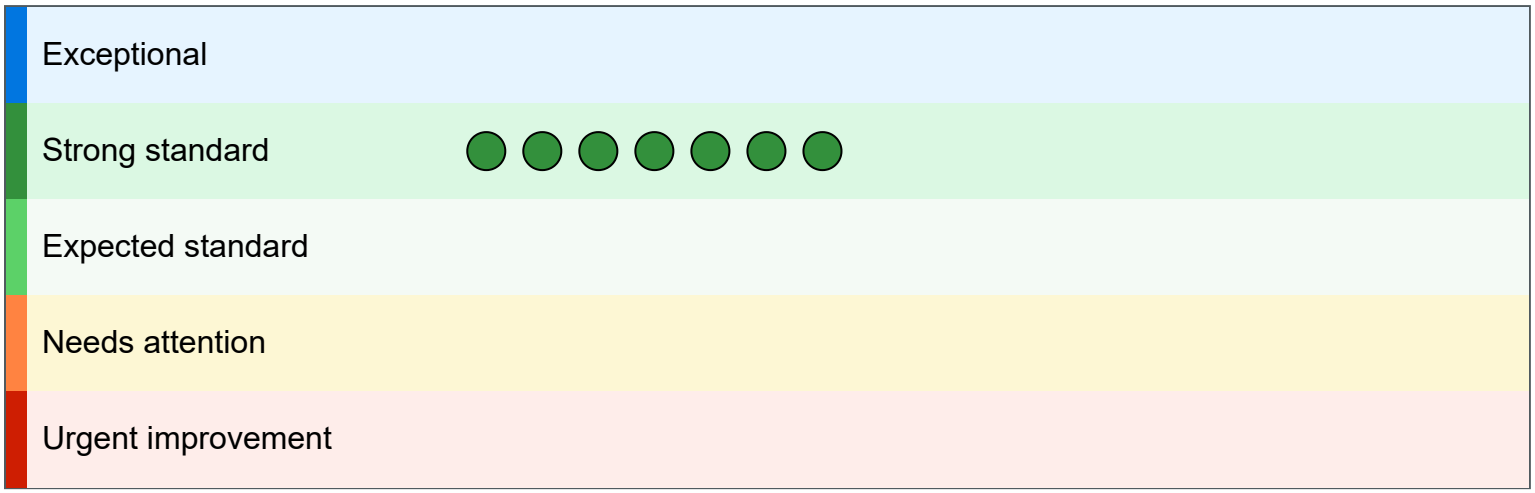
St Marys Catholic Academy

Address: Ford Green Road, Norton-le-Moors, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST6 8EZ

Unique reference number (URN): 140114

Inspection report: 24 February 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.

Strong standard

Achievement

Strong standard

Pupils achieve highly at this school. From the start of early years, children learn the foundational knowledge in reading, writing, mathematics and communication that enables them to access the curriculum confidently. Staff identify gaps in learning quickly and provide targeted support so pupils progress very well from their starting points. As a result, work is consistently high quality across subjects and year groups. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check and at the end of Year 6 consistently exceed national averages.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities use carefully planned resources and bespoke adaptations to access the curriculum fully and learn successfully with confidence and independence.

Across the curriculum, pupils develop a deep knowledge and secure understanding of each subject taught. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard

Attendance is high and remains above national averages. Pupils feel welcome and safe in school, and this encourages regular attendance. Leaders rigorously monitor attendance and act quickly when concerns arise. They work effectively with families to remove barriers and provide tailored support. This approach helps pupils attend consistently and engage fully with school life.

Expectations for behaviour are consistently high from early years to Year 6. Pupils live up to these expectations. This creates a purposeful, calm environment where all pupils can thrive. Pupils show a high level of respect for adults, peers and visitors to school. Pupils behave sensibly, make thoughtful choices and manage their emotions well.

Pupils show positive attitudes to learning. They engage in lessons enthusiastically, demonstrate self-discipline and collaborate consistently well with their peers. They contribute confidently to discussions and play cooperatively at social times. Bullying is extremely rare. When issues do occur, staff respond swiftly and resolve concerns effectively. Pupils who struggle with behaviour receive skilled support. Staff help them understand their emotions using a range of evidence-informed strategies.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard

Leaders have an accurate and informed understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. They use this knowledge effectively and make well-judged decisions that strengthen practice over time. The curriculum is ambitious, rich and engaging. Each subject is mapped and well sequenced so that essential knowledge builds securely, step by step.

Teaching is highly consistent across the school. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge. Leaders keep this sharp through regular training, focused coaching and the sharing of best practice. This creates a unified and purposeful approach in every classroom.

Leaders place a strong focus on early reading and other foundational skills. Staff teach phonics, spelling, vocabulary and early mathematics with precision. A consistent approach to handwriting is in place from the early years. Teachers have high expectations for what pupils can achieve. As a result, pupils take great pride in the presentation of their work. Pupils develop their vocabulary and spoken language through clear routines, including structured talk and collaborative learning.

