

St Margaret Mary Catholic Primary School, Carlisle

Kirklands Road, Carlisle, Cumbria CA2 4JD

Unique reference number (URN): 148701

Monitoring inspection report:

11 to 12 February 2026

At the most recent graded inspection, the following areas were identified as needing to improve:

- The curriculum in many subjects, as well as in the early years, is not well designed. It does not provide teachers with sufficient guidance for them to know what pupils should learn and when subject content should be taught. This hinders pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), from building a secure body of knowledge over time. The school must ensure that the curriculum sets out the important information that pupils will learn, ordered from the beginning of the early years to the end of Year 6, so that pupils can build their learning securely.
- In the absence of curriculum guidance, and without suitable support and training, teachers lack the expertise to deliver the curriculum. This means that the activities they select, alongside unclear explanations, do not help pupils to develop their knowledge or to understand key concepts. As a result, pupils do not learn the important knowledge that they should. The school must ensure that teachers are suitably equipped to build pupils' knowledge over time.
- Teachers do not use assessment strategies well. Consequently, they do not know what pupils know and understand. Misconceptions and gaps in pupils' learning remain unidentified and not corrected. The school should make sure that teachers have the support they need to utilise assessment strategies successfully so that they understand where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and adapt their teaching to remedy misconceptions.
- The school's early reading curriculum is not effective in making sure that children in the early years, and pupils in key stage 1, learn to read as soon as they should. Consequently, many pupils do not learn to read well enough. This makes it difficult for these pupils to access the rest of the curriculum. The school must ensure that staff are sufficiently trained to implement the phonics programme consistently well. Additionally, it must ensure that pupils who do not keep up with the pace of the programme receive swift and effective support to be able to access the curriculum.

- The school has not ensured that teachers have the expertise to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Consequently, adaptations to teaching and resources are not matched to pupils' needs. The school must ensure that teachers have the knowledge and expertise to provide the right support for pupils with SEND so that they learn all that they should.
- Capacity to improve the school is weak. The efforts to bring about much-needed improvements have been slow and lack urgency. Consequently, pupils underachieve and do not receive the standard of education to which they are entitled. The trust and those responsible for governance must ensure that they secure the necessary leadership capacity in the school to bring about rapid and sustained improvement.

Leaders and trustees are taking effective action to improve the school but continued work is needed to remove the special measures designation.

HMCI strongly recommends that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any further monitoring inspection we carry out.

During the monitoring inspection, inspectors focused on the following evaluation areas:

- *Leadership and governance*
- *Inclusion*
- *Achievement*
- *Curriculum and teaching*
- *Early years*

Leadership and governance

Since the previous monitoring inspection, leadership and governance have strengthened. This includes the appointment of new directors to the board of trustees and new governors on the local governing board. They now have the knowledge they need to provide improved support and challenge. This has increased the rigour of the systems and processes to hold school leaders to account. Additionally, there is improved oversight of the effectiveness of the school and the areas that require rapid improvement.

Turbulence in leadership and staffing is beginning to stabilise. This is helping the school to benefit more fully from the external support it receives. Support to develop the curriculum and staff's expertise to deliver it well, along with support to develop subject leaders to drive improvement in their subjects, is now better targeted at the areas that need the most improvement.

Instability in school leadership has led to a delay in rapid improvement. Current interim leaders have made a positive impact since they were appointed but much of their work is new. They have an accurate understanding of the effectiveness of the school and its weaknesses and have accurately identified the areas where urgent and decisive action is needed. However, many actions that they have taken are recent and the impact on pupils' learning, experiences and outcomes is only just beginning to pay dividends. Furthermore,

school leadership continues to be interim. This means that the extent to which the school can bring about positive changes that are sustainable over time remains uncertain.

Interim leaders continue to focus on improving the quality of the curriculum and teaching across the school, including in the early years. They have rightly prioritised stabilising staffing in order to drive these improvements. Their focus on continuing professional learning for staff to support consistent and effective curriculum implementation is appropriate and necessary to secure much needed improvement in pupils' learning and outcomes.

Leaders recognise that there is much to do to improve the learning and outcomes for pupils across the school, notably those with (SEND). This group of pupils have been particularly affected by the legacy of a weak curriculum. They are also disproportionately affected by inconsistent adaptations to the curriculum and teaching that do not sufficiently meet their needs. Added to that, targeted support and interventions are not in place to help staff to close gaps in pupils' knowledge quickly and effectively, including gaps in their reading, writing and mathematical knowledge. Further progress in stabilising leadership and staffing is necessary for the school to continue to improve.

Safeguarding

At the previous graded inspection, safeguarding was evaluated as being effective.

Inclusion

Interim leaders and the newly appointed special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) are taking appropriate action to identify and assess pupils' needs. They have ensured that staff receive the support and information they need to understand pupils' needs. Staff are beginning to use this information to ensure that pupils with SEND are supported to learn the curriculum alongside their peers.

