

Little Lever School

Address: Church Street, Little Lever, Bolton, Greater Manchester, BL3 1BT

Unique reference number (URN): 142296

Inspection report: 19 May 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.

Strong standard ●

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard ●

Leaders have designed a curriculum that ensures pupils develop a deep understanding of what they are taught. This ambitious curriculum is implemented consistently well across different year groups and subjects.

Teachers are experts in their subjects. They provide clear explanations of new knowledge and skills. Teaching activities are carefully considered and increase in complexity over time. Leaders have embedded highly effective ways of checking pupils' understanding. Teachers use robust techniques to identify exactly what pupils do and do not know. When gaps in pupils' knowledge are found, teachers and leaders carefully review the curriculum and their teaching strategies and make astute decisions to adapt them if necessary. They make sure that this information is retaught at an appropriate time. This helps to close any gaps in knowledge that pupils may have and cement their understanding.

Teachers ensure that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, consistently get the support they need. This includes specific resources and extra thinking time. Pupils who struggle with their reading, writing and numeracy are supported well in class. They also benefit from additional help when needed. Leaders build opportunities into the curriculum to develop pupils' essential knowledge and skills. This includes guided reading, handwriting practice and encouraging pupils to say new vocabulary aloud to develop their speech.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Typically, the grades that pupils attain in their examinations at the end of Year 11 are similar to national averages. However, pupils outcomes in these examinations have generally improved year on year. The most recent grades that pupils attain in English and mathematics, for example, are significantly above the national average.

Pupils, including those who face barriers to their learning, produce high-quality work and make appropriate progress from their starting points. As a result of the well-designed curriculum and highly effective teaching, pupils develop a secure knowledge of what they are taught. Over time, this knowledge builds so that pupils have an understanding of more complex ideas. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for their chosen destinations after secondary school.

Gaps in pupils' understanding in reading, writing and numeracy are addressed over time. The support that leaders have put in place sees almost all pupils secure this important knowledge. This helps pupils to access their future learning more readily.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders understand the importance of regular attendance and the impact that this can have on pupils' education. Leaders have high expectations and closely track absences to identify any patterns and trends. Overall attendance for pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs, has not been high enough over time. However, leaders have put strategies in place to address poor attendance. This includes home visits and, where appropriate, phased returns to school. Leaders promote positive attendance in school and praise those who attend well. These strategies are reducing persistent absence over time.

Leaders have high expectations for behaviour. Pupils understand the rules and routines that are in place. They know that unkind or disruptive behaviour is not tolerated. As a result, the school is calm and pupils behave well. The environment in classrooms allows pupils to focus on their learning. If there are any incidents of misbehaviour, including bullying, staff respond quickly and effectively. Leaders have created a range of strategies to support pupils who struggle with their behaviour. This is usually effective. However, sometimes these strategies do not sufficiently support pupils to manage their own behaviour independently.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well. Leaders identify accurately the barriers that different pupils face. This helps leaders understand how to support these pupils more effectively. When necessary, leaders work with other professionals to arrange specialist support. The extra help that pupils receive is carefully monitored to check it is working. Leaders adapt support when it is not effective.

Staff use effective strategies to support pupils who struggle with their learning or wellbeing. They provide appropriate help so that pupils, including those with SEND, can access the same ambitious curriculum and wider opportunities as their peers. This support is generally effective. However, some pupils' barriers are not consistently reduced. This means that they do not benefit fully from the school's offer.

Leaders make appropriate use of alternative provision. Pupils in this provision benefit from targeted support. Leaders work closely with professionals to help pupils known, or previously known, to social care. The progress that these pupils make is monitored carefully. This helps them to get the extra support that they need to succeed at this school.

Leaders use additional funding appropriately to support disadvantaged pupils. This includes targeted support, such as extra tuition when needed.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders, including trustees, know the school well. They have an accurate understanding of its strengths and priorities. Leaders' actions are having a positive impact on these priorities. Leaders are steadfast in their high ambitions for this school, their pupils and the community that they serve.

Trustees, who also act as governors, support and challenge school leaders' decisions. When necessary, trustees provide additional resources to support leaders in addressing the school's priorities.

Leaders and trustees ensure that staff have what they need to carry out their roles effectively. Staff build their knowledge and expertise through the comprehensive programme of professional development. Teachers work with subject leaders to improve their knowledge and share effective practice. Leaders understand the impact of this professional learning through effective quality checks.

Staff, including leaders, are well supported. There is effective collaboration to reduce workload where possible. Additionally, leaders offer a range of services to help with staff's wellbeing. Staff find leaders approachable and available to provide support when needed.

