

St Cuthbert's Church of England Primary School

Address: St Albans Road, Darwen, Lancashire, BB3 0HY

Unique reference number (URN): 119615

Inspection report: 9 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.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders monitor attendance and behaviour incidents rigorously. They use this information to intervene quickly when attendance or behaviour falls short of leaders' expectations. When necessary, leaders use a range of strategies to support pupils who struggle with getting to school. This includes prompt home visits, personalised plans and referrals to other agencies, when appropriate. Additionally, leaders celebrate positive and improved attendance. They reward pupils with points and prizes to recognise their efforts in getting to school. Leaders' actions are usually effective in reducing pupils' barriers to attendance and behaviour. As a result, attendance at the school is generally in line with the national average.

On the whole, pupils treat one another with respect. They play happily and sensibly together at social times and make sure to help others when needed. Any incidents of bullying or unkind behaviour are addressed quickly by staff and leaders. Pupils know leaders' rules and expectations. They know that positive behaviour is rewarded and that negative behaviour choices have consequences. That said, leaders provide additional support and education for pupils who struggle to manage their own emotions. This helps to prepare pupils well for the wider world.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Since the last inspection, leaders have reviewed and, where appropriate, made substantial changes to the curriculum. As a result, the curriculum is now crafted so that pupils build their knowledge and understanding in a logical and considered way. Alongside this, leaders have designed a professional learning programme to support the effective teaching of this new curriculum. Teachers typically set carefully designed tasks that gradually build pupils' knowledge over time. Staff also use a number of strategies to support pupils who face difficulties with their learning. This can range from checking for understanding to providing additional resources to working in a small group on a specially designed task. Teachers and teaching assistants check for pupils' understanding regularly. When they identify an error or misunderstanding, they usually address this quickly. The more effective teaching is in those curriculum areas that are more embedded, for example phonics. That said, leaders' recent curriculum changes and staff's knowledge of effective teaching help ensure that pupils are supported well to secure important foundations for learning.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders have crafted an early years curriculum that clearly sets out what children learn and the order in which they learn it. There are clear processes to measure children's progress through this curriculum as they establish secure foundations for later learning. Leaders' detailed knowledge of the children helps them to continually develop the provision. This typically ensures that children make effective progress from their starting points.

The knowledge of teachers and staff in the early years helps ensure that their interactions with the children are purposeful. Staff routinely expand children's vocabulary and provide

meaningful commentary to assist children in linking language to action. Staff design tasks carefully when teaching phonics and number knowledge. Children have opportunities to apply and deepen this learning in independent play. Leaders provide a range of exploratory activities, including an outdoor kitchen, a rope bridge and creative activities using paint. Children enjoy these activities while developing their physical strength and fine motor skills.

The wellbeing of children in the early years is prioritised. The environment is safe and welcoming. Consequently, children settle quickly because of the nurturing relationships that are in place. Staff understand the specific barriers to learning that individual children may face. The environment or task is often adapted to help reduce these barriers. Typically, children gain the knowledge and skills needed to prepare them well for Year 1.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

A notable number of pupils at this school face challenges in their lives. Leaders work with teachers, other professionals, parents and carers to ensure that these pupils get the support they need. Leaders monitor the progress these pupils make and, when necessary, adapt the support so that it is effective. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have support plans. These typically communicate clear strategies for teachers to use to help reduce these pupils' barriers to learning. When necessary, leaders provide additional support outside the classroom to address individual pupils' specific difficulties with learning or wellbeing. On the whole, this is effective.

Leaders also use additional funding, such as the pupil premium, to reduce barriers for disadvantaged pupils. Through providing financial assistance or additional academic support, leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils are helped to access the school's offer. Additionally, leaders track pupils who are known, or previously known, to social care. Through collaboration with other professionals, leaders ensure that support for these pupils is put in place in a timely manner.

When necessary, leaders make effective use of alternative provision. They use this resource appropriately and work closely with the provision to support pupils working towards their agreed targets.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Over the last few years, leaders and those responsible for governance have established systems and approaches to bring about necessary improvements to the school. Through the support and challenge of governors, and in consultation with other professionals, leaders have established a school that is safe, kind, and where pupils and children learn well. However, leaders are not complacent. They recognise where further improvement is needed to embed high-quality practice that is consistent across all areas of the school. Leaders' enthusiasm to share effective practice with other schools and professionals means that their plans are well-informed and lead to improvement.

Leaders and governors place great value on the wider staff body. In turn, staff feel cared for and supported by leaders. There is a shared understanding of what needs to improve at the school. Staff appreciate and benefit from the professional development programme. Moreover, the voices and opinions of staff are valued and leaders use these to inform future

actions, when practicable. This is especially the case when it comes to managing staff workload and wellbeing.

Parents and carers recognise how the school has improved over recent years. They are confident in the care and education that leaders provide for their children. Additionally, leaders' warmth and openness encourage families to seek additional support from the school when necessary. Often, the support that leaders provide is highly effective. Consequently, leaders have developed a culture where parents are comfortable communicating with the school. Parents are confident that issues are normally resolved quickly.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed a personal development curriculum that teaches pupils about life in modern Britain. Through ongoing conversations with pupils and parents, leaders regularly amend and adapt this curriculum to address current concerns or misconceptions. As a result, pupils can articulate an understanding of individual differences. They know that some of these differences are protected by law. This knowledge, supported by leaders' clear rules and expectations, helps pupils to demonstrate attitudes in which discrimination is not tolerated.

