

Sacred Heart Catholic Voluntary Academy

Address: Mere Close, LE5 3HH

Unique reference number (URN): 138081

Inspection report: 6 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	● ●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ **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 ●

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Inclusion is at the centre of all that this school does. Leaders and staff demonstrate a clear ambition for all pupils, whatever their needs or challenges. Leaders carefully consider the needs of the community and ensure that the school provides the necessary support for pupils to succeed. As a result, all pupils do well at this school.

Highly effective approaches identify and respond to pupils' learning and development needs. Leaders identify swiftly where help is needed. Staff provide focused support and make regular checks on pupil progress. This is reviewed routinely so that any barriers to learning can be overcome.

The school carefully maps the support for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who may be disadvantaged. It rigorously evaluates the impact of any support. High-quality training provides staff with the expertise to do their best for these pupils. The school works closely with parents so that everyone is aware of how to do their best for each pupil. Pupils know what they need to do to improve. Where appropriate, the school seeks additional precise support for pupils from other agencies.

Pupil premium funding is carefully targeted. The school makes sure that this money is well spent and that pupils get the help they need.

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders have a deep understanding of the community that the school represents. They have designed the personal development offer to reflect and support all of the different groups of pupils within it.

The school provides pupils with the opportunity to reflect on their spirituality. They are supported to do so from religious or non-religious backgrounds. Pupils develop a sense of moral purpose; they learn right from wrong. Pupils understand the importance of fundamental British values, equality and diversity and how to become active citizens. For example, pupils learned about letter writing and poster campaigns through recent work with the local Member of Parliament.

The school provides targeted pastoral support. Pupils learn how to manage their own emotions and resolve conflict. 'Friendship groups' are carefully engineered to offer support to pupils who struggle emotionally.

The school ensures that pupils understand about the changes in their bodies as they grow up. They learn the significance of looking after themselves both physically, mentally and online.

Leaders have thought carefully about how the school prepares pupils for later life. They recognise that there is a need to challenge pupils' and families' expectations and aspirations. The school works with local universities and employers so that pupils learn about different careers.

The school uses pupil premium funding to carefully target disadvantaged pupils. They work with the local community and other organisations to support these pupils. The engagement of pupils is carefully tracked to ensure that the school actively broadens all pupils' horizons. This work impacts positively on academic achievement as well as attendance.

The school provides a wide range of leadership opportunities for pupils. It sees this as a key component in developing pupils' confidence and resilience. Pupil leaders take assemblies, lead on charity events and support their peers. Pupils responsibly contribute to their school and community through roles such as the eco-team, the chaplaincy team and arts ambassadors.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Broadly, pupils achieve in line with national expectations for the end of key stage 2 national curriculum tests. However, pupils' starting points are low. High levels of deprivation, both academic and social, mean many pupils enter the school without the basics for learning. The school works hard to identify pupils' needs. They provide the support they need to ensure that pupils progress well from their starting points. Teachers regularly check on the progress of all pupils.

Leaders make sure that pupils have the skills they need to achieve well in readiness for their next steps as they progress through the curriculum. The school focuses on handwriting and language development, which means that pupils achieve well in all subjects. However, pupils' number fluency develops at a slightly lower rate, affecting the number of pupils who achieve well in the Year 4 multiplication check.

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

The school has worked tirelessly to increase pupil attendance. They look for every opportunity to ensure that pupils and parents understand the importance of attending school regularly. This work has paid off. Absence rates are now close to national averages. Although persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils has improved over time, some of these pupils remain persistently absent. Leaders should continue to focus on this important element of the school's work.

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils to behave well. Pupils respond positively to these expectations. There is a culture of mutual respect. Teachers make sensitive adaptations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils greet each other, and adults, warmly.

The school ensures that pupils develop positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils at all stages strive to produce work of their best quality and take pride in doing so. Staff are excellent role models. They consistently model the behaviours, attitudes and polite language needed to be attentive learners. This is copied by pupils. Routines in classrooms are very

well established. This minimises any fuss and supports pupils to learn well without disruption. Pupils are alert, engaged and eager to participate in discussions or answering questions.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The school has thought carefully about the curriculum to make sure that it suits the needs of its community. It is ambitious and connects learning as pupils progress from early years through to key stage 2 and beyond. Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching. In the main, teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge. Occasionally, teaching is hindered by limited subject knowledge. This means that pupils do not develop a clear understanding of concepts such as multiplication and in subjects like music.

Leaders ensure that there is a sharp focus on developing language and learning to read. They ensure that the curriculum includes ambitious vocabulary that pupils learn in each subject. This enables the many pupils who speak English as an additional language to access the full curriculum. Teachers routinely check how well pupils remember what they have been taught. They routinely question pupils to check their understanding. This is particularly effective in Mandarin. When they fall behind, they receive the support they need to catch up.

Teachers make sure that learning follows a sequence. They recap and revisit prior learning. This makes sure that all pupils have the prerequisite knowledge securely in place to build upon. Teachers carefully adapt learning activities. This ensures that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve the objective.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders prioritise early reading and phonics. Staff work hard to develop children's love of story and rhyme. For example, they used children's knowledge of a book to take the children on a 'snowman hunt'. This gives children the opportunity to practise familiar language and phrases in a different context. Occasionally, adults do not engage in high-quality interactions with children. This limits the opportunities to extend their thinking and practise new learning.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's context and the starting points of the children, which are typically very low. Leaders and staff quickly identify children with barriers to their learning and wellbeing. They implement sensitive and appropriate support. As a result, although outcomes are below those seen nationally, children make clear progress across all areas of learning. They are ready for their next stage of education.

