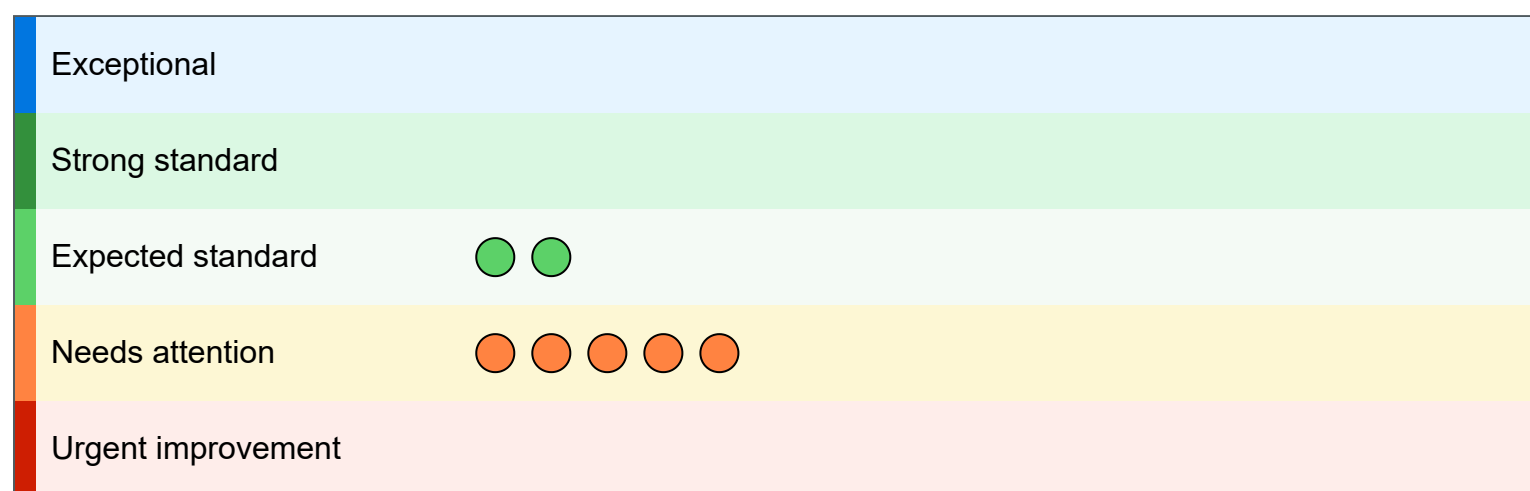


St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, a Voluntary Academy

Address: Tong Lane, Bacup, Lancashire, OL13 9LJ

Unique reference number (URN): 147592

Inspection report: 14 April 2026



✔ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- Not met: The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Early years

Expected standard 

Due to ambitious leadership, children in the early years get off to a secure start. Leaders ensure there is a language-rich learning environment that children use independently to play and learn. The early years curriculum is well designed. It is aligned closely with the key stage 1 curriculum to meet the needs of children and pupils who are taught in mixed-age classes. Teachers design activities that develop children's knowledge and curiosity about the wider world. Trained staff teach phonics well. They provide regular opportunities for children to practise reading sounds and words.

Staff know children well. They use this knowledge to support children to progress well through the curriculum. When needed, children receive timely support to help them keep up with their peers. This is particularly effective in supporting children's communication and language. Staff's interactions help children to develop their speaking and listening skills. For example, during 'snack and chat' children learn important life skills, such as taking turns and listening carefully to their friends. On a small number of occasions, these interactions do not deepen children's knowledge or understanding as well as they could. Children in the early years are confident. There is a sense of belonging and children are taught how to keep themselves safe, clean and healthy.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders are ambitious for pupils' personal development and wellbeing. They see this area of school life as the key vehicle to enrich pupils' lives and foster their sense of belonging. Leaders have carefully considered the community which they serve in constructing their personal development offer. As a result, the relationship and health education programme is carefully tailored to pupils' needs. For example, partnerships with the police and the NHS help pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Leaders are aware of online risks. Therefore, pupils are taught how to stay safe online and how to use social media appropriately.

There is a sense of responsibility among pupils. This is enriched through the various leadership roles offered to pupils. The 'GIFT' team makes valued contributions to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. For example, they show care for others who are in need within the community through charity work. Pupils are keen to make a difference in the school's improvement journey. 'Curriculum Ambassadors' help leaders to shape and improve the curriculum. In turn, this is supporting pupils to take ownership of their education and increasingly raise expectations of themselves.

