

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Aylesham

Address: Ackholt Road, Aylesham, Canterbury, Kent, CT3 3AS

Unique reference number (URN): 140520

Inspection report: 16 June 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.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils make suitable progress through the curriculum from their starting points as they move through the school. Most pupils apply their learning confidently in different subjects. They often produce high-quality work across the curriculum subjects and year groups. Starting in the early years, children learn phonics successfully. They quickly gain the confidence to read simple words with increasing fluency. Pupils draw on this knowledge over time to become fluent and confident readers. Reading is prioritised across the school, and this is reflected in pupils' positive outcomes.

By the end of key stage 2 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieve well in national tests for reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' writing skills develop over time, improving in handwriting, punctuation and spelling. They are well prepared for their next steps. Pupils leave school with the important knowledge and skills they need to be able to succeed in the next stage of their education and beyond.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have ensured there is a broad and well-sequenced curriculum in place. It helps pupils build the essential knowledge they need. Leaders have a clear understanding of the quality of both the curriculum and teaching. They use this knowledge to continually refine the curriculum to ensure it remains appropriate.

Staff have been well supported to develop the knowledge and skills they need to deliver the curriculum with increasing consistency. Teachers generally have the subject knowledge that they need to teach the curriculum well. Whole-school teaching approaches are designed to support all pupils. Staff make appropriate adaptations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities so that they can learn alongside their peers.

Phonics is taught daily using clear and consistent routines. It is taught with accuracy by well-trained staff. Pupils read the right books, so that their reading skills progress well. Developing the necessary skills in reading, writing and mathematics is prioritised from the start. Leaders take appropriate action if pupils need support to close gaps in securing these essential skills. Staff regularly check that pupils have secured knowledge before moving on. However, leaders are working to strengthen this area of their work further.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders have created a curriculum that provides a successful start to children's educational journey. Staff skilfully adapt activities to reflect children's interests and address identified needs. The environment has been thoughtfully resourced to meet children's needs and is an engaging and inviting learning space. This enables children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to gain the knowledge and skills that set them up well for future learning. They are confident and happy in the early years.

Through clear daily routines, children build their confidence and independence. Staff's interactions are effective in developing children's early communication skills. Well-trained staff model vocabulary and two-way conversations that secures appropriate language development.

The curriculum is rooted in strong foundations for communication, language and early reading. Children engage confidently with phonics and use the letter sounds that they are taught to begin to read and write with growing confidence and accuracy.

Children are well prepared for their next stage of learning. Leaders ensure successful transition into Year 1 with thoughtful opportunities to build relationships and address any gaps in learning. Relationships with parents and carers are positive and contribute to children's achievement and a deep sense of belonging.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have established an inclusive culture across the school. Leaders and staff know their pupils and families well. They identify pupils' needs quickly and prioritise meeting the needs of pupils with vulnerabilities promptly. This ensures that pupils feel a sense of belonging and enables them to focus on their education and enjoy their time at school.

Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is underpinned by the high expectations of staff. Leaders ensure staff receive well-considered training and support. They develop their knowledge and understanding of pupils' needs effectively. This enables staff to provide appropriate support for pupils. Staff use a wide range of resources to help pupils with SEND to learn effectively in their class. Staff check the effectiveness of their provision effectively and adjust their support when necessary. Partnerships with external agencies, as well as effective working with families, help staff to provide support that reduces pupils' barriers to their learning.

Additional funding is used appropriately to remove barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. They provide support well for pupils and their families, who may need extra help. Leaders check that additional support has a positive impact on pupils' education and wellbeing. This enables these pupils to achieve well.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have created a caring, supportive and ambitious culture, where pupils' best interests are prioritised. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They use this knowledge to prioritise the right actions for school improvement. They work successfully with staff to ensure implementation of these actions. Leaders make decisions that place pupils' best interests at the centre. Leaders' actions are always focused on improving the experiences and opportunities available to pupils.

Trustees and governors share the vision for the school, underpinned by the school's mission of 'Love God, Love Learning, Love Life'. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Robust processes enable them to support and challenge leaders effectively. They are knowledgeable about their roles. They use this knowledge when working with leaders to ensure that they fulfil their statutory responsibilities.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They feel that leaders respect and value their work. They appreciate the robust professional learning programme. Staff feel that leaders prioritise their wellbeing and are mindful of workload, when introducing new initiatives. They deeply appreciate leaders' sensitivity, care and understanding. Leaders work with external agencies and the wider community, so that families receive appropriate support when needed. Engagement with parents is positive and improving, contributing to pupils' positive attitudes, attendance and wellbeing. Many parents and carers are very positive about the school. They appreciate the care staff show their children.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils benefit from an inclusive and carefully planned personal development programme. Leaders have ensured that the programme aligns closely with the school's ethos and values. It is also tailored to the local context. They have carefully considered the learning opportunities that will best support pupils to be ready for life beyond school.

The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum is well structured. Pupils progress well through this curriculum and develop knowledge of positive relationships. Pupils learn about looking after their mental and physical health. They understand the risks they might face in daily life, including online. The relationships and sex education programme supports pupils to be ready for life beyond school. Leaders work with parents so that families feel informed and confident about what their children are learning.

Pupils develop an understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Activities such as body-autonomy scenarios and first aid deepen their understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils find out about other religions. They appreciate that everyone is different and unique and that discrimination is unacceptable. Pupils respect and value diversity in their school community. They show empathy and care for others and are proud of their school.

