

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Ulverston

Address: Springfield Road, Ulverston, Cumbria, LA12 0EA

Unique reference number (URN): 149541

Inspection report: 24 March 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 ●

Early years

Strong standard ●

Leaders have planned an early years curriculum that is well structured and focused on the essential knowledge children need. Staff teach the curriculum through a range of imaginative and engaging tasks. Staff focus on highly purposeful interactions that develop children's thinking, problem-solving and reasoning skills. Staff are adept at developing children's understanding by promoting their learning at every opportunity.

From the start of early years, there is a central focus on developing children's communication and language. Two- and three-year-old children are prepared extremely well for their next steps in learning. The support that these youngest children receive, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is highly effective in developing the range of their vocabulary. As children progress through early years, they use an increasingly complex range of language in their everyday speech.

Leaders also have a clear focus on developing reading in the early years. In the nursery provision, children start to recognise letters and the sounds that letters represent. In Reception, children extend their learning to read words and sentences with meaning. Children use their phonics knowledge well by applying it to their written work. By the end of their time in the early years, children, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, are well prepared for the Year 1 curriculum.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders identify any additional needs that pupils have at the earliest opportunity, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders and teachers check pupils' progress regularly to set consistently high expectations for pupils' learning. These checks are used to expertly adapt support to cater for pupils' changing needs and reduce barriers to their learning.

Staff use their training to address any barriers to learning that pupils may experience. They use a wide range of strategies to promote pupils' independent learning, for example. Staff support pupils to follow the curriculum successfully. Whatever their needs, pupils participate fully, achieve well and are included in all aspects of school life. Pupils feel valued and know that they are celebrated for who they are.

Leaders engage well with parents and carers. They work effectively with other agencies and use expert advice and guidance to support pupils' learning. Leaders draw effectively on research to inform how the school uses additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. As a result, the support and experiences provided help these pupils to achieve well.

Where necessary, the school uses alternative provision effectively to support some pupils' specific therapeutic needs.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' personal development. They have developed a comprehensive and highly-effective programme of experiences to support pupils' personal development and wellbeing. Leaders ensure that staff have high aspirations for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with additional needs.

Pupils gain a deep knowledge of their own and other faiths. They celebrate different cultures and beliefs and learn to respect and value diversity. Pupils have a detailed knowledge and understanding of equalities and fundamental British values. Pupils deepen their knowledge further through trips, such as a residential trip to London where pupils learn about democracy and British culture. The school's promotion of equality and diversity ensures that pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Pupils engage with different personal development themes and issues through oral presentation tasks and discussion activities. Pupils receive constructive feedback from their peers and learn to respect one another's views. These activities support the development of pupils' character, confidence and resilience. Pupils also have a highly developed sense of right and wrong. They learn how to resolve conflicts with others independently. Pupils consistently make the right choices and decisions about how they should act and respond to others.

The school's relationships and sex education programme ensures that pupils have a detailed and age-appropriate knowledge about what makes a healthy relationship. They know how to manage risks, including when online, and learn about financial matters, such as the dangers involved with credit and debt.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and interests. The school nurtures pupils' talents and interests through participation in clubs, including DJing and sports clubs. Pupils can also learn to play a number of musical instruments. Moreover, pupils learn about their local heritage. For example, they learn clog dancing and perform at a local folk festival.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Pupils achieve well. By the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is typically close to, and sometimes above, the national average. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' reading is a significant area of strength. This is a result of leaders' effective work to develop pupils' language and vocabulary.

The school successfully supports the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils achieve well across the curriculum from their differing starting points.

Academically, the school prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education. From early years, leaders prioritise the development of children's vocabulary, language and

number skills. At the early stage of reading, pupils accurately apply their phonics knowledge. Pupils secure the basic mathematical knowledge they need for key stage 1 and beyond. However, some pupils do not consistently demonstrate accurate spelling, punctuation and handwriting skills across subjects.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have a clear oversight of pupils' attendance. They spot patterns and trends to identify where pupils and their families may need more support. As a result of leaders' work, attendance rates are improving. They are consistently above the national average for all pupils. There has also been a significant reduction in the rate of persistent absence, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders have established a generally calm and respectful environment in which pupils show positive attitudes to school and to each other. Pupils feel safe from hurtful and harmful behaviours. Pupils trust staff to address any misbehaviour fairly and decisively. Staff generally apply the school's behaviour policy consistently well. Behaviours such as discrimination, bullying and harassment are rare. When such behaviour does occur, staff address it swiftly and effectively. However, at times, some pupils distract others in lessons when they do not focus fully on their learning. Some staff do not routinely tackle this well enough.

Leaders put effective strategies in place to ensure that all pupils, including those with SEND, learn how to manage their own emotions and feelings. For example, pupils use a set of skills that they have been taught to inform their reactions to other pupils' behaviour and views. This helps pupils to respond thoughtfully and maturely to others.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of education that the school provides. Leaders make informed decisions about how to improve provision further. For example, leaders recently reviewed the curriculum and made changes so it is appropriately ambitious and engaging for pupils. Staff's professional learning means that they have a secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. Teaching captures pupils' interest and makes learning memorable and fun.