Staff understand pupils' needs very well. They make thoughtful adaptations so all pupils can access the curriculum fully. Responsive checks on learning and shared expectations help teaching remain consistent, purposeful and highly effective.

Early years

Strong standard

Children in the early years are happy, settled and well cared for. Staff establish calm, predictable routines that help children feel secure and ready to learn. The learning environment supports development precisely. In the classroom, resources are deliberately chosen to develop fine motor skills. Outdoors, staff provide equipment that builds strength, balance and coordination.

Communication, language and reading sit at the heart of the early years curriculum. Children enjoy stories, songs and rich opportunities for talk. Staff select books carefully to widen vocabulary and model ambitious language. Phonics is taught in a clear sequence, and books accurately match the sounds children know. Staff check progress rigorously and address any gaps quickly. Early mathematics is consistently well taught.

The curriculum is very well sequenced and ensures children secure essential knowledge and skills. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged children make very effective progress from their individual starting points. This is because leaders and staff identify and break down barriers early to ensure children keep up through highly personalised, targeted support.

Teaching is purposeful. Adults play alongside children, extend thinking and build understanding through children's interests. They teach and revisit technical vocabulary, so children use it confidently. Parents and carers receive clear guidance on supporting learning at home and are invited into school regularly. Children develop independence and confidence and leave Reception very well prepared for Year 1.

Inclusion

Strong standard

Leaders place inclusion at the centre of their work. They identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) quickly and accurately. They use a clear, evidence-based approach from the moment a pupil joins the school. This ensures pupils receive the right support at the right time and have a real sense of belonging.

Staff receive high-quality training that helps them adapt learning to pupils' individual needs and starting points. They check progress closely. Staff spot gaps in knowledge early and put targeted support in place immediately, so pupils keep up. They guide pupils towards their individual targets with consistent and focused support. Pupils with SEND achieve highly from their starting points and flourish alongside their peers.

Leaders maintain strong oversight of provision. They track outcomes carefully and make sure teaching matches pupils' needs. Pupils with the highest levels of need receive highly personalised learning. This helps them feel reassured and build secure understanding over time. Leaders work closely with professionals and parents to secure timely and effective support. As a result, pupils grow in confidence and independence.

Leaders use funding highly effectively. Support for disadvantaged pupils is tailored and wide ranging. Staff provide academic, social and emotional support that helps pupils progress. Leaders' actions ensure that pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils experience success and participate fully in school life.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard

Leaders, trustees and governors promote high expectations and model professional conduct consistently. They review their work systematically and analyse its impact with precision. This rigorous approach strengthens practice and improves pupils' achievement and wellbeing. Leaders understand the school's strengths and priorities clearly.

Leaders take swift, well-judged action to enhance provision, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those known to children's social care. Their decisions ensure that pupils' academic and personal needs are met and that the most vulnerable pupils are included in all aspects of school life. As a result, provision for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND is tailored precisely to individual needs.

Leaders maintain positive relationships with parents and carers. They listen carefully to the views of families and ensure that staff act on them. Similarly, leaders are responsive to staff requests and suggestions for improvements. As a result, staff feel valued, and parents feel heard.

Professional learning is a key strength. The school and trust provide high-quality training and continuous coaching that deepen staff expertise. Early career teachers receive a comprehensive induction and feel well prepared and supported. Staff morale is high. Leaders manage workload thoughtfully and promote wellbeing.

Trustees and governors are knowledgeable and hold leaders to account with rigour. They fully understand the school's context and contribute actively to its strategic direction. Leaders fulfil their duty of care and ensure pupils receive a high-quality education in a safe and nurturing environment. Parents appreciate the high level of care pupils receive.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard

The school promotes pupils' personal development and wellbeing highly effectively. Pupils benefit from a well-planned programme that builds character, resilience and a secure understanding of healthy relationships. They reflect thoughtfully on their beliefs and experiences. They show genuine respect for others' values and engage maturely with ethical issues. The curriculum, enrichment opportunities and pastoral support work together to help pupils grow in all areas. Parents and carers speak highly of this work and view it as a key strength.

The school teaches pupils how to stay safe clearly and confidently. Pupils understand personal safety, recognise online risks and know how to seek help. They talk with maturity about protecting themselves and others.

Pupils have a secure grasp of fundamental British values. They speak confidently about democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect. Pupil leadership roles, such as fire marshals, librarians and school council representatives, make these principles meaningful. They help pupils understand responsibility and demonstrate democracy in action.

Pupils develop strong social and cultural understanding. They cooperate well, listen to others and resolve conflict positively. A rich programme of visits, celebrations and outdoor learning broadens their experiences. The residential trip to France builds cultural understanding by exposing pupils to new customs, language and traditions. Pupils also enjoy creative, artistic and cultural opportunities and take part in a wide range of clubs.

