

St Mary's CofE First Academy

Address: Marston Road, Wheaton Aston, Staffordshire, ST19 9PQ

Unique reference number (URN): 146427

Inspection report: 23 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.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

The school's positive culture encourages pupils to attend regularly. Pupils value being part of the school community and recognise the importance of attending every day. When needed, leaders identify attendance concerns early and respond quickly. Leaders monitor attendance carefully so that pupils receive support as soon as they need it. Leaders work closely with families, providing practical help and clear guidance so pupils who face challenges feel included and able to attend regularly. All of this means that attendance is consistently above average, and pupils who need support attend school regularly.

Pupils learn in a calm, welcoming environment where positive behaviour is the norm and kindness is modelled by everyone. Staff respond quickly and consistently to any concerns so pupils feel safe and confident. All pupils show positive attitudes to learning, settle to tasks with enthusiasm and take pride in doing their best. Leaders promote an inclusive approach that helps all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, understand expectations and manage their emotions successfully. Support such as regular check-ins, clear routines and calm spaces helps pupils stay focused and feel secure. As a result, pupils behave responsibly, treat others with respect and contribute to a community built on shared values and positive relationships.

Early years

Strong standard ●

Leaders place the early years at the heart of the school and show a clear understanding of how young children learn best. They make thoughtful decisions that keep children safe and ready to learn. The curriculum is carefully planned so that knowledge builds step by step. In Nursery, children take part in simple early phonics activities that help them tune into sounds. This early practice supports them to build words and begin writing with growing confidence when they move into Reception.

Teaching is warm, purposeful and highly responsive. Adults model rich language, extend children's ideas and use simple tools such as story bags to deepen understanding. They spot gaps early and provide targeted support, including extra fine motor practice and personalised phonics sessions. These approaches help children to apply their learning with growing independence. Leaders ensure that every child, including those with additional needs, receives the right help at the right time.

Children's wellbeing is nurtured through familiar routines, helping children to understand their feelings, and through kind, encouraging conversations. Staff help children to manage big feelings, make kind choices and grow in independence. The environment is inviting and well organised, with activities that spark imagination and build on what children already know. Parents feel welcomed as partners through workshops, open sessions and regular communication. Children achieve well, feel safe and thrive in a setting where their needs and interests are understood and celebrated.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils achieve well because they develop secure foundational knowledge across reading, writing and mathematics. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make steady progress from their starting points. Although results vary from year to year because cohorts are small, pupils learn well and make secure progress.

Foundational reading skills develop securely. Pupils respond well to clear routines and precise modelling, confidently blending sounds and using taught strategies when reading new words. They read with increasing fluency and confidence because they build secure early reading skills.

In writing, pupils use the vocabulary and ideas they have learned to produce well-structured, thoughtful work. They edit independently and explain their choices, showing growing confidence as writers. Across the curriculum, pupils apply subject knowledge accurately and talk confidently about topics such as the Romans and scientific enquiry. They are well prepared for their next steps in learning.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of teaching and the curriculum. They use this insight to make sure pupils on the whole receive high-quality learning. They have designed a well-sequenced curriculum that builds knowledge step by step. It places a clear focus on the essential foundations of reading, writing and mathematics. This is reflected in pupils' positive engagement and the quality of work in their books.

Early reading remains a priority. Pupils learn phonics well because teaching matches what they already know and what they need to learn next. Targeted support for those who need extra practice is effective. Leaders use staff carefully. They ensure teaching is inclusive so pupils secure the strong foundations needed for future learning. Generally, pupils use what they have learned with confidence. In writing, for example, they draw on modelled examples, planning tools and vocabulary resources to produce thoughtful, persuasive pieces. This reflects leaders' commitment to securing strong literacy skills for all pupils.

Foundational skills are taught consistently across the school. Pupils benefit from clear routines and well-structured lessons that help them build secure knowledge over time. However, there is some variation in how the wider curriculum is delivered. In subjects such as history, geography and science, teachers do not always adapt learning well enough to meet pupils' different needs. This means some pupils are not supported as effectively to make confident progress.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders know pupils and their families extremely well. This means they spot emerging needs quickly and put the right support in place straight away. This begins even before children start school. Leaders gather helpful information about each child's strengths and

any support they may need. Staff support pupils well through simple classroom adjustments, such as pre-teaching vocabulary, or through specialist support when a more targeted approach is needed. Ongoing training helps staff recognise early signs of need and to work confidently with external professionals.

Disadvantaged pupils benefit from carefully planned pupil premium funding. Leaders look closely at academic, attendance and safeguarding information, ensuring no child is overlooked. Pupils who need extra help with reading receive additional support, including sessions with reading experts. Consequently, these pupils are gaining confidence and becoming more fluent readers. Staff also keep expectations high, identifying pupils who can achieve greater depth and ensuring that all pupils can access the curriculum.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive timely, thoughtful support. Typically, effective adaptations in lessons help them keep up. Children known to social care are supported through regular reviews, tutoring and social skills groups. This strengthens wellbeing and engagement. Leaders' actions reduce barriers and ensure every pupil feels included, supported and able to thrive.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders demonstrate a culture of high expectations, professionalism and continuous improvement that is visible across the school. Since taking on their roles, the interim headteacher, supported by the Trust, has acted quickly to create a calm, consistent environment where pupils, staff and parents feel supported. Leaders share a clear vision based on an accurate understanding of what the school does well and what needs to improve.

