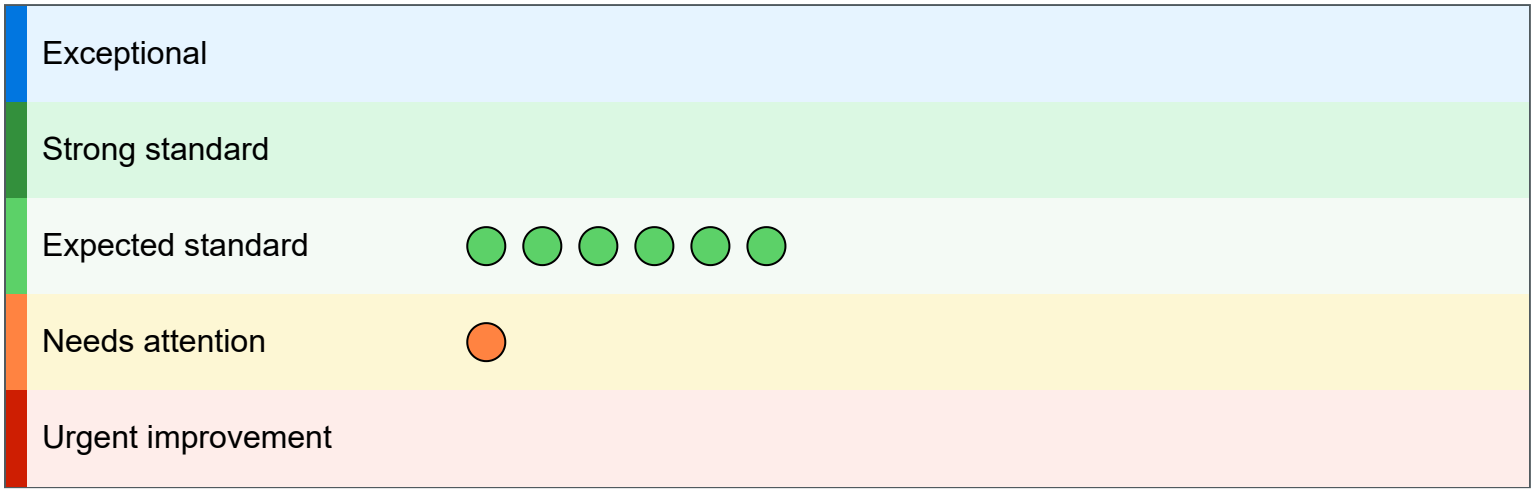
# St Mary's Catholic Academy

**Address:** St Walburga's Road, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY3 7EQ

**Unique reference number (URN):** 141257

# Inspection report: 16 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.

# Expected standard

## Attendance and behaviour

**Expected standard**

Leaders have prioritised improvements to attendance and behaviour. Through careful tracking of data, leaders have an accurate understanding of patterns and trends. Leaders identify and remove barriers to attendance swiftly. This includes proactive work with families along with support from external agencies. As a result, the attendance of pupils is in line with national averages and continues to improve. The number of pupils who are regularly absent is decreasing. This is also the case for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leaders have established a calm and orderly culture across the school. Pupils respond positively to routines and interact respectfully with others. Leaders provide proactive support for pupils who need additional help managing their behaviour. For example, some pupils benefit from regular mentoring sessions during the day that help them remain engaged with learning. All staff are trained on the effective use of the behaviour policy. Leaders monitor the implementation of behaviour systems carefully. Consequently, disruption to learning is uncommon.

Leaders exhaust all other avenues of support before using suspensions and permanent exclusions as a last resort. They take bullying and discriminatory behaviour seriously and respond swiftly if incidents occur.

## Curriculum and teaching

**Expected standard**

Leaders have designed a broad and ambitious curriculum. It is designed to equip pupils with the knowledge and skills that prepare them for local employment opportunities. Pupils' learning builds logically on prior knowledge. Leaders have identified the important knowledge pupils need to learn at each stage. This contributes to focused teaching of the curriculum. Leaders understand the strengths and areas for development within the curriculum and have prioritised improvements where needed. These actions are beginning to have a positive impact.

