24 (final)</b>       | S           | 62%              | S                              |
| <b>2022/23 (final)</b>       | 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 |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Latest 3 year average</b> | 47%         | 59%              | Below                          |
| <b>2024/25 (revised)</b>     | 57%         | 59%              | Close to average               |
| <b>2023/24 (final)</b>       | S           | 58%              | S                              |
| <b>2022/23 (final)</b>       | 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 |
|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Latest 3 year average</b> | 24%         | 60%              | Below                          |
| <b>2024/25 (revised)</b>     | 14%         | 61%              | Below                          |
| <b>2023/24 (final)</b>       | S           | 59%              | S                              |
| <b>2022/23 (final)</b>       | 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 | 24%         | 68%                              | -44 pp                  |
| 2024/25 (revised)     | 14%         | 69%                              | -55 pp                  |
| 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 | 47%         | 80%                              | -33 pp                  |
| 2024/25 (revised)     | 29%         | 81%                              | -52 pp                  |
| 2023/24 (final)       | S           | 80%                              | S                       |

| Year            | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 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 | 47%         | 78%                              | -31 pp                  |
| 2024/25 (revised)     | 57%         | 78%                              | -21 pp                  |
| 2023/24 (final)       | S           | 78%                              | S                       |
| 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 | 24%         | 80%                              | -56 pp                  |
| 2024/25 (revised)     | 14%         | 81%                              | -66 pp                  |
| 2023/24 (final)       | S           | 79%                              | S                       |
| 2022/23 (final)       | S           | 79%                              | S                       |

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been

mirrored and applied in the report card.

## Absence

### Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

| Year             | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (2 term) | 7.5%        | 5.2%             | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (3 term) | 5.9%        | 5.5%             | Close to average               |
| 2022/23 (3 term) | 5.5%        | 5.9%             | Close to average               |

### Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

| Year             | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (2 term) | 23.9%       | 13.3%            | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (3 term) | 16.2%       | 14.6%            | Close to average               |
| 2022/23 (3 term) | 12.4%       | 16.2%            | Close to average               |

## Our grades explained

### Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

### Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

### Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

## Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

## Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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