Leaders' strategic actions are making a noticeable difference. Staff now focus more sharply on developing pupils' key skills and addressing misconceptions early. Parents appreciate the renewed partnership with the school and value opportunities such as open sessions and book looks that help them stay connected to their child's learning. The interim headteacher brings deep knowledge and a steady, reassuring presence. She is supported effectively by the Trust to prioritise what matters most for pupils.

Staff speak warmly about leaders' support. They describe leaders as approachable and proactive, giving practical help when workloads rise. This has boosted morale and created a positive, collaborative culture. Staff wellbeing is prioritised.

Professional learning is purposeful and has strengthened classroom practice. Staff talk confidently about training on how to support children with additional needs, explaining how these strategies help pupils succeed. Behaviour across the school is calm and respectful, supported by consistent expectations and strong relationships.

Governors and the Trust play an active role in sustaining improvement. They understand the school's priorities, check information first hand and provide both support and challenge. Their commitment ensures that leaders always act in the best interests of all pupils and the wider community.

Leaders take a thoughtful and strategic approach to personal development and wellbeing, making it a visible part of daily school life. Pupils speak proudly about the respectful way staff interact with them. Leaders have created a school where warm, trusting connections help children feel safe and supported. This sense of belonging helps pupils approach learning with confidence and enthusiasm.

The personal development programme is rich and well planned. Leaders build pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding through visits, themed days and creative experiences that bring learning to life. However, pupils are sometimes less confident when talking about other world religions and places of worship. Leaders teach pupils how to stay safe online and offline through personal, social, health and economic education lessons, computing and assemblies, helping them explain confidently how to block or report concerns, seek help and make responsible choices. High-quality relationships and sex education and health education is delivered sensitively and shared with parents in advance, promoting trust and transparency.

Leaders also help pupils understand fundamental British values in meaningful ways. Pupils vote for activities, discuss fairness in stories and explore respectful disagreement. Leadership opportunities, such as the school council, eco committee and worship team, give pupils a real voice and help them develop responsibility and confidence. These experiences build character and a strong sense of belonging and are supported by inclusive practice that ensures every pupil can take part.

Personal development is an entitlement for all. Leaders adapt provision so pupils with additional needs or barriers can participate fully. Staff provide warm, responsive pastoral care, checking in regularly, offering calm spaces and working closely with families to remove barriers. Pupils enjoy a wide range of clubs and enrichment activities and feel encouraged to try new things. As a result, they show strong character, positive attitudes and a clear understanding of how to stay safe, healthy and ready to learn.

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

Pupils live out the school's values of honesty, kindness and respect in the way they learn, play and interact. A strong sense of belonging is evident in how confidently they talk about their school, describing it as a place where they feel happy, cared for and listened to. Warm, trusting relationships with staff are a significant strength. Pupils say adults are always there when they need help. This consistent support enables them to feel safe and ready to learn.

Calm routines and respectful interactions help pupils focus fully on their learning. Positive behaviour is the norm. In lessons, pupils concentrate well, follow instructions promptly and support one another with kindness. Around school, they move sensibly and play cooperatively. Pupils are clear about the difference between bullying and isolated incidents and trust adults to act quickly.

Enjoyment of learning shines through in pupils' enthusiasm for topics such as space and the natural world. They speak proudly about their achievements and describe lessons as fun, interesting and appropriately challenging. Their work shows that they are achieving well. Most pupils read with increasing fluency, write persuasively using ambitious vocabulary and apply subject-specific knowledge confidently.

A strong sense of inclusion is woven through daily life. Pupils with additional needs benefit from additional help such as visual prompts, sensory circuits and targeted reading support. This helps them to keep up with their peers.

Opportunities beyond the classroom enrich pupils' experiences. Clubs, leadership roles and performances from the music band help pupils develop confidence and character. Regular attendance reflects pupils' enjoyment of school and their commitment to learning. They thrive because they feel safe, behave well and enjoy their lessons.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teaching in the foundation subjects is consistently effective and that teachers adapt learning effectively across the wider curriculum so that pupils build secure knowledge.
 - Leaders should further strengthen the personal development offer so that pupils gain a broader understanding of different faiths and cultures.
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About this inspection

This school is part of St Chad's Academies 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), Sarah Cockshott, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Harry Azima. The regional hub lead is Karen Taylor.

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.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with school leaders, including the interim assistant principal and the co-principal (designate). They also spoke with representatives of the trust, including the regional hub lead, the CEO, the deputy CEO, the senior improvement advisor and representatives of the local governing committee during the inspection, including the chair of the local academy committee.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character.

The school uses no alternative provision.

Interim Assistant Principal : Jenny Watts

Lead inspector:

Su Plant, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Azizan Kabil, 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 23 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

88

Well 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

99

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)

20.78%

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

2.27%

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

15.91%

Close to 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).

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)	3.7%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	4.2%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	5.5%	5.9%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (3 term)	6.0%	13.0%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	13.8%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	15.6%	16.2%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional 

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard 

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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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