Leaders have established clear expectations for effective teaching. These include presenting new knowledge clearly and checking pupils' understanding regularly. Teachers make adaptations to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils so that they can access learning just as well as their peers. In many lessons, these approaches support effective and purposeful learning. However, these practices are not implemented consistently across the curriculum. As a result, pupils do not develop secure knowledge in some subjects.

Leaders identify pupils who have gaps in literacy and numeracy at an early stage. They provide a range of support programmes to help pupils catch up. Provision to improve reading and numeracy is more developed than leaders' work to strengthen handwriting and oracy.

## Inclusion

**Expected standard**

Leaders use a range of assessment information to identify pupils' needs accurately. This work begins before pupils join the school. They assess pupils' reading, communication and literacy needs. This enables leaders to understand the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities well. They share strategies effectively with staff so that pupils receive appropriate support. These strategies enable pupils to overcome their barriers in the classroom.

Leaders check the use of adaptations carefully through one-page pupil profiles and regular reviews. Feedback from lesson visits informs staff development. Leaders also draw appropriately on external expertise when required. They adapt support to meet pupils' changing needs with accuracy. As a result, pupils receive support that helps them to access learning with success.

Leaders use additional funding effectively to support vulnerable pupils, including those known to social care. Support extends beyond the classroom. For example, pupils benefit from breakfast provision, assistance with uniform and equipment, subsidised educational visits and music tuition. Leaders maintain positive relationships with the virtual school. Consequently, barriers to participation are reduced for pupils. Leaders use alternative provision appropriately and in the best interests of pupils.

## Leadership and governance

**Expected standard**

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have established a long-term strategy to improve achievement across the curriculum. Leaders have taken measured action, and some aspects of their work are beginning to have a positive effect. For example, leaders' focus on improving the attendance and behaviour of pupils has resulted in significant improvement. Leaders monitor the impact of their actions carefully.

Governors and trustees are experienced and knowledgeable. They are aligned with leaders' priorities for the school. They understand the areas that require further improvement and provide appropriate challenge and support. Governors ensure that they fulfil their statutory duties.

Leaders provide effective professional development for staff that reflects the school's priorities. For example, staff receive training that helps them support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively. Early career teachers receive appropriate support. Staff also access external training to develop their expertise. This contributes positively to school improvement.

Leaders are mindful of staff wellbeing. They listen to staff views and involve them in decision-making. Staff understand and uphold the school's values. They are proud to work at the school.

Leaders work effectively with parents and carers and external organisations. They liaise with a range of agencies to provide necessary support to pupils. Leaders work collaboratively

with other local schools to share effective practice. As a result, the school makes a positive contribution to the local community.

## Personal development and wellbeing

**Expected standard**

Leaders have designed a personal development programme that builds systematically on pupils' prior learning. The programme responds to the needs of pupils and the local community. For example, leaders use pupil surveys and information from local agencies to identify emerging priorities. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and how to keep safe online. Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate training to deliver the personal development programme. They monitor the delivery of this curriculum carefully. As a result, pupils develop knowledge that helps them respond appropriately to local and national risks.

Leaders provide a broad enrichment programme. This includes aspirational trips to the University of Oxford, international skiing trips to Italy and an expedition to Nepal. Opportunities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award further enrich pupils' experiences. Pupils participate in clubs including a young philosophers group and a cooking club. These experiences help pupils develop confidence, resilience and wider interests.

Pupils' leadership opportunities help them foster a sense of responsibility. This contributes to the respectful environment in school. For example, members of the pupil council advocate on behalf of others, and the recycling team promotes environmental awareness. Leaders track participation and ensure that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities can access these opportunities. As a result, all pupils are prepared for life in modern Britain as active citizens.

