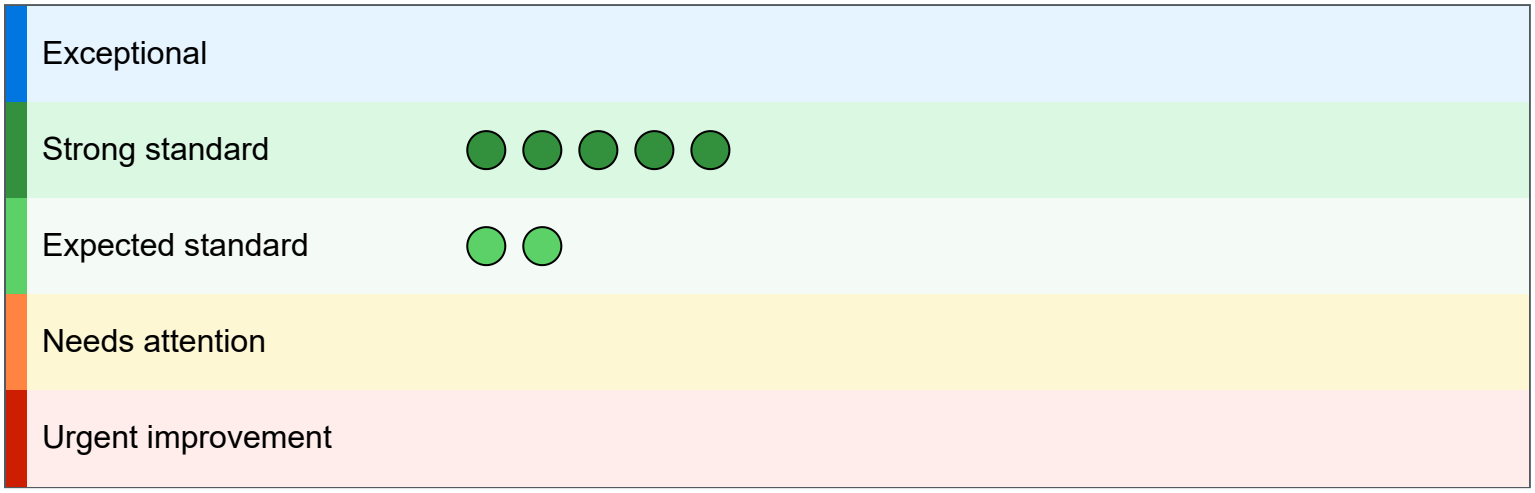
St Michael's Catholic Primary School, Houghton

Address: Durham Road, St Michael's Catholic Primary School, Houghton le Spring, Tyne and Wear, DH5 8NF

Unique reference number (URN): 147131

Inspection report: 23 June 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, including those who face barriers to learning, consistently achieve well across the curriculum. Over time, academic outcomes are above national averages and improving.

Pupils consistently produce high-quality work. They write at length with fluency and accuracy and confidently approach complex mathematical problems. Children in the early years have impressive phonics knowledge. They use this knowledge well when meeting unfamiliar words and texts.

Pupils show a passion for learning. They understand and use a wide-range of subject-specific vocabulary when describing concepts and explaining their thinking. Pupils build on their achievements across core subjects across the wider curriculum. In geography, for example, pupils combine their knowledge of the subject with impressive writing skills to clearly explain ideas such as how natural processes work or how places change. Pupils are very well-prepared for their next steps in education at the end of each phase within the school.

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard

Leaders and staff know pupils extremely well. This means they intervene early on matters relating to attendance and behaviour. Pupils' attendance, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and in receipt of free school meals, is high over time. Persistent absence is lower than national averages. Leaders relentlessly scrutinise attendance data and act swiftly if it falls below their high expectations. Bespoke support and interventions for individuals helps them quickly get back on track. Across school, staff consistently create a culture where pupils feel they belong.

In lessons, pupils show high levels of engagement. They concentrate, ask questions and try their very best. Older pupils enjoy being mentors for their younger peers. This includes supporting friendships and taking ideas forward as part of the school council. Pupils and staff appreciate the clear behaviour expectations leaders have put in place. Pupils describe the different 'clouds' on their classroom walls. This system helps them make positive choices about how to behave. Around school, pupils play happily together and show respect for difference. They rarely need reminders from staff. If anyone does say unkind things, pupils trust adults to act quickly. Bullying is uncommon and dealt with swiftly if it does occur.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard

Leaders have a deep understanding of how pupils learn. This enables them to make highly effective decisions about the curriculum. Trust-wide, high-quality curriculums are in place. For example, leaders meticulously plan English around six core pillars. These are reading, writing, oracy, grammar, phonics and the literary cannon. This sets the benchmark for impressive standards in the school. Across each year group, teaching is consistently effective. Teachers take the time to check pupils' understanding, clearly model their expectations and break learning down into smaller steps.