However, as was the case at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, the support that the school provides for pupils with SEND does not effectively reduce the barriers to their learning and wellbeing. This is because staff do not have sufficient expertise to meet the needs of pupils with SEND, particularly those with complex needs. For example, there is variability in how well staff adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils. This has been further compounded by turbulence in staffing. Furthermore, targeted academic support and interventions to support pupils are in their infancy. Weaknesses in the support for pupils with SEND continue to affect how well these pupils achieve.

Achievement

Interim leaders have continued to establish a new and ambitious curriculum to improve achievement. This includes an effective phonics programme to help pupils secure the phonics knowledge they need to become confident and fluent readers. However, weaknesses in the school's previous curriculum have led to pupils having significant gaps in their subject knowledge, including in reading, writing and mathematical knowledge. These gaps persist and have not been addressed quickly or effectively. This has adversely impacted on pupils' learning and achievement. Published outcomes in 2025 showed a decline in pupils' attainment and a widening gap for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils do not

have the knowledge and skills they need across the curriculum to be ready for the next stage of education.

Curriculum and teaching

Interim leaders have a precise understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching across the school. They have used this insight to identify accurately the actions required to bring about improvement, to make necessary staffing changes and increase resources to better support the teaching of the curriculum. Since the previous monitoring inspection, interim leaders have further developed a broad and ambitious curriculum. This makes clear the knowledge pupils should know and the order in which subject content should be taught. It provides teachers with guidance on how to choose suitable learning activities, teach subject-specific vocabulary and explain clearly key concepts. This has raised expectations for pupils' achievement.

Typically, teachers have the expertise they need to teach the curriculum well. They identify and address misconceptions and ensure pupils learn effectively what has been planned in the curriculum. That said, turbulence in staffing has led to some variability in the delivery of the curriculum. Furthermore, it has led to some inconsistencies in adaptations to teaching to meet pupils' needs.

Pupils are starting to acquire a broad body of knowledge and subject-specific vocabulary. However, the legacy of a weak curriculum means that pupils continue to have gaps in their knowledge across the curriculum, including in reading, writing and mathematical knowledge. This means that learning is not as secure as it should be, as pupils are taught new content without having secure prior knowledge to build on.

Early years

Interim leaders have continued to ensure that leaders and staff in the early years have the knowledge and experience they need to raise expectations of what children can and should achieve. Leaders have an accurate understanding of previous weaknesses in the provision and have recently developed an effective strategy to bring about urgent improvement. Much of this work is in the early stages or has not started. The newly introduced curriculum aligns with the curriculum for key stage 1 and beyond to ensure that children are better prepared for Year 1. Improvements to resources, the learning environment, outdoor provision and routines to better support the implementation of the curriculum, are beginning to make a positive difference to children's learning and experiences. Children are beginning to acquire the knowledge they need across all areas of learning.

That said, children continue to have gaps in their knowledge, understanding and skills as a result of a previously weak curriculum. While these gaps have been identified, they are not closing quickly. Furthermore, the curriculum and teaching have not been sufficiently adapted to meet the needs of children, particularly those who join the school with low starting points and those with SEND. Additionally, further work is required to better support staff to develop high-quality interactions with children to extend and deepen their understanding. This continues to hinder how well children achieve.

Additional next steps

Leaders and trustees should continue to work to address the priorities for improvement identified in the last graded inspection report.

About this inspection

The inspectors carried out this monitoring inspection under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005, and it was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded inspection that took place in October 2024.

The school's previous inspection and the first monitoring inspection were carried out under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) at that time. The renewed EIF took effect from 10 November 2025. The areas for improvement identified at the school's graded inspection and subsequent monitoring inspection have been cross-referenced to the relevant evaluation areas in the inspection toolkit for consideration on this monitoring inspection.

The purpose of this monitoring inspection was not to determine grades for any of the evaluation areas set out in the school inspection toolkit. The purpose was to identify and report on the school's progress in addressing priorities for improvement since the school's previous inspection.

Since the first monitoring inspection in June 2025, a third interim executive headteacher and a new interim senior assistant headteacher took up their posts in October 2025. Additionally, there have been some changes to the local governing board and to the board of trustees. There has been turbulence in leadership and staffing since the previous inspection. This has begun to stabilise. Currently, most classes are taught by a permanent class teacher.

During this inspection, meetings were held with the interim executive headteacher and other senior leaders, including the interim assistant headteacher, SENCo and early years lead, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, other staff, trustees, governors, the local authority and the diocese, to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection and first monitoring inspection.

Lead inspector

Sally Timmons

His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector

Keith Wright

Ofsted Inspector

About this school

School capacity	238
Number of pupils on roll	219
Resourced provision or SEND unit (if applicable)	No

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