Leaders provide effective pastoral support, particularly for vulnerable pupils. For example, pupils have access to dedicated key workers who work proactively to meet emerging needs. This has contributed to all pupils feeling a sense of belonging to the school family.

Pupils receive appropriate guidance about future pathways. They engage with local employers and visit universities. Leaders carefully guide pupils to pursue pathways that reflect their talents and interests. As a result, nearly all pupils move on to suitable destinations when they leave school.

## Post-16 provision

**Expected standard**

Students are positive about their experience in the sixth form. Leaders have designed a curriculum that reflects local employment opportunities. For example, students can study theatre or participate in the soccer school programme. Leaders understand the strengths and priorities of the sixth-form provision and take appropriate action to maintain standards.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum is taught well. Learning builds effectively on prior study. Leaders help students develop secure knowledge and skills. As a result, students generally achieve outcomes that are close to national averages. This includes disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Students benefit from a range of clubs, volunteering opportunities and leadership roles. They help to lead enrichment activities for younger pupils and contribute significantly to

charitable fundraising. Leaders support disadvantaged students to access these opportunities. As a result, students develop the independence and responsibility needed for adult life.

Students receive comprehensive guidance about their future options. This ensures that they are prepared for life beyond the sixth form. They experience a range of education, employment and training pathways, many of which reflect opportunities within the local labour market. Consequently, the vast majority progress to sustained destinations, including university and apprenticeships.

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## Needs attention

### Achievement

**Needs attention**

Pupils do not achieve as well as they should over time. This is reflected in below-average outcomes in national examinations across many subjects. As a result, too many pupils do not have the skills to prepare them for their next stages of education, employment or training.

Leaders recognise these weaknesses and have prioritised improvements to the quality of teaching. They have introduced strategies intended to help pupils make more progress from their starting points.

There are early signs of improvement in some curriculum areas. Disadvantaged pupils generally achieve in line with other disadvantaged pupils nationally. Also, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make appropriate progress from their starting points. However, leaders' actions have not yet secured consistently positive achievement across the curriculum, and overall attainment remains low.

Leaders' work to improve reading is helping pupils access the curriculum more successfully. Pupils increasingly use subject-specific vocabulary to good effect and explain their learning with greater confidence.

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

Pupils feel happy and safe. They benefit from positive relationships with staff. Pupils know that adults are available to support them at all times. Pupils also have systems that enable them to raise concerns online. As a result, they are confident that adults will listen to them and take appropriate action. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from risks in the local community. For example, they learn about the dangers associated with drug misuse.

Pupils attend well. They enjoy learning in a calm, purposeful environment. Established routines mean that pupils and staff understand expectations clearly. There is a culture of mutual respect across the school that reflects the ethos of the school. Consequently, pupils learn in classrooms where there is little disruption. Leaders deal with bullying effectively.

Leaders know pupils well and have high ambitions for all. Leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive appropriate support. For example, trained staff support pupils with SEND to overcome their barriers. Leaders also provide additional resources such as revision guides and equipment for pupils who need them. As a result, all pupils have an equitable school experience. However, pupils do not achieve as well as they should across many subjects.

Pupils participate in a broad range of extra-curricular opportunities. For example, 'Shine' workshops help pupils develop their self-esteem. 'The Big Conversation' programme supports pupils' understanding of stress management. Pupils also learn about issues affecting their local community. For example, leaders have responded to local concerns about health by promoting healthy eating. These experiences help pupils to broaden their understanding of the world around them.

Students in the post-16 provision study a curriculum that prepares them for local employment opportunities. They achieve well and benefit from leadership opportunities that develop responsibility. Detailed careers guidance helps most students move successfully into education, employment or training.

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## Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that improvements to teaching, including the checks made on what pupils know and remember, are embedded across all subjects.
- Leaders should ensure that improvements to the curriculum lead to a positive trend in pupils' achievement.
- Leaders should refine the tracking of pupils' participation in the personal development programme to respond to their individual needs and aspirations across all phases.

