

Banks St Stephen's CofE School

Address: Greaves Hall Avenue, Banks, Southport, Merseyside, PR9 8BL

Unique reference number (URN): 119384

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.

Expected standard

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders' subject curriculums are well thought out and build logically from the early years to Year 6. Leaders make careful decisions about where the curriculum needs amending. For example, where parts of the intended geography curriculum had not been previously taught in sufficient depth, leaders made sure that pupils have extra opportunities to revisit important knowledge. In lessons, teachers make careful use of checks on pupils' knowledge to pinpoint what to teach next.

In several subjects, the curriculum and its delivery benefit greatly from the well-informed expertise of subject leaders and class teachers. For pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who have an education, health and care plan, leaders make certain that these plans are suitable and are followed by teachers.

Most of the time, the teaching of key skills in reading, writing and mathematics is successful. However, the quality of some teaching of phonics and reading recently slipped a little. Leaders have rightly set the improvement of phonics and reading as whole-school priorities. Leaders are taking determined action, for example, by ensuring that their strengthened curriculum is enriched with well-chosen story books. Teaching is focused much more on helping pupils to keep up in their phonics and on learning how to talk about stories and the works of different authors.

Early years

Expected standard 

Leaders make sure that staff identify and support the needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the early years quickly and effectively. They make links with other settings or external professionals when necessary. Staff make close and effective links with parents and carers to support children's wellbeing and learning.

Staff gently and skilfully support 2-year-olds to develop their physical skills and the words that they understand and use. This work continues well with 3-year-olds. Staff's use of story books to teach and inspire children is carefully considered. In the Reception class, staff prioritise the effective teaching of phonics and early writing. Children learn to be skilful talkers, readers and writers.

Children in the early years, including 2-year-olds, learn the curriculum well. This is because curriculum content is well considered and the new staff team talks supportively with children. Staff help children to be physically active and to speak clearly and confidently. Staff guide children well in their learning, such as understanding the melting of ice. Leaders ensure that staff establish clear, consistent routines to help children to feel secure at school. Staff encourage children to learn by trying suitable tasks for themselves. Children are well prepared academically and socially for Year 1.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders establish warm, respectful relationships between parents and carers, different communities and professionals at the heart of the school's work. For example, all families can benefit from the school's 'Sharing Shed'. This resource provides some food, school uniform, toiletries and books for local families.

Leaders make sure that the school focuses on what support is right for the current time in each pupil's life. Leaders and staff generally understand the needs of each pupil and family. Leaders use extra funding thoughtfully. For instance, they use pupil premium funding to ensure that disadvantaged pupils participate in extra activities at school, where needed.

Leaders develop staff's expertise, including through training, such as with regard to taking a well-organised approach to supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, on occasion, some staff lack detailed understanding of the learning needs of pupils with SEND.

Strategies to support the learning of pupils, especially those with SEND, consistently enhance pupils' experiences. Leaders and staff strive to help each pupil to feel that they belong at Banks St Stephen's. For example, leaders have worked closely with the families of pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This has helped leaders and staff to understand pupils' lives and how to celebrate and respond to that effectively in school.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate, honest and realistic understanding of the school. They check the quality of pupils' work and classroom teaching alongside staff's information on how well pupils remember important curriculum knowledge. Leaders consider pupils' views about their learning. This informs leaders' actions, such as to improve curriculum content and the quality of staff training. Leaders are starting to take the right steps to strengthen their own expertise in areas, such as phonics and the early years.

Governors are very clear about their role. They challenge one another and the headteacher about the progress of school improvement priorities. Governors understand their statutory duties. They are well informed about the opportunities and challenges facing the school's long-term future.

Leaders act in the best interests of pupils. For example, leaders work with the local authority to ensure that, when relevant, pupils' education, health and care plans are suitable and up to date. Leaders make purposeful links with families of pupils, such as those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, to better inform the school's work to support these pupils.

Teachers and teaching assistants have high wellbeing. They are supported, listened to and valued. Leaders make sure that staff have a reasonable workload, including providing the time away from the classroom that they need to prepare lessons. Leaders provide all teaching staff with access to a range of helpful training.

Leaders' well-thought-out programme for pupils' personal development and wellbeing enhances their learning and broadens their experiences. For example, the school's recent collaboration with a local secondary school provided an exciting music event for the pupils at Banks St Stephen's. Pupils enjoy a variety of live performances. The school ensures that particularly disadvantaged pupils benefit from these opportunities. For example, some pupils recently visited a professional performance of a well-known musical. Leaders track which pupils take advantage of enrichment experiences so that all are included and benefit fully.

Pupils have a deep understanding of fundamental British values. They develop their understanding of the importance of these values for their everyday lives. Pupils learn to be kind, polite and thoughtful. The personal, social and health education curriculum helps pupils to learn about modern society effectively. They build a rich knowledge of aspects, such as the consequences of a person's digital footprint. Pupils in upper key stage 2 develop a mature understanding of consent. They understand the need to avoid negative comments about the physical appearance of others. They develop an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. The school prepares pupils to be safe, sensible and respectful young people.

Leaders act effectively when vulnerable pupils need extra help. This includes appropriate and timely support for their mental health. Many pupils say that they value the support for their wellbeing that the school provides through its pastoral programme.