Pupils take pride in holding leadership roles as prefects and learning mentors. These roles develop pupils' confidence, character and sense of responsibility. Leaders provide a wide range of visits and trips and ensure they are available for all pupils. These include trips to see an orchestra in London and a local beach, often using the train to support independence and preparation for their next steps. Pupils talk enthusiastically about attending nature club and being national winners of a reading competition. Pupils receive well-considered pastoral support. They appreciate that nurturing staff are available to help them. Because of this, pupils develop well socially, morally, spiritually and culturally.

Needs attention

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Leaders emphasise the importance of regular attendance at school and celebrate high attendance. Leaders work closely with families to identify and address barriers, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Previously, attendance at the school was below national averages. Leaders have now

established very clear systems and priorities to reduce absence and there are signs of improvement as a result, but these are in the early stages. Attendance at the school this year is now broadly in line with national averages and persistent absence has reduced significantly for all groups. Leaders know attendance needs to continue to improve so that pupils do not have gaps in their learning.

From their start in the early years, clear routines and high expectations for behaviour are established. Pupils develop highly positive attitudes to learning. Children learn in a calm and purposeful environment, where disruption to learning is rare. Staff consistently model and promote the school's values. Positive relationships between staff and pupils form a key focus of the school's work. Pupils are respectful towards each other and adults. They cooperate well with each other to resolve conflicts. This is particularly evident during break and lunchtime, when pupils play and interact with high levels of independence. Bullying and other forms of harassment are not tolerated. If pupils require extra support to reach the high expectations, this is quickly provided by skilled and caring staff.

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

Pupils arrive each day happy to be part of their welcoming school community. Staff know pupils and families well. They are greeted warmly on arrival and supported into class with kindness and care. Pupils demonstrate courtesy and respect and this is evident throughout the school day. Pupils are confident to speak about their learning and their enjoyment of school.

Behaviour across the school is very positive and pupils are well supported by skilled adults. Pupils are focused and keen to learn. There is no disruption to learning. Across the school they contribute confidently to lessons and collaborate effectively. Starting in the early years, children feel safe because of the positive and trusting relationships staff form with them. Consequently, pupils are not worried about bullying or unkindness. Pupils benefit from effective pastoral care. They know that staff will quickly resolve any issues or worries they have. Attendance has improved this year. However, some pupils still do not attend school regularly enough. This results in them missing important learning.

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils to make progress and achieve well. They benefit from a carefully considered, broad and enriching curriculum. From the early years, pupils build knowledge and skills successfully. Over time, pupils achieve well. They enjoy learning and the school environment celebrates their achievements and successes. The inclusive culture and practice in the school ensures that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils make progress and are included in all aspects of school life.

Pupils enjoy a range of trips and visits to enrich their learning. They value opportunities to support each other by taking responsibility in the school as prefects and learning mentors. Leaders and staff care deeply about pupils, their families and the community they serve. Pupils are well supported to develop confidence and resilience and be ready for their next steps.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to refine their assessment systems to ensure that they are used consistently and effectively, so that pupils build understanding securely across all subjects.
 - Leaders should continue to embed their systems for promoting regular attendance so that pupils' attendance rates continue to rise and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent continues to fall, so that pupils do not miss out on important learning.
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About this inspection

The school is part of the Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Annemarie Whittle, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Caroline Stockmann.

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 headteacher, senior leaders and a range of teaching and non-teaching staff. Inspectors also met with members of the local governance committee and trustees, including the chair. They met the CEO and members of the trust's central team.

Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons and during social times.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Catholic religious character. The school's last section 48 inspection, for schools with a religious character, took place in November 2023.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher: Hester Seager-Fleming

Lead inspector:

Simon Graydon, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Neerasha Singh, 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 16 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

118

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

133

Well 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)

33.05%

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

0.00%

Well 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

23.73%

Well above 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	72%	61%	Above
2024/25 (final)	71%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	75%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	71%	60%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	85%	74%	Above
2024/25 (final)	86%	75%	Above
2023/24 (final)	88%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	82%	73%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	72%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (final)	71%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	75%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	71%	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	83%	73%	Above
2024/25 (final)	86%	74%	Above
2023/24 (final)	88%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	76%	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	72%	46%	Above
2024/25 (final)	57%	47%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	89%	46%	Above
2022/23 (final)	67%	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	80%	62%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	71%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	89%	62%	Above
2022/23 (final)	78%	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	72%	59%	Above
2024/25 (final)	57%	59%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	89%	58%	Above
2022/23 (final)	67%	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	84%	60%	Above
2024/25 (final)	86%	61%	Above
2023/24 (final)	89%	59%	Above
2022/23 (final)	78%	59%	Above

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	72%	68%	4 pp
2024/25 (final)	57%	69%	-12 pp
2023/24 (final)	89%	67%	21 pp
2022/23 (final)	67%	66%	0 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	80%	80%	0 pp
2024/25 (final)	71%	81%	-9 pp
2023/24 (final)	89%	80%	9 pp
2022/23 (final)	78%	78%	-1 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	72%	78%	-6 pp
2024/25 (final)	57%	78%	-21 pp
2023/24 (final)	89%	78%	11 pp
2022/23 (final)	67%	77%	-11 pp

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	84%	80%	4 pp
2024/25 (final)	86%	81%	5 pp
2023/24 (final)	89%	79%	9 pp
2022/23 (final)	78%	79%	-1 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 (3 term)	8.0%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	6.9%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	8.8%	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)	26.0%	13.0%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	23.4%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	26.8%	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.

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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