

St Nicholas of Tolentine Catholic Primary School

Address: Pennywell Road, Bristol, BS5 0TJ

Unique reference number (URN): 149915

Inspection report: 17 March 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

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Attendance is a high priority for the school. Staff work closely with families to understand barriers to pupils attending well. A carefully considered and bespoke approach underpins the successful support the school provides. This is strengthened by guidance from external agencies. It includes a well-established breakfast club and the 'walking bus'. Leaders analyse attendance information thoroughly. They use this well to identify patterns and trends. Despite high rates of absence historically, which sit above the national average, leaders' actions to address this have started to impact positively. This is particularly the case for the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils live out the school's values of 'enjoy, success, respect, community, responsibility and compassion' in their day-to-day interactions with one another and staff. They demonstrate the utmost respect for one another. Staff skilfully support pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour. This creates a calm and purposeful environment in which pupils learn without disruption. They listen attentively to each other and are often keen to build on and contribute to class discussions. Pupils do not tolerate any form of bullying or discrimination, including when using the internet. They know that staff would deal with it swiftly.

Early years

Expected standard 

The early years is a happy, safe and exciting place to learn. There is an ambitious and well-designed curriculum. The classroom environment fully supports this. Nothing is left to chance. Staff use children's starting points to shape the curriculum. Children engage in a wide range of purposeful activities, with learning at the centre. They benefit from the high-quality interactions they have with staff. This supports their sense of curiosity and develops their language and vocabulary. In particular, children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language understand important vocabulary and apply it when they speak. For example, children use words such as 'extinct' to describe dinosaurs.

Children develop a love of reading. They orally rehearse special stories. During independent learning time, children retell these with enthusiasm and accuracy. Phonics teaching is effective. Children use their knowledge to build words and read sentences. Opportunities to practise counting and apply their phonics knowledge to writing are carefully structured. Children develop letter formation and writing well. They are well prepared for Year 1.

The school works in close partnership with parents and carers. It shares important moments of celebration and success, so that parents have an up-to-date understanding of their child's progress.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Inclusion is at the heart of the school. Pupils benefit from the effective approach to inclusion that leaders have put in place. Leaders and staff use clear systems and processes to

accurately and promptly identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those with other challenges.

Staff appreciate the additional training and support the school and trust provide. This helps staff to understand and meet pupils' needs better. For example, staff learn to understand how a pupil's past experience of trauma may affect their behaviour. Staff use this information well to support pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour. Work with external professionals, such as speech and language therapists, further enhances the school's offer.

Teachers adapt learning and provide additional resources to enable pupils with SEND to access the curriculum alongside their peers. Regular reviews of pupils' individual plans inform future provision and targeted support.

Leaders use additional funding for disadvantaged pupils effectively. Leaders have created a well-informed strategy. This accurately identifies pupils' barriers, based on the context of the school. Leaders routinely review the success of this strategy. They make necessary adjustments to ensure it continues to have a positive impact on disadvantaged pupils' achievement and wellbeing.

Leaders use alternative provision appropriately. Robust processes ensure that it is safe, suitable and in the best interests of the pupils who attend.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school's provision for pupils' personal development is successful. It offers a varied and broad range of experiences that nurture their talents. Clubs such as football, hockey, and arts and crafts mean that there is something for everyone. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is enhanced by a range of trips. Leaders work creatively to support pupils and their families. This means that those who are disadvantaged benefit fully from this offer.

The school's provision to develop pupils' spiritual and moral understanding is ingrained through the culture and ethos. Pupils enjoy regular projects, for example based on diverse and inspirational people. These projects help pupils to understand, appreciate and celebrate difference. Work as 'mini police' further enhances pupils' understanding of fundamental British values, such as the rule of law. As a result, they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

The PSHE and relationships and sex education curriculum ensures pupils learn about important concepts. These include positive relationships, consent and personal space. Pupils speak with great maturity about body changes. They know how to keep themselves safe, including outside of the school gate. Pupils understand the dangers of gangs and the impact that peer pressure can have. The curriculum helps pupils to see the benefits and drawbacks of using the internet. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. Leaders adapt the programme to ensure pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities fully understand these important messages.

Leadership roles and responsibilities enable pupils to develop confidence and build character. Pupils fulfil these roles with pride, including the chaplaincy team, playtime

buddies and the 'green team'. Through charity work, pupils learn how their actions can make a difference, starting within their own community.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' achievement in national assessments over time has been below the national averages. There is an improving picture in some aspects. Pupils have attained better in mathematics, including those who are disadvantaged. The same applies to the Year 1 phonics screening check. However, pupils leave the school with gaps in their knowledge.

The school accurately prioritises pupils securing basic skills and knowledge. However, due to historical weaknesses in teaching, some pupils have not caught up. This impacts on pupils' achievement in the wider curriculum. The quality of pupils' work in books in some subjects is variable. Leaders have taken action to address this, but it is still at an early stage. This means that some pupils are not as well prepared as they should be for the next stage in their education.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

The quality of teaching is inconsistent. The legacy of a weak curriculum hinders pupils' progress. Leaders' efforts to address this and improve the curriculum have not yet had a consistently positive impact across all subjects and year groups. In wider curriculum subjects, such as history and geography, pupils do not build knowledge as well as they should. This is because teachers do not successfully address gaps in learning. Pupils' misconceptions persist.