The wellbeing programme supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils very effectively. Leaders track provision closely and adjust support when needed. Leaders successfully break down any barriers to ensure that all pupils can access the full offer.

The school's music offer is a significant strength. Pupils perform confidently in regular festivals and concerts, and the school even has its own orchestra. Pupils speak proudly about the instruments they play and the opportunities available to them.

Leaders work in close partnership with the Children's University. This raises aspiration and helps pupils see ambitious futures for themselves. Through rich experiences such as this, pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.

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

There is a deep sense of belonging at St Mary's Catholic Academy. The school's mission statement, 'Many hearts, one accord: in God's love we grow and learn together to build the kingdom of God', is understood and lived by all. Pupils are nurtured and their talents are developed. Pupils are greeted with warmth and care, setting them up for a positive start to the day. School values are woven through the curriculum and daily life. Pupils learn to be responsible, resilient and empathetic citizens.

Pupils take on a range of leadership roles, including head boy and head girl. Parents and carers are invited into school regularly. A highlight is the 'Watch Me Learn' sessions. These are valued by the staff, parents and pupils. The school regularly celebrates achievements in attendance, behaviour and personal successes.

Pupils follow an ambitious, enriched curriculum from the early years. The school's curriculum is exciting and carefully tailored to meet the needs of all pupils. As a result, pupils are highly engaged and achieve very well from their starting points. Pupils enjoy talking

about their learning with enthusiasm. They are very well prepared for their next steps in education.

There is a highly inclusive ethos at the school. Staff work thoughtfully together to support and care for pupils who may have barriers to their learning or wellbeing. Carefully tailored provision enables pupils to fully access learning. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities flourish alongside their peers.

Pupils are very proud of their school and attend regularly. They are respectful, well-mannered and responsible. There is a real sense of togetherness throughout the school community. Bullying is not tolerated. As a result, pupils feel safe and happy in school.

Pastoral care is integral to the school's approach to personal development. Pupils are fully supported to play a part in their school and local community. All pupils benefit from an extensive range of clubs and enrichment opportunities, including cycling proficiency, lacrosse, learning to play a musical instrument, residentials and a biannual trip to France.

Next steps

- The school should secure exceptionally high standards of leadership and governance, leading to transformational outcomes and experiences for all pupils.

About this inspection

This school is part of St Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Multi-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, Toni Ellis, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Julia Bridgewater.

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

Following our updated 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 executive principal, head of school, special educational needs coordinator, the chief executive officer, Catholic senior executive leader, trust school improvement partner, chair of the trust board, members of the trust board, senior governance partner, members of the local governing board, head of SEND services at the local authority, a representative from the Archdiocese, staff, parents and pupils during the inspection.

This school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. The school was inspected by the Catholic Schools Inspectorate on the 27 and 28 February 2025.

The school runs a nursery provision for 3- and 4-year-olds.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection: a change in leadership. An executive principal and head of school have been appointed.

Executive Principal: Sarah Rathbone

Lead inspector:
Victoria Jordan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Christopher Wright, Ofsted Inspector
Nicola Price, 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 24 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

241
Close to 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)

21.50%
Close to 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

2.90%
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: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

10.79%
Below 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	73%	61%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	77%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	70%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	71%	60%	Above

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	84%	74%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	84%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	83%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	84%	73%	Above

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	80%	72%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	84%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	80%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	77%	71%	Close to average

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	84%	73%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	87%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	83%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	81%	73%	Above

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	74%	46%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	S	47%	S

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	86%	46%	Above
2022/23 (final)	71%	44%	Above

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	84%	62%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	S	63%	S
2023/24 (final)	86%	62%	Above
2022/23 (final)	86%	60%	Above

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	84%	59%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	S	59%	S
2023/24 (final)	100%	58%	Above
2022/23 (final)	71%	58%	Above

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	84%	60%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	S	61%	S
2023/24 (final)	86%	59%	Above
2022/23 (final)	71%	59%	Close to average

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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	74%	68%	6 pp
2024/25 (revised)	S	69%	S
2023/24 (final)	86%	67%	18 pp
2022/23 (final)	71%	66%	5 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	84%	80%	5 pp
2024/25 (revised)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	86%	80%	6 pp
2022/23 (final)	86%	78%	7 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	84%	78%	6 pp
2024/25 (revised)	S	78%	S
2023/24 (final)	100%	78%	22 pp
2022/23 (final)	71%	77%	-6 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	84%	80%	5 pp
2024/25 (revised)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	86%	79%	6 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	71%	79%	-8 pp

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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)	3.0%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	3.3%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	3.4%	5.9%	Below

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)	5.3%	13.3%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	6.5%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	5.5%	16.2%	Below

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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