Pupils experience a broad curriculum that supports them to build their knowledge on what has gone before. Teachers generally use assessment strategies effectively to check pupils' understanding of key knowledge. However, there is a lack of precision in the way that some teachers identify and remedy some basic errors in pupils' knowledge and skills. For example, errors in pupils' handwriting, spelling and punctuation are not routinely addressed.

In phonics and mathematics, the curriculum sets out clearly the knowledge that pupils need to know. Where needed, teachers adapt tasks and provide support for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that they learn the intended curriculum successfully and progress well from their starting points.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They have clearly identified relevant areas for improvement to develop the school's provision further. Leaders have undertaken significant work in revising the curriculum. They have also ensured that staff implement the revised curriculum appropriately. This has made a positive difference to pupils' learning. In particular, the recent focus on developing the range of pupils' vocabulary and the quality of pupils' spoken language has been highly successful.

The checks that leaders undertake on the quality of provision ensure that pupils are always put at the heart of leaders' and trustees' decision-making. There is a continual focus on how the school can best support vulnerable pupils and those who face barriers to learning. The school uses funding for disadvantaged pupils effectively. Leaders use this additional funding where it has the greatest effect on the outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged pupils.

Trustees and local governors meet the duties required of them. They receive the information they need to support and challenge school leaders through a range of sources. Trustees and governors use this information to support and challenge school leaders so that the school continues to improve.

Staff are positive about the support that they get from leaders for their workload and wellbeing. They value the professional learning opportunities available to them.

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

Pupils at St Mary's appreciate the care and attention that staff provide. This makes the school a welcoming and supportive environment for pupils. Pupils have secure and supportive relationships with staff. They are mindful of following the school's 3 rights: the right to learn, be safe and be respected. Pupils use these principles in their everyday interactions with each other. They behave well and maintain positive relationships with their peers. Staff do not allow poor behaviour to escalate. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare. Pupils know how to manage their own feelings and emotions because of the support that staff provide. This means that the environment is generally calm and purposeful, with clear routines. For example, in the early years, children settle independently at the start of the day.

Pupils trust staff and feel safe in their care. This helps to foster in pupils a clear sense of belonging to the school. Pupils are proud to be part of a community where everyone is welcome, valued and included. Pupils enjoy coming to school. This is clearly evidenced in pupils' high rates of attendance.

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils' achievement. Pupils have a positive attitude towards their education and attain well. Leaders ensure that barriers to learning are identified swiftly, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils progress well through the curriculum and from their starting points because staff use effective strategies to support them to do so.

Pupils benefit from a rich and varied range of curriculum experiences. For example, they have regular walks in the local environment to supplement their learning, helping to reinforce their geographical knowledge. Pupils are extremely well prepared to become mature and responsible members of the school and wider community. For example, pupils lead sports activities for younger pupils and raise funds to support charities.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that all staff consistently and effectively address basic errors in pupils' handwriting, spelling and punctuation so that these do not persist.
 - Leaders should ensure that all teachers apply consistent expectations of behaviour in lessons so that pupils remain focused and do not distract others from their learning.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Mater Christi 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 (CEO), Jacky Kennedy, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Elisabeth Mallinson.

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 executive headteacher, the acting head of school, the early years leader, the CEO of the multi academy trust, the director for school improvement, trustees, members of the local governing board, staff, pupils, parents and carers during the inspection.

This school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. The school's first section 48 inspection as an academy is due before July 2027.

The school makes use of 2 alternative provisions, including one that is unregistered.

This was the school's first inspection since becoming an academy in February 2023.

Executive headteacher : Laura Byrne

Lead inspector:

Steve Bentham, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Keith Wright, Ofsted Inspector

Cleo Cunningham, 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 24 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

164

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

120

Well 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)

7.20%

Well below 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

4.27%

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

9.76%

Below average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Well below 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	78%	61%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	65%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	93%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	81%	60%	Above

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	95%	74%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	100%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	100%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	86%	73%	Above

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	83%	72%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	70%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	100%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	86%	71%	Above

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	86%	73%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	83%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	93%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	86%	73%	Above

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

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

Disadvantaged pupils 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	33%	46%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	S	47%	S

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
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
Latest 3 year average	83%	62%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	S	63%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23 (final)	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
Latest 3 year average	58%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	S	59%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S
2022/23 (final)	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
Latest 3 year average	50%	60%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	S	61%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23 (final)	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	33%	68%	-34 pp
2024/25 (revised)	S	69%	S
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	83%	80%	4 pp
2024/25 (revised)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
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	58%	78%	-19 pp
2024/25 (revised)	S	78%	S
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	50%	80%	-30 pp
2024/25 (revised)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
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)	3.0%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	4.3%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	4.8%	5.9%	Below

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	1.8%	13.3%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	6.5%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	17.1%	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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