Leaders have an accurate and detailed understanding of the curriculum's strengths and areas to develop. They have now put in place an ambitious curriculum that is well designed and sequenced. In some subjects, such as English and mathematics, the impact of leaders' actions to improve teaching is more evident. In these subjects, teachers use their subject knowledge well to ensure that learning is typically delivered effectively. They adapt the curriculum helpfully to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Staff ensure that pupils learn the basic skills they need to access the curriculum, particularly regarding reading. Teachers skilfully ensure pupils secure the important foundations for learning to read. Pupils in the early stages of reading have books that match the sounds they know. If needed, they receive support to catch up quickly.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Leaders know that further action is needed to continue to improve the school and to ensure that pupils learn well across the curriculum. Recent work to develop pupils' mathematical, reading and writing skills is not currently reflected in better achievement. Leaders, alongside

members of the trust, have begun to address long-term weaknesses in the curriculum and the inconsistency with which staff deliver it.

Those responsible for governance provide a balance of challenge and support to leaders. This ensures that the school's actions are leading to sustained improvement in some areas. Leaders make decisions in the best interests of pupils. This is particularly the case for those who are disadvantaged, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who face other challenges. Governors make sure the school fulfils its statutory duties, for example regarding safeguarding practices.

Staff feel valued. They know that leaders are available to support and advise. Staff appreciate the professional learning programme the school and trust provides. This helps staff, including those new to the profession, to develop their expertise. It improves their confidence to deliver the curriculum with greater consistency. Staff appreciate the genuine efforts leaders at all levels make to manage their workload. There is a deep sense of pride and belonging among the staff team.

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

St Nicholas of Tolentine is a safe haven for pupils. They arrive each day with a smile on their face and a desire to learn. Staff care deeply about pupils and their families. A high proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. Many join and leave the school at different points of their education. This impacts on their overall attendance. Leaders are relentless in their drive to ensure that the attendance for most groups of pupils is improving.

Over time, the curriculum and teaching have not been effective. Some pupils do not learn as well as they should. This is reflected in pupils' low achievement in national assessments. In addition, gaps in pupils' learning remain because the checks teachers make are not consistently effective. This is particularly true in the wider curriculum.

Staff foster positive and trusting relationships. They fully understand and reduce the barriers that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged face. Pupils and staff are proud to be part of this rich and diverse community. There is a real sense of belonging. In the early years, children follow the routines well. Pupils meet staff's high expectations of behaviour. Across the school, pupils have positive attitudes to learning.

The personal development offer is a golden thread that runs through the school's work. Pupils have an impressive understanding of fundamental British values, such as the rule of law and mutual respect. They reflect this in how considerate they are of one another and staff. As a result, incidents of bullying are rare. If they do occur, staff deal with them quickly.

Pupils benefit from opportunities designed to develop their interests and broaden their horizons. For example, they learn musical instruments, including strings and brass. Pupils play an active role as advocates for looking after the environment. These opportunities help them to be responsible citizens and thrive.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers use assessment effectively to check pupils' learning and adapt teaching so that pupils build the depth of knowledge they need across the wider curriculum.
 - Leaders should ensure that pupils across the school achieve better outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics so they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
 - Leaders and governors should monitor the curriculum to ensure teaching and pupils' achievement improve with sufficient speed and rigour.
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About this inspection

This school is part of The Cardinal Newman Catholic Educational 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), Dr Daniel Doyle, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Iheanyi Christopher Izuka.

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, vice principal, members of staff, the CEO and representatives from the trust board and local governing board.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. As a new school, it has yet to be inspected under section 48.

The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.

Principal: Rachael James

Lead inspector:

Wendy D'Arcy, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Sarah Ryder, 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 17 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

135

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

210

Below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

65.93%

Well above 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

5.19%

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

27.41%

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

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		61%	
2024/25 (revised)	33%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	40%	61%	Below
2022/23		60%	

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		74%	
2024/25 (revised)	48%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	60%	74%	Below
2022/23		73%	

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%	
2024/25 (revised)	43%	72%	Below
2023/24 (final)	52%	72%	Below
2022/23		71%	

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		73%	
2024/25 (revised)	57%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	44%	73%	Below
2022/23		73%	

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		46%	
2024/25 (revised)	20%	47%	Below
2023/24 (final)	33%	46%	Close to average
2022/23		44%	

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		62%	

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	30%	63%	Below
2023/24 (final)	58%	62%	Close to average
2022/23		60%	

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		59%	
2024/25 (revised)	30%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	42%	58%	Below
2022/23		58%	

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

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

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		60%	
2024/25 (revised)	50%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	33%	59%	Below
2022/23		59%	

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		68%	
2024/25 (revised)	20%	69%	-49 pp
2023/24 (final)	33%	67%	-34 pp
2022/23		66%	

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%	
2024/25 (revised)	30%	81%	-51 pp
2023/24 (final)	58%	80%	-21 pp
2022/23		78%	

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		78%	
2024/25 (revised)	30%	78%	-48 pp
2023/24 (final)	42%	78%	-36 pp
2022/23		77%	

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		80%	
2024/25 (revised)	50%	81%	-31 pp
2023/24 (final)	33%	79%	-46 pp
2022/23		79%	

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 term)	6.4%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	7.2%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	9.3%	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 term)	21.2%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	21.2%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	27.0%	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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