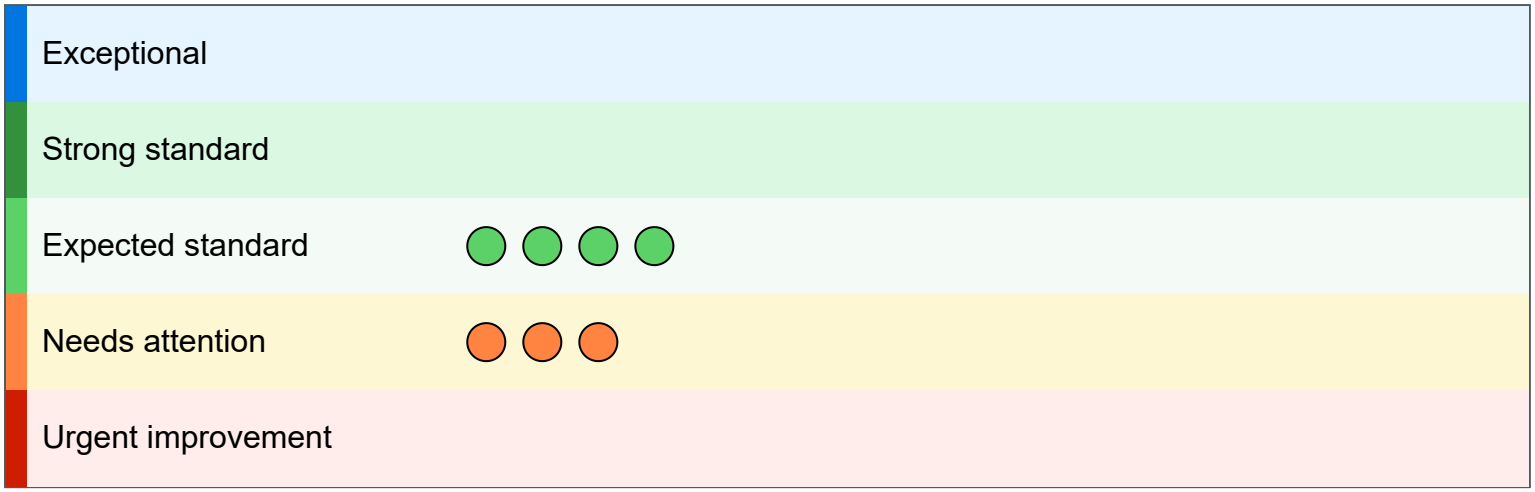
Marlfields Primary School

Address: Waggs Road, Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4BT

Unique reference number (URN): 140895

Inspection report: 7 July 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

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard

Leaders accurately understand the quality of the curriculum and how it is taught. Since joining the trust, they have overhauled many curriculum subjects and clearly set out the key knowledge they want pupils to know in each year group. This means that teachers deliver new content in a logical order to help pupils build on what they already know. These improvements are starting to make a difference to pupils' achievement.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge, which enables them to explain new learning clearly. They benefit from the high-quality training that they receive and regular helpful feedback from leaders. Leaders and staff make regular checks on pupils' learning to see how well they understand and remember what has been taught. This enables them to make changes when they spot that some pupils find understanding key learning difficult. Staff skilfully adapt their approach to meet the needs of pupils with identified barriers to learning.

Leaders generally focus on making sure that pupils in the early stages of education have the English and mathematics knowledge and skills that they need to access future learning. They have a clear approach to the teaching of reading and number. However, staff are less clear on how to teach pupils to write accurately. They do not address errors and misconceptions in pupils' handwriting and spelling knowledge with enough urgency to resolve gaps in pupils' skills.

Inclusion

Expected standard

Leaders have sharpened the way in which they identify pupils' needs. They do so with greater precision, which leads to suitable support being put in place when it is needed. Through positive relationships with external providers and families, staff provide the right help at the right time. This means that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who attend the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND, are fully included in the life of the school.

Staff receive a wide range of training to understand how best to support pupils who have barriers to their learning. They are proactive in making changes to how they teach and the resources that they use. Through calm areas, visual prompts and well-considered timetable choices, pupils are guided well to be ready to access the classroom environment. Pupils who struggle to settle to their work are sensitively supported by staff, who genuinely care for them. As a result, they access their learning with success.

