

St Ethelbert's Roman Catholic Primary School, a Voluntary Academy

Address: Melbourne Road, Deane, Bolton, Lancashire, BL3 5RL

Unique reference number (URN): 150179

Inspection report: 8 September 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 ●

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders' commitment to the personal development and wellbeing of pupils is a golden thread that runs through the fabric of the school, shaping its culture and daily practice. Leaders prioritise this area to ensure that pupils, including those who face any disadvantages, benefit from a wide and rich set of experiences that equip them with the skills and attributes needed to navigate the wider world with confidence.

Leaders craft a personal development programme that is tailored to pupils' interests and aspirations. It thoughtfully reflects the school's context. Personal, social, health and economic education is highly effective. Its impact is clear in how pupils understand difference, treat others with respect and value the school's diverse community. Pupils show confident knowledge of fundamental British values and apply these through meaningful experiences. For example, an 'oracy for advocacy' project gives pupils the chance to write speeches and debate in Parliament on issues of social justice, human rights and the environment. They also demonstrate secure knowledge and understanding when celebrating the faiths and beliefs of others.

A carefully planned relationships, sex and health education programme helps pupils understand topics such as puberty and healthy relationships. They learn about healthy eating and the importance of being active. Pupils know how to manage risks in the online world. Leaders provide precise pastoral support so that pupils are happy, safe and secure. For example, leaders establish systems that anticipate pupils' mental health and wellbeing needs. These systems include daily emotional 'blob' check-ins, access to a specialist mental health team and trained pupil mental health ambassadors.

The school has a well-developed offer for all pupils to develop their interests. For example, pupils regularly enjoy attending dance club, taekwondo and 'STEAM' club. Pupils participate positively as active citizens beyond the school gates, organising charity events for community projects.

Expected standard ●

Achievement

Expected standard ●

Most pupils achieve outcomes close to national averages in mathematics and above national averages in reading by the end of Year 6. This includes disadvantaged pupils, who generally achieve better than their peers nationally in reading and close to national averages in mathematics. However, some pupils have not achieved as well as they could in writing. Leaders have strengthened the teaching of writing in response, and this is improving the quality of pupils' written work. A significant number of pupils join or leave the school during the year, which affects the school's published outcomes.

Across the school, pupils typically progress well through the curriculum. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They generally

secure the key knowledge they need. Pupils with additional vulnerabilities, including pupils who speak English as an additional language, receive targeted support. This helps to reduce the barriers to pupils' learning so that pupils achieve well in relation to their starting points.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

School leaders and trustees hold a clear commitment to securing high attendance for every pupil. They track pupils' attendance carefully, identifying any barriers to pupils' attendance when they arise. Pupils' attendance rates, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are in line with national averages. Disadvantaged pupils attend particularly well. Leaders establish robust systems to check on pupils' attendance and swiftly follow up any absences. They provide tailored support, including regular discussions with families and work with external agencies. Pupils who are persistently absent now attend more frequently.

Pupils behave well throughout the school day. They are extremely polite, well-mannered and enthusiastic about their learning. Leaders have high expectations. Pupils rise to meet these standards. Lessons are typically purposeful. Most pupils focus on their work and contribute willingly. Outside, pupils play happily, simply wanting to be with their friends. Older pupils act as role models to younger pupils. Incidents of bullying and discriminatory behaviour are rare. Staff deal with concerns quickly. Trained staff use personalised strategies to support those pupils who may need help to manage their emotions. For example, physical activities at the start of the day help pupils to settle quickly and be ready for the day ahead.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have a precise understanding of the strengths of the curriculum, which is ambitious, coherent and well sequenced. They regularly review how well the curriculum is taught and make timely improvements when required. For example, leaders have made sure that the phonics and reading programme is securely embedded. This is taught particularly well.

Teachers have secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. They explain new learning by breaking it down into manageable steps. Effective support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities means they access the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. Teachers make adjustments and provide resources so that pupils understand concepts fully. They encourage all pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, to rehearse subject-specific vocabulary by sharing ideas with their peers. Teachers carefully check what pupils learn and remember. This means that they address misconceptions quickly. Additional support prevents any gaps in learning appearing.

More recently, leaders have prioritised strengthening pupils' basic skills, particularly in writing, handwriting and mathematics. This work is having a positive impact. However, sometimes staff miss opportunities to extend or consolidate pupils' basic knowledge and skills. For example, they sometimes overlook chances to further strengthen pupils' transcription skills, including their pen grip and letter formation. When this happens, these pupils do not learn as well as they could.

Early years

Expected standard 

The school has a well-sequenced curriculum so that children typically secure the key knowledge and skills they need. This enables children to develop their understanding across all the areas of learning. For example, children strengthen their gross motor skills by balancing on play equipment or transporting blocks in a wheelbarrow in the construction area. Skilled staff develop children's language and communication skills by modelling and reinforcing detailed vocabulary. This helps children to extend their own vocabulary and engage in quality interactions.

Staff in the early years make sure children are safe. They know families well, building trusting relationships from the start. A well-planned transition programme begins before children start at the school. This gives families and children the confidence they need for a smooth start to children's education.

Staff know children well. They adapt the curriculum to meet children's different needs. This means everyone can participate and make progress. Effective pastoral support helps children who need it. Children who start school below age-related expectations, and those who speak English as an additional language, typically make positive progress from their starting points in readiness for the next stage of learning.

Leaders have a clear understanding of what is working well in the early years and where practice needs further refinement. They prioritise children's fine-motor control and ensure children secure strong foundations in language, communication and early number. This prepares children well for key stage 1.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Inclusion is at the heart of the school's work. Leaders and staff create a caring and nurturing culture where pupils feel that they belong. They work closely with families to identify and reduce any barriers to pupils' learning and wellbeing. Leaders seek appropriate advice from external professionals when needed. This ensures that pupils receive swift support and take a full part in school life.