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## About this inspection

This school is part of Blessed Edward Bamber 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 (CEO), Helen O'Neill, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sue Ridyard.

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

Inspectors spoke with the principal, senior leaders, staff, pupils, the CEO, members of the governing body including the chair of governors, the chair of the board of directors and a representative of the local authority.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Catholic religious character. Its last section 48 inspection was in October 2023.

The school currently uses one registered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Simon Eccles

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**Lead inspector:**
Usman Kothia, His Majesty's Inspector

**Team inspectors:**
Tuesday Humby, Ofsted Inspector
Kevin Sexton, Ofsted Inspector
Christopher Beard, Ofsted Inspector
Rebecca Smith, 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 16 June 2026

## School and pupil context

### Total pupils

**1,184**
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: 1,067

**School capacity**

## 1,199
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: 1,154

**Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)**

## 37.09%
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: 28.9%

**Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan**

## 1.77%
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: 3.09%

**Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support**

## 11.99%
Close to average

**What does this mean?**

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

National average: 13.4%

**Location deprivation**

## Well below 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

### English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2024/25 (final)** | 28.8% | 45.4% | Below |
| **2023/24 (final)** | 28.3% | 45.9% | Below |
| **2022/23 (final)** | 27.2% | 45.3% | Below |

### Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2024/25 (final)** | 41.5 | 46.1 | Close to average |

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2023/24 (final)** | 42.0 | 45.9 | Close to average |
| **2022/23 (final)** | 40.3 | 46.3 | Below |

### Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2023/24 (final)** | -0.70 | -0.03 | Below |
| **2022/23 (final)** | -0.76 | -0.03 | 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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2024/25 (final)** | 18.2% | 25.8% | Close to average |
| **2023/24 (final)** | 11.9% | 25.8% | Below |
| **2022/23 (final)** | 10.3% | 25.2% | Below |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2024/25 (final)** | 33.8 | 34.9 | Close to average |
| **2023/24 (final)** | 32.9 | 34.6 | Close to average |
| **2022/23 (final)** | 29.4 | 35.0 | Below |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2023/24 (final)** | -1.11 | -0.57 | Below |
| **2022/23 (final)** | -1.32 | -0.57 | 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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

| Year | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2024/25 (final)** | 18.2% | 53.1% | -35.0 pp |
| **2023/24 (final)** | 11.9% | 53.1% | -41.2 pp |
| **2022/23 (final)** | 10.3% | 52.4% | -42.1 pp |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

| Year | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2024/25 (final)** | 33.8 | 50.4 | -16.6 |
| **2023/24 (final)** | 32.9 | 50.0 | -17.1 |
| **2022/23 (final)** | 29.4 | 50.3 | -20.9 |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

| Year | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2023/24 (final)** | -1.11 | 0.16 | -1.27 |
| **2022/23 (final)** | -1.32 | 0.17 | -1.49 |

## Destinations after 16

### Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2023 leavers (revised)** | 92% | 92% | Average |
| **2022 leavers (revised)** | 93% | 93% | Average |
| **2021 leavers (revised)** | 89% | 94% | Below |

# 16 to 18 performance

### A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2024/25 (final)** | 31.18 | 35.00 | Below |
| **2023/24 (final)** | 31.64 | 34.38 | Close to average |
| **2022/23 (final)** | 33.05 | 34.16 | Close to average |

### A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

| Year | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2024/25 (final)** | -0.2 | 0.0 | Close to average |
| **2023/24 (revised)** | -0.2 | 0.0 | Close to average |

# 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)** | 7.9% | 8.4% | Close to average |
| **2023/24 (3 term)** | 7.4% | 8.9% | Below |
| **2022/23 (3 term)** | 7.9% | 9.0% | 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)** | 22.5% | 23.4% | Close to average |
| **2023/24 (3 term)** | 21.8% | 25.6% | Close to average |
| **2022/23 (3 term)** | 24.8% | 26.5% | 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.

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