Leaders make suitable use of the pupil premium grant to ensure that disadvantaged pupils participate fully in all that is on offer, within and beyond the classroom.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard

School and trust leaders work collaboratively to bring about change when it is needed. For example, their work to improve the curriculum in the early years and key stages 1 and 2 means that children and pupils are achieving better than they did in the past. Leaders

understand what is working well and what needs to further improve. Through regular checks, they can see the impact of their work while keeping pupils' best interests at the heart of their decision-making. Staff benefit from playing an active role in school development. This empowers them to embrace changes with confidence and positivity. Leaders consider staff's workload and wellbeing when making decisions. Staff appreciate how they are cared for and valued.

Those responsible for governance have a clear oversight of the school's work. They understand and fulfil their statutory duties. Governors actively verify that the school is focusing on the right areas for improvement. For example, they make checks on leaders' decisions to reduce the barriers that some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, face. Through the work with trust directors, governors have an accurate understanding of school leaders' work to embed positive changes.

Staff's professional learning is clearly linked to school development priorities. This means that staff receive the right training to continue to develop their knowledge across areas of the school's work. They learn from others within the trust and benefit from developing their own leadership skills. This supports the level of expertise within the staff to continue to sustain some of the recent changes.

Parents and carers recognise that the school is continuing to improve. They appreciate how well staff know their children and the warm approach that staff take to settle their children into school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard

Leaders have put in place a suitable programme to enrich pupils' personal development. Pupils are encouraged to be active and positive members of the school community. They use their understanding of fundamental British values to inform the way in which they act with others. For example, staff make sure that pupils understand democracy and the importance of listening to the views of others. Pupils value different opinions. They know what it means to be equal and understand the importance of treating others with respect.

Leaders ensure that personal, social, health, economic education programme and the relationships and health education curriculum equips pupils well to understand the ways in which they can keep themselves safe. Pupils understand age-appropriate risks, such as the negative aspects of using the internet, peer pressure and the dangers linked to bodies of water. They secure key learning about healthy lifestyles and use this to make positive choices about managing their mental health and wellbeing. They are well prepared for life in modern society.

Pupils relish the opportunities that they have to develop their interests. Leaders make sure that extra experiences are accessible for all. They carefully track participation so that no pupil is left out. Through clubs, such as cookery, gardening, football and writing a school magazine, pupils collaborate with each other and develop new talents. They are proud to represent their school in sporting tournaments and performing live on stage with the school choir. Pupils value these experiences and the chance to demonstrate confidence and resilience beyond the classroom.

Pupils know how to access pastoral support in school. Those who need a calmer space over lunchtime enjoy attending the 'club hub'. Well-trained staff are available to support them with strategies to manage any worries that they may have. As a result, pupils develop a mature understanding of managing friendships and resolving any disagreements. This sets them up well for managing relationships.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention

The most recent published data shows that, by the end of key stage 2, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is below the national average. Typically, pupils achieve better in reading. This is because they gain a secure grasp of phonics. However, although improving, some pupils do not form their letters and numbers correctly. This limits their ability to record their work clearly and fluently in English and mathematics and across the curriculum. As a result, pupils are not fully prepared for their next stage in learning.

Recent improvements to the curriculum mean that current pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils who attend the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND, are making greater gains in learning key knowledge. Mostly, pupils talk with confidence about what they have learned and understood. Leaders ensure that pupils who find learning more difficult receive the support that they need to catch up.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention

Staff do not apply the school's renewed behaviour policy consistently well. They do not tackle all incidents of misbehaviour quickly and decisively. In lessons, the behaviour of some pupils is often left unchecked. As a result, some pupils experience disruption to their learning. Instances of bullying, harassment or the use of derogatory language are rare and they are usually dealt with swiftly. However, leaders do not analyse incidents of unsafe behaviour deeply enough to identify patterns and trends that could help reduce these occurrences over time.

Leaders understand the reasons for pupils' absences. They are successful in reducing the barriers that prevent some pupils from attending school regularly. As a result, persistent absence is reducing and is now close to the national average. Overall pupils' attendance rates remain below the national average but are improving year on year.

The positive relationships that staff have with pupils underpin their approach to reducing lost learning time. Staff ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with social, emotional and mental health needs are settled and feel secure in school. As a result, these pupils approach school with positive attitudes and benefit from the interesting range of activities on offer.

Early years **Needs attention**

Leaders have made recent improvements to the curriculum in the early years. They have prioritised the high-quality teaching of phonics and mathematics so that children gain the essential knowledge and skills that they need to build on for future learning. However, children do not have access to well-considered opportunities to use and apply what they have learned independently. Consequently, the activities that some children experience do not help them achieve their next steps as well as they should. As a result, children are not fully prepared for the learning they will encounter in Year 1.