All staff know how to promote fluent and accurate handwriting. This means pupils write with confidence and skill across the curriculum. From the early years, staff ensure that the building blocks of success are firmly in place. Phonics is very well taught and young children enjoy plentiful opportunities to put this learning into practice. Staff know exactly which pupils need more support and how best to provide it. This means pupils who face barriers to learning access the curriculum successfully. Teachers ask precise questions to find and address gaps in pupils' learning. They also make sure older pupils practice their skills in reading, writing and mathematics across the broader curriculum. This further enhances pupils' mastery of the subjects.

Early years

Strong standard

Leaders are highly knowledgeable about high-quality education in the early years. They prioritise this important area of the school. Leaders have a clear vision for the setting. They set high standards and children rise to them. Leaders undertake swift and precise assessments of children on entry. This enables them to precisely match the provision to their needs. Ongoing checks on children's progress means children catch up or keep up with their peers. Leaders design the curriculum to build secure foundations in phonics, number facts and handwriting. Children use punctuation confidently and apply phonics knowledge to tricky spellings.

Across the provision, children are happy and safe. They chat confidently to visitors and each other. Staff deliberately model language and encourage high-quality talk. For example, while painting rain forests, children excitedly discuss native animals, such as the capybara. Around the thoughtfully resourced provision, children show impressive independence. They select activities that deepen their learning, sustaining concentration and perseverance over time. Adults skilfully direct children who need more support to appropriate activities, ensuring they quickly address any gaps in their development. Children, including those who face barriers to learning, get off to a flying start in the early years and are very well prepared for year 1.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard

Leaders across the trust and school show excellent insight into what they do well and what needs to be better. Over recent years, they have improved the curriculum and outcomes for pupils. From the early years to Year 6, there is high ambition and no limits to what pupils can achieve.

Governors provide effective support and challenge to the school. They understand their statutory duties well and hold leaders to account for high standards. Trust-wide systems support the high-quality education the school provides. For example, they provide detailed insights into school data, well-developed systems for identifying pupils who need more support and a clear strategy for helping pupils gain core skills in English, communication and mathematics. This all helps the school to move forward with purpose.

Leaders match professional learning opportunities to the priorities in the school. Quality assurance processes directly shape the training plan for the following year. This means everything the school does has direct impact on pupils' outcomes and experiences. Staff are happy working at the school. They feel well-supported by leaders and enjoy opportunities to

develop their careers across the trust. School leaders provide support to others. This includes through collaboration with phonics scheme providers and as school improvement partners. The school is on a journey of improvement. A small minority of parents continue to express concerns about provision in the school. Leaders know they need to further strengthen partnership working with parents of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Expected standard

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders spot pupils' needs quickly and accurately. In the early years, language assessments help leaders to put support in place from the earliest opportunity. Across school, leaders carefully capture pupils' needs in 'spotlight' plans. These documents ensure staff provide individualised support in the classroom. The impact of this work is clear in the outcomes pupils achieve. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who face other barriers produce high-quality work. They grow in confidence over time, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders make sure extra funding for pupils in receipt of school meals makes a positive difference. Well-matched interventions help close the attainment gap between these pupils and their peers. Leaders purposefully start the school day flexibly. This allows staff to check-in with pupils who need extra support. As a result, pupils access learning confidently and sustain high attendance.

Leaders coordinate pupils' support with external agencies. However, they recognise that they have more work to do to develop how they improve pupils' social, emotional and mental health. While leaders have engaged external specialists to help them with this important work, it is too early to assess the impact for pupils. While academic outcomes are positive, some pupils need more focused support for wellbeing and social development.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders prioritise the personal development of their pupils. Pupils learn to be confident in a range of social situations. They often read out loud in assemblies and at the weekly 'Celebration of the Word'. There is a well-planned personal development programme in place. This connects a taught curriculum with external speakers and a wide range of other opportunities. Pupils learn how to stay safe on- and offline. They are able to describe and recognise healthy and unhealthy relationships. Pupils develop respect for different people and communities. They learn about protected characteristics and fundamental British values, confidently explaining why these topics are important. However, some pupils do not develop detailed enough knowledge about other faiths. This means some find it hard to engage in meaningful discussions about the customs and practices of others.