Leaders build positive relationships with their parent and carer community. This is mostly effective and allows leaders, parents and carers to work together in the best interests of the pupils. Leaders and trustees also work closely with other schools and professionals. They form networks of support that help them to share effective practice and invite in external quality assurance.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have established a personal development programme that teaches pupils what they need to know about themselves and the world around them. This includes understanding people's differences, and gaining knowledge of the fundamental British values. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, articulate this knowledge well. They understand how this information applies to them and how it influences their behaviours. Leaders adapt the personal development programme if new issues arise in the community. This includes improving pupils' understanding of sensitive topics and how to keep themselves safe both online and offline.

Pupils benefit from effective pastoral support. Staff recognise pupils' worries about social issues, such as unkind or unsafe behaviour, and ensure that prompt help is given. Leaders have established specific spaces to help pupils who may be struggling. When necessary, leaders provide extra support and tuition for pupils with barriers to their learning or wellbeing. This encourages most pupils to have open conversations about their concerns or behaviour and better understand the world around them.

Leaders offer a range of opportunities that broaden pupils' interests, including learning British Sign Language, performing in the school musical and visiting the local zoo. Generally, pupils appreciate this range of opportunities and some find new interests as a result.

The careers programme teaches pupils about their choices after secondary school. Organised events give pupils the opportunity to speak to different employers. These cover professions such as accountancy, local governance and construction. Additionally, leaders invite visitors from local colleges and sixth forms to speak to pupils about further study after

the age of 16. This offer provides pupils with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their next steps.

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

As pupils arrive at Little Lever, they are greeted warmly by supportive staff. Pupils have positive and respectful relationships with staff and each other. They find comfort in leaders' clear rules and routines. This helps pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to be safe. Bullying and unkind behaviour are rare. When it does happen, pupils know that staff will deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils are proud to be part of this school community and appreciate the support that they receive.

Pupils appreciate leaders' high expectations of them. They benefit from a well-taught and ambitious curriculum and lessons that challenge them appropriately. Teachers know their pupils well and provide more help when necessary. This means that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, know more and remember more over time. Consequently, pupils gain the necessary qualifications to progress to their chosen destination after secondary school.

Classrooms are calm and purposeful. This allows pupils to focus on their learning undisturbed. Most pupils attend regularly. However, some pupils' absence rates remain high. While this is improving, some pupils do not benefit from the consistent education that they should. These pupils also miss the wider opportunities that the school offers.

Pupils enjoy the range of extra activities and opportunities on offer, such as 'just dance' and 'knit and natter'. Through these opportunities, pupils find new interests and hobbies. Some pupils also take on leadership responsibilities, for example being on the student leadership council. Pupils understand their role in creating a positive culture at the school.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that strategies are put in place to support pupils to sustain consistently high attendance rates and therefore benefit fully from the education that the school provides.
- Leaders should ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, develop the self-discipline and skills required to manage their own behaviours and emotions.

About this inspection

This school is the only school in the Lever Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The principal of the school is also the chief executive officer of the trust. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sally McFarlane.

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 chair of trustees, the principal and senior leaders during the inspection. They spoke with groups of staff and pupils and also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's surveys.

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 currently makes use of 9 alternative provisions, including 4 that are unregistered.

Principal: Dominic McKeon

Lead inspector:

Tom Theobald, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Victoria Atherton, Ofsted Inspector

Dawn Platt, Ofsted Inspector

Michael Wright, Ofsted Inspector

John Cowper, 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 19 May 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,064

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

1,050

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: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

30.83%

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

4.14%

Above 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

13.91%

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

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

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 (final)	56.7%	45.4%	Above
2023/24 (final)	49.0%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	41.1%	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 (final)	46.2	46.1	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	45.8	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	44.4	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)	0.13	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	0.09	-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 (final)	33.3%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	38.9%	25.8%	Above
2022/23 (final)	22.6%	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 (final)	35.4	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	39.7	34.6	Above
2022/23 (final)	35.0	35.0	Close to average

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)	-0.22	-0.57	Above
2022/23 (final)	-0.62	-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 (final)	33.3%	53.1%	-19.8 pp
2023/24 (final)	38.9%	53.1%	-14.2 pp
2022/23 (final)	22.6%	52.4%	-29.8 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 (final)	35.4	50.4	-15.1
2023/24 (final)	39.7	50.0	-10.3
2022/23 (final)	35.0	50.3	-15.3

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)	-0.22	0.16	-0.39
2022/23 (final)	-0.62	0.17	-0.79

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 (revised)	88%	92%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	89%	93%	Below
2021 leavers (revised)	91%	94%	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 (3 term)	10.3%	8.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	10.9%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	10.3%	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 (3 term)	28.5%	23.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	31.0%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	32.1%	26.5%	Above

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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