Pupils respect and value the differences between themselves and others. Their knowledge of fundamental British values is secure. This supports pupils in working and learning together and prepares them well for the world around them. Pupils enjoy a wide range of after-school activities, including sports and the arts. They access the woodland areas around school, developing important life skills of cooperation and team work. Leaders closely track how well different groups of pupils engage with these experiences. This results in high participation rates, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders have strengthened the pastoral support for pupils. Staff act quickly to support pupils' wellbeing. As a result, pupils report school is a place where they feel known and valued.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Over time, many pupils have not achieved well. They have not been well prepared for the next stage of their education. This is reflected in the most recent published data. The attainment of the Year 6 pupils who left the school in 2025 was below that of other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

Improvements to the curriculum and the way in which it is taught, especially in the early years and key stage 1, mean that the younger pupils are becoming better equipped to access their learning. However, many older pupils continue to have gaps in their knowledge. This limits their ability to achieve as well as they could.

Leaders have prioritised pupils' writing fluency, particularly handwriting and spelling. This is beginning to bear fruit. More recently, younger pupils are developing their reading knowledge with increasing confidence. However, the proportion of Year 1 pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check remains below the national average.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

The persistent absence of some pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is stubbornly high. This affects how well these pupils thrive, academically and socially. As a result, they cannot fully benefit from what the school has to offer. Recently, with support from the trust and local authority, leaders have improved their systems to improve attendance. Targeted support for families is beginning to have a positive effect on the attendance rates of all pupil groups. Consequently, attendance rates are starting to improve.

Leaders have made it their mission to ensure that the school is a place where pupils feel that they belong and are safe. Consequently, they have prioritised promoting pupils' positive behaviour. Training for staff means that they better understand pupils' behaviours, including those related to SEND more effectively. Pupils are taught how to manage their own behaviour. Dedicated spaces such as 'The Hive' support pupils who feel overwhelmed. As a result, suspensions from school have decreased. At times, some pupils become distracted in lessons or they do not move around the school calmly. Many pupils report behaviour has improved. However, a few pupils believe that bullying is not dealt with quickly enough by staff.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Considerable changes in staffing have negatively impacted leaders' ability to move teaching forward as quickly as they intended.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have overhauled the curriculum. As a result, there are now coherent curriculums across different subjects in place. However, the way in which these curriculums are delivered varies in quality across classes and subjects. Consequently, teaching does not enable pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged, to learn all that they should.

Leaders have an accurate insight of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. They are beginning to build a commonly understood approach to teaching across the school. Leaders make sure that staff access a suitable range of professional development opportunities. This is leading to some improvements. For example, the focus on ensuring that the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics means that younger pupils have a secure foundation on which to build as they move through the school. However, other work to improve staff's expertise has not been as effective. For instance, teaching does not consistently focus on addressing pupils' gaps in knowledge and their misconceptions. Although pupils' needs are now readily identified, teachers' expertise in adapting their teaching to help pupils access their learning is variable.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Leaders use additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils, particularly through pastoral support to help pupils manage their emotions and behaviour. However, leaders do not evaluate the impact of this support sharply enough, especially in relation to pupils' achievement. This limits leaders' ability to refine their actions to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders' work to identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved. As a result, they have a greater insight into the barriers that may hinder the learning of these pupils. Leaders are becoming increasingly accurate in identifying the obstacles that other pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, may encounter to their learning or wellbeing.

Leaders work increasingly well with external agencies and specialists. With the support of the trust, they have also prioritised staff's professional development. These changes have started to lead to better personalised support that these pupils need to learn well. However, these positive changes are not universally successful in all classrooms. This means that, for some pupils, particularly those with SEND, their needs are not met well enough. For example, their work in lessons at times is not well matched to their abilities.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Over time, the school has experienced considerable instability in teaching and leadership. This has hindered the school's journey of improvement. However, new trust and school leaders are united in their ambition for pupils. They make the right decisions in the best

interests of pupils. Leaders are a cohesive team who have stabilised this school. They have wasted little time in accurately identifying the school's strengths and most pressing issues to address. They have established the foundations that are needed to secure long-term success for the school.

Leaders work has benefited from the support that they have received through the trust and external partnerships. High-quality professional development is having a positive impact. However, the impact of this work is not fully realised. Variability in curriculum delivery means that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are not achieving as well as they should.

The trust has strengthened its strategic oversight of the school. Trustees and members of the local governing body have an accurate knowledge of the progress of school. Those responsible for governance fulfil their statutory duties. They support and challenge leaders appropriately, using their accurate insights from data and other information to aid the school's improvement journey. However, their knowledge of the school's approach to supporting disadvantaged pupils through the pupil premium strategy is less well developed.