Across the school year, a variety of thoughtful activities teach pupils about the wider world. For example, pupils enjoy British science week where they learn to create circuits and use a robotic dog. Through careers week, pupils learn about exciting professions which helps

shape their future aspirations. Pupils also run enterprise projects, learning how to handle money and work together as a team. Leaders carefully connect trips to the taught curriculum. Where this is the case, this enhances pupils' interest and learning in these subjects. For example, a trip to an open-air museum deepens their knowledge in history. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, access this wide range of suitable opportunities. However, leaders have not tailored the programme enough for all pupils to benefit fully.

Pupils receive effective pastoral care from staff who know them well. They are happy and content at school. Pupils can confidently describe how to look after their physical health. However, they are less confident when sharing what they have been taught about developing positive mental wellbeing.

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

Pupils flourish at this happy and purposeful school. They know staff set high expectations and they are determined to meet them. In lessons, pupils learn ambitious subject-specific vocabulary. This helps them feel confident as tasks become more complex. Pupils are inquisitive. They ask questions and are eager to improve their work. Children in the early years show impressive knowledge and skills. Their embedded recall of number facts and phonics sets them up well for future success. As a result of this high-quality education, pupils across the school, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who face other barriers to learning, achieve highly. Their outcomes in external tests are typically above national averages over time. Pupils are extremely well prepared for their next steps in education.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are striking. They show empathy for their peers, respect for difference and an enthusiasm for learning. From the early years onwards, pupils build positive relationships with adults. This helps pupils feel safe and secure at school. They know who to turn to if they need help. If behaviour falls short of the school's high expectations, pupils know they will be treated with consistency and fairness. They respect the school's approach to reconciliation, recognising that it helps them reflect on what has gone wrong.

Pupils enjoy opportunities to contribute to their wider community and develop as thoughtful citizens. This helps them promote the school's values. For example, every year group has a designated charity. These charities have clear links to the community. Pupils appreciate learning about the charity, raising money and making a difference beyond the school gates.

Pupils experience a broad range of extra-curricular activities. For example, pupils enjoy attending crochet and knitting club, one of the many ways they can discover new talents and interests.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to strengthen provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This should include developing targeted support for social, emotional and mental health barriers as well as working in partnership with families.
- Leaders should ensure that the taught personal development curriculum enables pupils to develop secure and detailed knowledge over time and that the wider personal development offer is structured so that all pupils benefit fully from it.

About this inspection

This school is part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lucie Stephenson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Angela Boyle.

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 (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMI.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, trust director of standards and performance, vice-chair of trustees, chair of governors and the director for education from the diocese during the inspection.

Inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. It's last section 48 inspection was in March 2026.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The headteacher took up post in September 2023 and the deputy headteacher took up post in September 2025.

The trust currently has a vacancy for a chair of trustees. The current chair is the vice-chair, acting on an interim basis.

Nicholas Reeson: Headteacher

Lead inspector:
Hannah Millett, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:
Deborah Ashcroft, Ofsted Inspector
Nicola Murray, 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 23 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

200
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)

6.00%
Well below 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

1.00%
Below 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

10.00%
Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

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	69%	61%	Above
2024/25 (final)	87%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	76%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	45%	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	84%	74%	Above
2024/25 (final)	97%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	90%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	66%	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	77%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	87%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	86%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	59%	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	81%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	97%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	86%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	59%	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	47%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	S	47%	S

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	50%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	S	44%	S

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	53%	62%	Below
2024/25 (final)	S	63%	S
2023/24 (final)	67%	62%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

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	60%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	S	59%	S
2023/24 (final)	67%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	S	58%	S

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	60%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	S	61%	S
2023/24 (final)	67%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	S	59%	S

‘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	47%	68%	-21 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	69%	S
2023/24 (final)	50%	67%	-17 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	66%	S

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	53%	80%	-26 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	67%	80%	-13 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	78%	S

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	60%	78%	-18 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	78%	S
2023/24 (final)	67%	78%	-11 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	77%	S

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	60%	80%	-20 pp
2024/25 (final)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	67%	79%	-13 pp

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

‘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 (3 term)	3.4%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	4.1%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	5.2%	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)	6.3%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	9.7%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	11.6%	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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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