

Inspection of St Paul's CofE Primary School, Astley Bridge

Newnham Street, Astley Bridge, Bolton, Lancashire BL1 8QA

Inspection dates:	22 and 23 October 2024
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The principal of this school is Anna Lister. This school is part of the Forward As One Church of England 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), Karen Bramwell, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Peter Bond.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since June 2013. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Paul's is an exciting place to learn. Pupils thrive in this happy school. Relationships between adults and pupils are exceptionally strong. The school's 'four pillars' help to ensure that everybody is made to feel welcome and respected. Children in the early years, along with any new pupils in other year groups, settle into school life quickly.

Pupils know that the school expects them to be 'ready, respectful and safe.' This inspires them to be the very best that they can be. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They show great consideration and politeness towards others. Pupils glow with pride when they receive 'smart cards' in recognition of their superb attitudes to school life.

The school is steadfast in its determination for every pupil to succeed. It has high expectations for pupils' academic achievement. Children in the early years get off to a flying start. Pupils across the school, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are remarkably well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Pupils make a highly tangible contribution to school life. They relish the responsibilities that leaders trust them to carry out. These include being playground leaders, e-safety champions, and members of the junior leadership team.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school is relentless in its pursuit to empower pupils in becoming independent and inquisitive learners. Working with the trust, the school has designed an engaging curriculum from the early years to Year 6 that successfully meets pupils' needs and interests.

The school serves a diverse community. Many children who join the school in the early years and in other year groups, speak English as an additional language. Staff support these children to develop strong communication and language skills. The school ensures that pupils have mastered the foundational knowledge in subjects before moving on to more difficult concepts. There are regular opportunities to revisit learning. Staff identify and quickly address any gaps in learning. Pupils make strong connections between new knowledge and prior learning. This helps them to gain an impressive depth of knowledge.

The school skilfully identifies and addresses the additional needs of pupils with SEND. Most pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as their peers. Where required, the school has well matched individual learning plans in place. As a result, pupils with SEND progress well through the curriculum.

Reading is at the heart of pupils' learning. Pupil reading ambassadors talk with pride of the reading café sessions that they lead. Children in the Nursery classes, including those who access the two-year-old provision, are immersed in rhymes and stories. This helps them to build an understanding of new vocabulary and sounds quickly. Children are well prepared to learn phonics when they join the Reception Year.

Well-trained staff expertly deliver phonics sessions. They build pupils' reading knowledge effectively with books that closely match the sounds that pupils know and understand. Pupils who struggle to read, including those who speak English as an additional language, benefit from well-matched additional support. The vast majority of pupils become fluent readers by the time that they leave the school.

The school regularly reviews the curriculum. This helps to inform its work to further enhance the already exceptional educational offer to pupils. Staff embrace the ongoing professional development that they receive. They value the support and training that the school and trust provides them. This develops staff's expertise and helps them to refine their practice, while ensuring that their workload is manageable.

In the early years, children focus fully on the task at hand. Pupils have an impressive work ethic. They enjoy learning and take considerable pride in the work that they produce. The school prioritises pupils' attendance. A small proportion of pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should. The school has a clear understanding of the reasons for this. It works closely with parents and carers to support these pupils to attend school more regularly.

The school's work to ensure that pupils develop as well-rounded young people is noteworthy. Pupils discuss topical issues with deep understanding and empathy. They have an impressive understanding of equality. Pupils learn in depth how to look after their mental health. Pupil well-being leaders provide regular 'breathing' sessions with their peers. Pupils use journals to 'write about their feelings.' They describe these approaches as helping them to be calm.

Pupils benefit greatly from the vast array of high-quality enrichment activities on offer, such as visiting law firms, courts and watching live orchestras. They build their confidence through learning in the school's 'Wild Wood' and through activities such as trampolining.

Trustees work effectively with the local governing body to hold the school to account for the quality of education that pupils receive. They help to ensure that pupils continue to receive an outstanding education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138851
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10337695
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	255
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Peter Bond
CEO of the trust	Karen Bramwell OBE
Principal	Anna Lister
Website	www.st-pauls.bolton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 and 21 June 2013, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Manchester. The last section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, took place in February 2018. The next section 48 inspection is due to take place during the 2025/26 academic year.
- The school runs a breakfast club for pupils.
- The school provides education for two-year-old children.
- The school do not make use of alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other school leaders.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics history, science, and music. For each deep dive, they had discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders and pupils about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- The lead inspector observed pupils from key stages 1 and 2 read to a familiar adult.
- The lead inspector spoke with members of the board of trustees, including the CEO and the chair of the trust. She also met with members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors.
- The lead inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for the provision for pupils with SEND. To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff, and pupils, and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their experiences of school. They looked at a range of documents related to pupils' welfare and education. They also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and for pupils.
- Inspectors met with parents at the start of the school day. They took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. Inspectors also spoke to some parents by telephone.

Inspection team

Rebecca Jewitt, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Barraclough

Ofsted Inspector

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