Leaders are mindful of staff's workload and wellbeing. As a result, staff are positive about working at the school. They value the support that they have received. One the whole, parents and carers are positive and acknowledge the school's rapid development and improvement.

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

St Mary's is a welcoming school. Pupils receive a warm greeting at the start of the school day. This makes pupils feel safe and happy. They enjoy social times much more than they have in the past. Pupils understand what bullying is and the different forms it can take. Bullying does not happen often. However, when it does, a few pupils do not believe that staff resolve incidents quickly enough. Many pupils behave well during lessons, but some pupils lose concentration and distract others. This sometimes has a negative impact on other pupils' learning. Although pupils' attendance rates are improving over time, they remain below the national average.

Pupils enjoy their learning. Leaders have improved the curriculum and the way that it is taught. These changes are beginning to have a positive impact, particularly in the early years and in key stage 1. Even so, this has not made enough difference to older pupils. Due to weaknesses in the past, these pupils have gaps in their knowledge, which limits their ability to achieve as well as they should. Leaders accurately identify the barriers that some pupils face to their learning or wellbeing. This is particularly true for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, staff's use of this information is variable. As a result, pupils with SEND do not learn consistently well.

Pupils' aspirations for themselves are rising. This is because of the work that leaders have done on careers education. Pupils are proud of the 'Aspirations Wall', which illustrates their hopes and career ambitions for the future.

Since the previous inspection, leaders, with the support of the trust, have stabilised the school. Leaders have identified the right priorities, in the right order, to secure improvement. As a result, pupils are getting a much better experience of all that is on offer.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the variability with which the curriculum is taught is reduced so that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils, learn all that they should and are ready for the next stage of their education.
 - Leaders should continue to embed their systems for prompting regular attendance so that pupils' attendance rates rise and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent reduces.
 - Leaders should ensure that teachers use the information that they hold about pupils' needs to adapt their teaching so that these pupils overcome barriers to learning and achieve well.
 - Leaders should ensure that their high expectations of behaviour are applied in all aspects of school life so that small incidents of disengagement are reduced further.
 - Leaders should help staff in the early years to consistently use high-quality interactions to deepen children's learning.
-

About this inspection

This school is part of Romero 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 (CEO), Katy Cox, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Angela Ager.

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 HMI.

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Inspectors spoke with school leaders, members of the trust board, including the chair of the trust board and the CEO. They also met with members of the local governing body and a representatives of the local authority and the diocese.

This school is registered as having a Christian religious character. It is in the Diocese of Salford. Its last section 48 inspection was June 2018.

Inspectors checked the following information with the school:

This school is registered as having a Christian religious character. It is in the Diocese of Salford. Its last section 48 inspection was June 2018.

The school currently does not use alternative provision.

Headteacher: Elizabeth Lloyd

Lead inspector:


Elliot Costas-Walker, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Schelene Ferris, 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 14 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

140

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 272

School capacity

210

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

76.15%

Well above 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

6.43%

Well 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: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

25.00%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs 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	26%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	15%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	37%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	32%	60%	Below

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	49%	74%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	48%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	53%	74%	Below
2022/23 (final)	47%	73%	Below

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	46%	72%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	30%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	63%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	53%	71%	Below

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	34%	73%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	30%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	42%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	32%	73%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

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

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

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	28%	46%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	18%	47%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	35%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	33%	44%	Close to average

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	46%	62%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	36%	63%	Below
2023/24 (final)	53%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	50%	60%	Close to average

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	46%	59%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	27%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	59%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	56%	58%	Close to average

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	33%	60%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	27%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	41%	59%	Below
2022/23 (final)	33%	59%	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 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	28%	68%	-40 pp
2024/25 (revised)	18%	69%	-51 pp
2023/24 (final)	35%	67%	-32 pp
2022/23 (final)	33%	66%	-33 pp

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	46%	80%	-34 pp
2024/25 (revised)	36%	81%	-44 pp
2023/24 (final)	53%	80%	-27 pp
2022/23 (final)	50%	78%	-28 pp

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	46%	78%	-32 pp
2024/25 (revised)	27%	78%	-51 pp
2023/24 (final)	59%	78%	-19 pp
2022/23 (final)	56%	77%	-22 pp

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	33%	80%	-46 pp
2024/25 (revised)	27%	81%	-53 pp
2023/24 (final)	41%	79%	-38 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	33%	79%	-46 pp

Absence

Overall absence

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	7.2%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	8.6%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	6.5%	5.9%	Close to average

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	23.8%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	29.3%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	24.8%	16.2%	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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