Teachers receive clear and helpful information about pupils' needs through the 'pupil passport'. Regular training helps teachers to understand how to make suitable adaptations to learning. This means that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn alongside their peers. Staff adapt provision effectively. The 'sunshine room' and nurture room in school ensure that pupils with SEND receive effective support. As a result, these pupils access suitable learning, have their needs met and make progress from their starting points.

Disadvantaged pupils, and those with other vulnerabilities play an active role in school life. These pupils access educational trips and take on leadership roles alongside their peers. Disadvantaged pupils benefit greatly from additional funding and support. This includes a focus on developing their oracy and language skills as well as personalised work with external professionals. English and mathematics intervention has notable impact for those pupils who are new to English.

Leaders, including trustees and governors, know their pupils and context well. At all levels, leaders demonstrate an unwavering commitment to ensuring that pupils can become active, kind and considerate individuals who are well prepared for their future lives. Leaders make decisions with pupils' best interests in mind. Parents and carers appreciate the school and the care their children receive.

Leaders accurately identify the strengths of the school and priorities for improvement. They have accurately identified appropriate improvement priorities. They ensure that these are known and understood by all. Systems to enable leaders' oversight of key aspects of the school's work, such as pupils' attendance and academic progress, are well established. Leaders allocate time and resource for staff to share good practice with other schools in the trust, develop their expertise and contribute to continued whole-school improvement.

Governors and trustees understand their roles and responsibilities, using their expertise and experience well to support leaders. They also provide valuable support and challenge for school leaders. They are knowledgeable about the work of the school and fulfil their statutory responsibilities well.

Staff, including early career teachers, benefit from professional learning that equips them with the knowledge and skills to help pupils succeed. Staff describe leaders as approachable and supportive. They appreciate leaders' consideration for staff's workload and wellbeing. Leaders work positively with parents, external agencies, the trust and the diocese to support pupils and strengthen the school's provision.

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

St Ethelbert's is a welcoming school where pupils treat one another with kindness and respect. Staff greet pupils warmly each morning, helping them to start the day positively and live out the school's ambition of 'love learning as friends'. Pupils feel they belong because staff know them well and understand their individual needs. This helps them feel happy, safe and listened to. Most pupils attend regularly.

Pupils enjoy school and typically make good progress, whatever their starting points or barriers to learning. Those who join mid year or in different year groups, including pupils who speak English as an additional language, receive support that helps them settle quickly. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities get the help they need. Most pupils achieve in line with national expectations. This means they are well prepared for their next steps.

Pupils' behaviour is calm and settled. They engage well in lessons and enjoy talking about their learning. They move around the school sensibly and show good manners to staff and each other. At social times, pupils play happily together. Children in the early years relish using the slide and sand pit with friends. Bullying is rare. Staff act quickly and fairly when pupils raise concerns.

The school has the highest ambition for every pupil regardless of their background or circumstance. Pupils broaden their horizons through the rich and varied set of experiences on offer. Pupils enjoy linking their learning to practical experiences. Whether it is using their learning in history to participate in a Second World War 'blitz live action' workshop, visiting an eco-station to learn about sustainability or visiting a local mosque, pupils value how these educational visits bring their learning to life. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about the vast array of leadership opportunities, taking seriously their roles as play leaders and members of the school's 'GIFT' team.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that pupils secure the necessary accuracy and fluency in basic knowledge and skills, particularly in writing, in readiness for their future learning.
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About this inspection

This school is part of St Teresa of Calcutta Catholic 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, Christopher Foley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John McAuley.

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

This inspection took place on 8 and 9 September 2026.

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 and other senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator and the designated safeguarding lead, during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority, a representative of the diocese, members of the board of trustees and members of the local governing body, including the chair of the local governing body.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school currently uses no alternative provision. The school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. It is in the Diocese of Salford. Its last section 48 inspection took place in June 2026.

Headteacher: Mandy Messham

Lead inspector:

Kate Bowker, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Sarah Gower-Jones, Ofsted Inspector

Matthew King, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from [different sources](#). More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

 The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 8 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

207

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: 268

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)

35.96%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 26.5%

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

3.38%

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: 4.1%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

8.70%

Well below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

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

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		61%	
2024/25 (final)	62%	62%	Close to average
2023/24		61%	
2022/23		60%	

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		74%	
2024/25 (final)	88%	75%	Above
2023/24		74%	
2022/23		73%	

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		72%	
2024/25 (final)	65%	72%	Below
2023/24		72%	
2022/23		71%	

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		73%	
2024/25 (final)	73%	74%	Close to average
2023/24		73%	
2022/23		73%	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		46%	
2024/25 (final)	62%	47%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24		46%	
2022/23		44%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		62%	
2024/25 (final)	85%	63%	Above
2023/24		62%	
2022/23		60%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		59%	
2024/25 (final)	62%	59%	Close to average
2023/24		58%	
2022/23		58%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		60%	
2024/25 (final)	69%	61%	Close to average
2023/24		59%	
2022/23		59%	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		68%	
2024/25 (final)	62%	69%	-8 pp
2023/24		67%	
2022/23		66%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25 (final)	85%	81%	4 pp
2023/24		80%	
2022/23		78%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		78%	
2024/25 (final)	62%	78%	-17 pp
2023/24		78%	
2022/23		77%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25 (final)	69%	81%	-11 pp
2023/24		79%	

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23		79%	

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)	6.3%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	5.9%	5.5%	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)	21.1%	13.0%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	16.8%	14.6%	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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