The school has established a well-structured curriculum. This supports children's progress and identifies the knowledge and skills children need. Teachers ensure that learning activities have a clear focus. They provide planned opportunities for children to practise and widen their vocabulary. The environment evokes learning across all areas of the curriculum as children play.

Leaders have established a real sense of unity in this school.

Senior leaders have a secure understanding of the school's context and use this to set the school's strategic direction. A particular strength is the inclusive culture that informs everything the school does. Whatever barriers pupils, families and the community face, leaders work hard to overcome them. Leaders' decisions are always in the best interests of pupils. Parents express sincere gratitude for the work of this school. As one parent remarked: 'This school is remarkable. When my children leave from home, I am confident that my child is being looked after and thriving.' This typically reflects the sentiment of other parents' views.

Leaders have established sound approaches to find out how well the school is doing. Clear plans set out the path to success. The school's priorities use evidence-based research to underpin staff development. Staff are very positive about their work and know that leaders look out for them. They talk proudly, and at length, about the culture and ethos that has been developed in the school.

Governors and trustees have a sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They fulfil their statutory duties well. They work closely with leaders to check the school is doing the right things well.

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

Pupils enter school with smiles on their faces. They behave well and say that bullying is rare. Pupils feel safe and are confident that adults will deal with any concerns they may have. Pupils settle quickly into classes because expectations of them are high and routines well established.

Pupils clearly enjoy their learning. They talk positively about what they are doing, referencing useful things they have learned before, for example how learning about a healthy diet enabled them to understand the importance of blood transporting nutrients around the body. However, a few teachers lack the subject knowledge they need to teach confidently in a few subjects. Consequently, not all pupils grasp quickly an understanding of the basics of mathematics, such as multiplication. Occasionally, staff miss opportunities to have high-quality interactions with younger pupils. However, pupils achieve well by the time they leave school.

This school is relentlessly focused on removing any barriers pupils may have to their learning. This extends to supporting parents and carers in supporting their child with any challenges they may be facing. Regular English classes enable parents to support their child's learning at home.

The school has established a tangible sense of unity and community. Pupils state how special it is to be part of this school. They appreciate the opportunities to do things they may not ordinarily be able to, such as trips to museums and farms. Expectations for pupils to be respectful of everyone are high. Pupils talk in detail about their responsibilities as British citizens.

Most pupils are keen to attend school. A minority of pupils continue to need ongoing support to attend school as well as they should.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that all adults in the early years consistently maximise opportunities to engage children in high-quality interactions. This will enable children to develop the language and social skills they need to progress more quickly.
 - The school should ensure that all teachers have the subject knowledge that they need to teach subjects across the curriculum well. For example, to teach multiplication so that more pupils achieve the multiplication check and are better equipped for their next stage of learning.
 - Leaders should continue to closely analyse attendance rates and implement strategies to improve the attendance of a small proportion of pupils that continue to be persistently absent from school.
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About this inspection

This school is part of the Saint Thomas Aquinas 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, Neil Lockyer, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sarah Noon.

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 co-headteachers, the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator, assistant headteachers, the chief executive officer and director of standards and performance from the trust, the chair of the board of trustees, the chair of the local governing body and other members of this body along with a wide range of staff, pupils and parents during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Christian religious character. The school is part of the Diocese of Nottingham. It was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in March 2023. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.

The school uses no alternative provision.

The school has undergone a significant change in leadership since the last inspection. There has been a change in headteacher and the school now has 2 co-headteachers.

Co-headteachers: Mrs Alison James and Mrs Marie Sexton

Lead inspector:

Mark Anderson, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

John Spragg, His Majesty's Inspector

Damienne Clarke, His Majesty's 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 6 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

333

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

371

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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

24.69%

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

4.50%

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

21.02%
Above 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	66%	61%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25	66%	62%	Close to average
2023/24	70%	61%	Above
2022/23	63%	60%	Close to average

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	76%	74%	Close to average
2024/25	79%	75%	Close to average
2023/24	77%	74%	Close to average
2022/23	72%	73%	Close to average

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	75%	72%	Close to average
2024/25	71%	72%	Close to average
2023/24	77%	72%	Close to average
2022/23	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	81%	73%	Above
2024/25	82%	74%	Above
2023/24	87%	73%	Above
2022/23	74%	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	61%	46%	Above
2024/25	65%	47%	Above
2023/24	53%	46%	Close to average
2022/23	65%	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	76%	62%	Above
2024/25	82%	63%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	67%	62%	Close to average
2022/23	76%	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	67%	59%	Above
2024/25	65%	59%	Close to average
2023/24	67%	58%	Close to average
2022/23	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	73%	60%	Above
2024/25	76%	61%	Above
2023/24	73%	59%	Above
2022/23	71%	59%	Close to average

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	61%	68%	-6 pp
2024/25	65%	69%	-5 pp
2023/24	53%	67%	-14 pp
2022/23	65%	66%	-2 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	76%	80%	-4 pp
2024/25	82%	81%	2 pp
2023/24	67%	80%	-13 pp
2022/23	76%	78%	-2 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	67%	78%	-10 pp
2024/25	65%	78%	-14 pp
2023/24	67%	78%	-11 pp
2022/23	71%	77%	-7 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	73%	80%	-6 pp
2024/25	76%	81%	-4 pp
2023/24	73%	79%	-6 pp
2022/23	71%	79%	-9 pp

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 terms)	6.8%	5.2%	Above
2023/24	7.1%	5.5%	Above
2022/23	7.3%	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 (2 terms)	21.1%	13.3%	Above
2023/24	25.5%	14.6%	Above
2022/23	23.3%	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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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