

The Catholic High School, Chester

Address: Old Wrexham Road, Handbridge, Chester, Cheshire, CH4 7HS

Unique reference number (URN): 139343

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.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils' attainment in national examinations is improving and most pupils progress well from their starting points. Disadvantaged pupils also achieve well, with their outcomes in many subjects similar to national averages. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those in the specially resourced provision, typically achieve well.

In the sixth form, published examination results dipped below average in 2025. Leaders took effective action to improve how well some course were taught. This has led to current students achieving well.

Across the curriculum, pupils typically gain appropriate knowledge and skills. They develop strong foundations in literacy. Opportunities such as debating allow pupils to build their communication skills confidently. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are well supported to develop their spelling, vocabulary and oracy skills.

Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Almost all progress successfully on to education, employment, or training.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have strengthened their systems for monitoring attendance. Rates of attendance for all pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are in line with the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is improving and their levels of persistent absence have reduced from previous years. However, leaders acknowledge that further improvement is needed to help some disadvantaged pupils come to school more often.

A sense of community underpins the school's approach to behaviour. Pupils follow well-established routines and respond positively to the high expectations set by leaders. Staff build warm relationships with pupils. The rewards system is used effectively to encourage pupils to come to school and behave well. Pupils typically conduct themselves positively in corridors and around the school. This results in a calm and orderly atmosphere. During breaktimes and lunchtimes, pupils enjoy each others' company, whether chatting together or playing sports. In lessons, most pupils engage in tasks well and remain focused on their learning. Bullying is rare and when concerns arise, staff sort it out quickly. Pupils are typically considerate of each other. Derogatory language is not commonly heard. Staff deal with it quickly if it happens.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have established an ambitious curriculum. Since the last inspection, they have improved its design successfully. The curriculum builds on prior learning, helping pupils to develop their knowledge of a wide range of subjects.

Teachers typically have secure subject knowledge, which they use to present information clearly. They draw on what pupils already know and use a range of engaging activities to support pupils' understanding. However, on occasions, learning is not adapted precisely enough to fully meet the needs of some pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders have a secure understanding of the strengths of the curriculum and teaching, and where refinement is needed. They recognise that further work is required to ensure that the intended curriculum is delivered consistently well.

Assessment is generally used well to check prior knowledge and to inform future learning. While teachers routinely check for understanding, there are occasions when pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to learn from any errors they may have made. Leaders identify gaps in pupils' reading and writing skills effectively. Pupils' progress is tracked closely to ensure that any gaps in this essential knowledge are identified and reduced. Work is under way to strengthen numeracy support across the school.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Care for pupils lies at the heart of the school's inclusion strategy. Leaders identify pupils' varied needs quickly and precisely. They share comprehensive information with staff. Staff are trained to use a range of strategies to help pupils overcome any barriers to learning that they experience. When pupils need extra support, leaders work effectively with external agencies as well as parents and carers to meet pupils' needs.

Leaders have strengthened the support for pupils who need additional help in class. This enables pupils to engage with their learning. Typically, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported effectively. However, at times, learning is not adjusted closely enough to meet some pupils' specific needs. Leaders continue to refine the way they evaluate the impact of their strategies.

The school's specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND provides well-considered care and teaching for pupils who need more specific input. It is highly valued by the pupils who attend. Leaders also ensure that the 'Trinity' provision offers high-quality support for pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. This helps pupils to feel settled and ready for their next lesson.

Leaders ensure that additional funding, such as the pupil premium, is used effectively, for example by ensuring that disadvantaged pupils can participate in school trips and other activities. Alternative provision is commissioned appropriately and is used only when it is in the pupil's best interests.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders, together with trustees and governors, act in the best interests of pupils. They are united in their commitment to ensuring that the school offers the very best opportunities for pupils inside and outside the classroom. Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas that need further improvement. Those responsible for governance bring relevant expertise to their roles. They immerse themselves in the life of the school. Governors are well informed about how well the school is doing and are active participants

in its continual improvement. They ask astute questions and support and challenge leaders in equal measure.

Staff, including those new to the profession, are proud to be part of the school community. They feel genuinely valued. Leaders are considerate in their approach to staff's workload and wellbeing. Staff speak warmly about the professional learning opportunities available to them. These opportunities support their ongoing professional development and deepen their subject knowledge. For example, leaders have been proactive in equipping staff with consistent approaches to enhance literacy in all subjects.

Leaders have cultivated positive partnerships with parents and carers, the local community and neighbouring schools. For example, through the Chester Schools Partnership, leaders have secured opportunities to broaden pupils' horizons and further enrich their experiences in school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have built a coherent personal development programme that meets statutory requirements and responds to the specific needs of the school community. For example, leaders respond proactively to local safeguarding priorities by adapting the curriculum to address risks that pupils may encounter in their lives. This includes raising awareness of the potential harmful effects of social media. Pupils learn how to stay safe, lead healthy lives and maintain positive relationships. Pupils are well cared for. Those who sometimes need additional help with their behaviour receive sensitive support through the 'Trinity' provision which helps them to settle, feel at ease and engage more fully in their learning.

Pupils embrace the school's values. They show respect for differences between people. Pupils typically gain a secure understanding of fundamental British values. They have regular opportunities to explore and celebrate diverse cultures and beliefs. These opportunities also deepen pupils' tolerance and understanding of others. Pupils relish taking on responsibility and make a real difference both in school and in their community. For example, some pupils contributed to a university project on artificial intelligence. Leaders track pupils' participation in enrichment activities carefully to ensure equitable access to these opportunities. This helps to ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils benefit from all that is on offer.