A notable number of pupils face real challenges in their lives. Consequently, leaders provide comprehensive support for both pupils and their families. This helps to build effective and trusting relationships through which leaders can signpost families to other agencies and professionals, when appropriate. Additionally, these relationships allow leaders to develop a clear understanding of the barriers and risks that pupils face. This knowledge further informs the personal development curriculum. Leaders ensure that identified pupils receive additional education about topics where the risk may be increased, such as online safety and what makes healthy relationships. As a result, pupils learn how to recognise potential risks and keep themselves safe.

Leaders build pupils' independence and maturity through a range of additional roles and responsibilities, including as house captains and members of the school council and worship group. Pupils sometimes have a democratic vote to elect peers to these roles. In turn, pupils learn about and can articulate a clear understanding of democracy and how it is used in British society.

Leaders offer a range of clubs, trips and experiences that most pupils engage with. Pupils learn about the importance of the environment by visiting local parks, woods and zoos. They expand their cultural experiences through theatre and museum trips as well as art and music clubs. They learn about the importance of helping others by singing at the local care home and raising money for local charities. Collectively, this programme of enrichment helps pupils find new interests and understand their role in society.

Achievement

Over time, the number of pupils meeting the expected standard in key stage 1 and 2 national tests is too low. That said, recent changes to the curriculum are starting to address this. Key stage 1 pupils build their foundational knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics effectively. Similarly, key stage 2 pupils are starting to close the gaps in their knowledge formed by an earlier, less effective curriculum. The work produced by children and pupils is generally of a high quality. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consequently, outcomes in key stage 1 and 2 national tests, while still below the national average, have improved.

Leaders' recent changes to the curriculum are supporting pupils to build secure knowledge. These changes are still relatively new. However, the knowledge and skills that pupils are now gaining are preparing them well for their next stage of education.

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

Children and pupils find comfort in the school's warm, caring and supportive culture. In turn, pupils are happy and build meaningful friendships quickly. Pupils are also kind to one another. They play well together and make efforts to ensure that no other pupils are left out. Here, pupils are safe both physically and emotionally. They openly share concerns with their teachers and know that the right support will be given. This helps ensure that any instances of bullying are dealt with swiftly. The security that pupils feel at the school helps ensure that the majority of pupils attend school regularly. At the start of the day, almost all pupils arrive at school positively and ready to learn.

On the whole, pupils thoroughly enjoy their lessons. They listen carefully to the staff in the classroom and take care with their work. Pupils now complete tasks that help them build secure knowledge and address historic gaps in their learning. Children in Reception also develop essential knowledge and skills through appropriately designed tasks. Children and pupils who face difficulties with their learning get the help they need. Consequently, most children and pupils' outcomes in national tests have improved.

In line with their Christian ethos, pupils value the importance of giving back to their community. They raise funds for local charities and participate in local events such as singing in the community. Pupils also broaden their cultural knowledge and personal interests through trips and clubs. Those who face challenges in their lives receive additional support to take full advantage of the school's wider offer. Additionally, pupils value the additional responsibilities on offer. This reflects their pride in the school and their desire to help others.

Next steps

- Leaders should embed a highly effective use of assessment to identify and close gaps in pupils' knowledge rapidly so that pupils' build a secure body of knowledge as they move through the school.
 - Leaders should continue to ensure that high-quality teaching is consistent across the school so that outcomes in national tests improve across both key stages.
 - Leaders should continue to apply a sharp focus on all areas of the school's provision so that improvements are embedded and sustained.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Victoria Weddle.

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

This inspection took place on 9 September 2026 and 10 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 school leaders, governors, the local authority and the diocese during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke to a number of pupils, staff and parents. Responses through Ofsted Parent View were also considered as part of the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. It is in the Diocese of Blackburn. Its last section 48 inspection was in January 2024.

The school currently makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Emily Coolican

Lead inspector:

Tom Theobald, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Darren McCann, 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 9 September 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

184

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: 268

School capacity

225

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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

35.33%

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

4.89%

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

16.30%

Close to 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	32%	61%	Below
2024/25 (final)	38%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	32%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	25%	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	51%	74%	Below
2024/25 (final)	55%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	50%	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	38%	72%	Below
2024/25 (final)	48%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	32%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	34%	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	54%	73%	Below
2024/25 (final)	69%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	47%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	47%	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	10%	46%	Below
2024/25 (final)	17%	47%	Below
2023/24 (final)	7%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	7%	44%	Below

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	28%	62%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	33%	63%	Below
2023/24 (final)	36%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	14%	60%	Below

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	15%	59%	Below
2024/25 (final)	25%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	7%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	14%	58%	Below

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	28%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	42%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	29%	59%	Below
2022/23 (final)	14%	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	10%	68%	-58 pp
2024/25 (final)	17%	69%	-53 pp
2023/24 (final)	7%	67%	-60 pp
2022/23 (final)	7%	66%	-59 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	28%	80%	-52 pp
2024/25 (final)	33%	81%	-47 pp
2023/24 (final)	36%	80%	-44 pp
2022/23 (final)	14%	78%	-64 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	15%	78%	-63 pp
2024/25 (final)	25%	78%	-53 pp
2023/24 (final)	7%	78%	-70 pp
2022/23 (final)	14%	77%	-63 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	28%	80%	-52 pp
2024/25 (final)	42%	81%	-39 pp
2023/24 (final)	29%	79%	-51 pp
2022/23 (final)	14%	79%	-65 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 (3 term)	5.8%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.7%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	6.3%	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 (3 term)	15.1%	13.0%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	16.1%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	19.9%	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.

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.

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