Pupils enjoy a range of visitors to school and educational trips and benefit from suitable resources that enhance their learning about different faiths, feelings and values. Pupils understand that compassion and respect for difference are shared by many different people.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' attainment in the Year 1 phonics screening check and in reading at the end of Year 6 were below average in 2025. This means that pupils, including some disadvantaged pupils, were not as ready as they should be for the next stage of their learning. Leaders are taking appropriate steps to address these weaknesses, but these are recent improvements to the curriculum and teaching and they will take time to show impact in published outcomes for pupils' attainment.

Pupils in Year 4 attain well in the multiplication tables check. This has been the case for the past 3 years. This success is because of the school's high-quality mathematics curriculum and teaching. It has deepened pupils' enthusiasm for mathematics, which is a popular subject at the school.

Pupils throughout the school write well and achieve well in writing. The quality of pupils' work in their books and their ability to recall important information in different subjects have

improved. For example, older pupils are very keen to explain what they have learned from their recent learning about the works of William Shakespeare.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Although leaders have high expectations for pupils' regular attendance, they have not succeeded in making sure that pupils attend school as often as they should. Over time, the attendance of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, is below average. The rate of pupils' persistent absence is higher than it should be. This affects pupils' learning of the curriculum. Leaders identify barriers to pupils' attendance and provide support for pupils and their families where needed. This has resulted in some positive improvements in pupils' attendance, such as for some particularly vulnerable pupils. However, this has not been sustained over time, and too many pupils do not attend school on a regular basis.

Around the school, pupils behave with care, consideration and self-control. Bullying and incidents of discrimination are rare and are addressed promptly by leaders. In the playground, pupils are proud of their roles to help one another and are respectful of the 'zones', where specific activities are permitted. This enhances pupils' understanding of the school's rules and of how to help one another to behave. Pupils enjoy their lessons and have positive attitudes. Leaders make sure that staff benefit from training to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Leaders keep a close check on all behaviour issues and act promptly, when pupils need additional help to behave.

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

Pupils enjoy their lessons. They achieve well in some subjects, such as in mathematics and music and in their writing. However, leaders do not ensure that all pupils know phonics well enough and read as effectively as possible. In addition, leaders do not make certain that all pupils have high attendance. Leaders are taking a range of important steps to address these issues but it is too soon to see the full impact over time.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, say that they have many friends at the school. They behave well and feel happy and safe. Pupils have many opportunities to talk about their feelings and experiences with expert staff. This support helps pupils to feel calm and focus on their studies. Pupils can explain well what might make for a healthy friendship, such as showing compassion or avoiding arguing when disagreeing.

Pupils are proud of their school, including its large grounds and many trees. They find that it is a place that welcomes and values all pupils, and celebrates their different backgrounds.

Pupils relish playing in the school's brass band and learning new skills at clubs, such as choir, chess and reading. Pupils speak of the importance of teamwork and participation, as well as achievement. They gain a valuable understanding of the wider world, for example through trips to the Houses of Parliament or to see the agricultural produce at local farms in Banks.

Pupils understand important concepts, such as democracy, contribution and responsibility. The school's 'House of Commons' consists of pupils voted for by fellow pupils. The school's 'House of Lords' consists of pupils selected by leaders. These houses model to pupils how they can work together thoughtfully and improve the school for everyone.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teaching in phonics and reading is consistently high quality so that pupils achieve well.
 - Leaders should make certain that their actions to improve attendance have a positive impact and that attendance for all pupils improves.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff receive suitable training to further develop their expertise in supporting the learning of pupils, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Richard Sharples.

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, the deputy headteacher and several other leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator, during the inspection.

Inspectors met with representatives of the governing body, the local authority and the diocese.

Inspectors spoke with several pupils, staff and parents and carers and considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

This school is registered as having a Church of England religious character. The most recent section 48 inspection of the school was in 2023.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. The school has started to provide some places for 2-year-old children.

The school currently uses no alternative provision.

Headteacher: Gareth Allen

Lead inspector:

Tim Vaughan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Liz Kelly, Ofsted Inspector

Sally Aspinwall, 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 6 January 2026

School and pupil context**Total pupils**

189

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

200

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)

30.18%

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

2.12%

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

10.58%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Close to 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%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	55%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	67%	61%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	65%	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	70%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	66%	75%	Below
2023/24 (final)	79%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	65%	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	76%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	79%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	71%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	76%	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	71%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	72%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	75%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	65%	73%	Below

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	42%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	50%	47%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	29%	46%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	44%	S

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	50%	62%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	57%	63%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	43%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

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	54%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	71%	59%	Above
2023/24 (final)	29%	58%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	58%	S

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	54%	60%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	71%	61%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	29%	59%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	59%	S

'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	42%	68%	-26 pp
2024/25 (revised)	50%	69%	-19 pp
2023/24 (final)	29%	67%	-39 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	66%	S

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	50%	80%	-30 pp
2024/25 (revised)	57%	81%	-24 pp
2023/24 (final)	43%	80%	-37 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	78%	S

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	54%	78%	-24 pp
2024/25 (revised)	71%	78%	-7 pp
2023/24 (final)	29%	78%	-49 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	77%	S

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	54%	80%	-26 pp
2024/25 (revised)	71%	81%	-9 pp
2023/24 (final)	29%	79%	-51 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	S	79%	S

'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 (2 term)	7.6%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	9.1%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	6.2%	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 (2 term)	20.3%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	20.4%	14.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	18.7%	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.

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