Phonics is taught well in the Reception class. Children secure new sounds and begin to read with confidence. However, they do not transfer this into their early writing well enough. Children enjoy stories and songs. Staff receive the training that they need to understand how young children develop communication skills. They interact well with children to encourage talk and ask purposeful questions to extend children's language.

Children in the early years feel secure because staff respond with care to their emotional and welfare needs. They have well-established routines that make them feel safe. Staff share useful information about children's development with parents and carers. This helps parents and carers to be active participants in their children's early education.

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

Pupils are greeted warmly by staff each morning as they arrive at school. This positive start to the school day means that they typically feel safe and attend regularly. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Pupils know that a trusted adult is close by if they need one. They understand how to keep themselves safe when in school and online. When pupils do raise a concern, such as an incident of bullying, staff generally listen and act quickly.

On the whole, pupils behave well in classrooms and during playtimes. They are polite, respectful and kind to each other. On occasion, they can be distracted in their learning by pupils who struggle to manage their emotions. Some pupils do not feel that adults deal with poor behaviour consistently well. They are not confident that further incidents are prevented.

Children in the early years settle well to learning. On occasion, they do not access activities that help them to fully develop knowledge and skills. Pupils from Year 1 to Year 6 now benefit from an ambitious curriculum, which has improved how well pupils remember what has been taught. Even so, pupils have gaps in their learning which prevent them from being fully prepared for their next stage in education.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), have their barriers to learning identified and reduced. This includes those pupils who attend the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. These pupils take part in lessons alongside their classmates, supported by staff who know their needs well.

Pupils contribute to school life through roles such as school councillors and eco warriors. They show genuine pride in driving change, for example choosing which charity the school

supports. Pupils broaden their horizons through residential trips and visits to local museums and the zoo. They benefit from these opportunities to learn about life beyond their school. They are well equipped for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that the strengthened approach to managing pupils' behaviour is followed consistently well by all staff so that incidents of weaker behaviour reduce and pupils' learning is not disrupted.
- Leaders should ensure that there is a clear approach to the teaching of transcriptional skills so that pupils begin to write with accuracy and fluency from the early years and that gaps in older pupils' writing knowledge close.
- Leaders should ensure that children in the early years have suitable activities and opportunities to use and apply their learning so that they are better prepared for Year 1.

About this inspection

This school is part of the Children First Learning Partnership 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), Abigail Rourke, and overseen by a board of trust directors, chaired by Nicola Chell.

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

This inspection took place from 7 to 8 July 2026.

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 headteacher and other senior leaders during the inspection. They also met with members of the local governing body and the trust directors as well as the CEO. Inspectors spoke with pupils, staff, parents and carers.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school includes a specially resourced provision for seven pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This provision caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.

The school does not use alternative provision.

Headteacher: Claire Sleath

Lead inspector:
Emily Morris, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:
Nicky Parkinson, 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 7 July 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

182
Below 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

206
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)

34.36%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 26.3%

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

9.89%

Well above 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

12.64%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational needs support 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)

Resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SpLD - Specific Learning Difficulty, VI - Visual Impairment, HI - Hearing Impairment, SLCN - Speech, language and Communication, ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health, PD - Physical Disability, MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (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	39%	61%	Below
2024/25 (final)	28%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	38%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	49%	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	71%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	76%	75%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	81%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	60%	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	51%	72%	Below
2024/25 (final)	38%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	38%	72%	Below
2022/23 (final)	69%	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	56%	73%	Below
2024/25 (final)	41%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	62%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	66%	73%	Close to average

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	17%	46%	Below
2024/25 (final)	18%	47%	Below
2023/24 (final)	S	46%	S
2022/23 (final)	23%	44%	Below

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	52%	62%	Below
2024/25 (final)	64%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
2022/23 (final)	31%	60%	Below

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	28%	59%	Below
2024/25 (final)	18%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23 (final)	46%	58%	Close to average

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	31%	60%	Below
2024/25 (final)	18%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23 (final)	38%	59%	Below

‘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	17%	68%	-50 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	18%	69%	-51 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
2022/23 (final)	23%	66%	-43 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	52%	80%	-28 pp
2024/25 (final)	64%	81%	-17 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
2022/23 (final)	31%	78%	-48 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	28%	78%	-50 pp
2024/25 (final)	18%	78%	-60 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S
2022/23 (final)	46%	77%	-31 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	31%	80%	-49 pp
2024/25 (final)	18%	81%	-62 pp
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S
2022/23 (final)	38%	79%	-41 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 (3 term)	6.3%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	8.7%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	8.9%	5.9%	Above

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)	16.2%	13.0%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	26.2%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	34.8%	16.2%	Above

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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