Pupils gain valuable careers guidance. Leaders have established purposeful partnerships with local employers. Pupils, including students in the sixth form, benefit from work experience and gain an appreciation of the skills needed for the world of work. Leaders make appropriate adjustments to ensure that pupils who face barriers to their learning can participate fully in these activities and placements. The vast majority of pupils move on to appropriate education, employment or training, including apprenticeships.

Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders have ensured that the school's sixth form is inclusive. Students take up a broad range of well-designed courses of study. Those following vocational qualifications generally make progress that is close to the national average. However, in the most recently published A-level examination results, students on some academic courses did not achieve as well.

Leaders are taking effective action to address this. Teaching continues to improve. Most learning activities are appropriate and help to deepen students' learning. Teachers are strengthening how they check and respond to students' understanding. A more structured approach to study periods is helping students to use their independent study time more productively. The impact of these recent strategies is evident in the high-quality work produced by current students. They generally progress well through the curriculum.

Students are actively engaged in the life of the school. For example, they contribute to the student council and take an organising role in charity and sporting events. Students benefit from a programme that covers relationships, ethics and financial planning. These experiences help them prepare well for their future lives.

Students receive valuable careers advice that helps them to navigate and plan for their next steps. Students who face additional barriers to their learning are looked after with care. They value the support that they receive.

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

Pupils thrive in this warm, friendly and inclusive school. They develop trusting relationships with staff that help them to feel secure. Pupils value the advice and support they receive from staff. They are safe and have an adult they can speak to if they have any concerns.

Pupils generally behave well. Most pupils listen attentively in lessons and learn in a calm environment. Bullying is uncommon. When it does occur, staff respond quickly and effectively. Pupils are polite and show respect for differences between people. They socialise well together around the school. Pupils who need additional support appreciate being able to access quiet spaces such as the 'Trinity' provision. These spaces enable them to settle and prepare for their learning.

Pupils typically attend school regularly. Those who face barriers to learning receive tailored support from staff. Most pupils enjoy learning and try their best. Pupils and students in the sixth form generally achieve well, including in their end-of-year examinations in Year 11 and Year 13. They build secure subject knowledge and skills across most subjects. They leave school well equipped for their next steps.

Pupils benefit from a rich and varied programme of extra-curricular activities that develop their confidence and nurture their interests. These include the gospel choir, debating society and art clubs. Pupils develop teamwork skills and enhance their wellbeing through participating in a wide range of sports. They speak positively about taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which develops their leadership skills and resilience. Pupils showcase their talents and forge lasting relationships with their peers through the school's regular musical productions. These foster their sense of belonging and create unforgettable memories.

Pupils are actively engaged in the wider community. Their contributions include advocating for local bike racks, sixth-form bingo sessions for local residents and donating to refugee charities. These experiences develop pupils' sense of responsibility and compassion.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to strengthen the consistency of teaching to further improve pupils' learning experiences and outcomes for all pupils.
 - Leaders should continue to build on their recent improvements to the Post-16 provision to ensure that students achieve well in the qualifications that they study.
 - Leaders should continue to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils so that they attend well.
-

About this inspection

This school is part of The Chester Catholic Academies Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The headteacher, Cathryn McKeagney, also acts as the chief executive officer of the trust. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Bernard Larkin.

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, other senior leaders and staff during the inspection. The lead inspector met with trustees and governors. The lead inspector also spoke with representatives from the diocese and the local authority. An inspector spoke with representatives of the alternative providers that the school uses.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. It is part of the Diocese of Shrewsbury. Its last section 48 inspection took place in November 2024.

The school provides a specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The provision supports up to 15 pupils with autism.

The school makes use of 3 unregistered alternative providers.

Headteacher : Cathryn McKeagney

Lead inspector:

Ahmed Marikar, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Richard McGuire, His Majesty's Inspector

Andy Cunningham, His Majesty's Inspector

Stephanie Gill, Ofsted Inspector

Rebecca Smith, 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

808

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: 1,067

School capacity

1,117

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)

21.54%

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: 28.9%

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

3.59%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

13.74%

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)

Resourced provision

What does this mean?

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

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (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)	44.5%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	34.8%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	37.1%	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)	46.7	46.1	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	44.3	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	43.2	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)	-0.08	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.50	-0.03	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' 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)	18.5%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	21.2%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	14.3%	25.2%	Below

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)	32.7	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	30.4	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	28.4	35.0	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.27	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.37	-0.57	Below

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)	18.5%	53.1%	-34.6 pp
2023/24 (final)	21.2%	53.1%	-31.9 pp
2022/23 (final)	14.3%	52.4%	-38.1 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)	32.7	50.4	-17.7
2023/24 (final)	30.4	50.0	-19.6

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	28.4	50.3	-21.9

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.27	0.16	-1.43
2022/23 (final)	-1.37	0.17	-1.54

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)	82%	92%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	94%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	82%	94%	Below

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	26.38	35.00	Below
2023/24 (final)	31.66	34.38	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	28.08	34.16	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	-0.3	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	0.1	0.0	Close to average

Absence

Overall absence

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	9.1%	8.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	8.2%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	11.9%	9.0%	Above

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)	25.9%	23.4%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	23.8%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	31.2%	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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted
© Crown copyright 2026



© Crown copyright