

Saint Edmund Arrowsmith Catholic Academy

Address: Cumber Lane, Whiston, Prescot, Merseyside, L35 2XG

Unique reference number (URN): 148534

Inspection report: 30 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.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' achievement is consistently below national averages. The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils is also below that of similar pupils across the country. The achievement of current pupils is variable across classes and subjects. Due to legacy issues with high staff turnover, older pupils have considerable gaps in their knowledge. In some cases, these negatively affect their confidence and readiness to complete work. The frequent absence of some pupils is another contributory factor.

There are signs of improvement. Younger pupils are increasingly secure in their subject knowledge. The work of older pupils is beginning to show gains in knowledge and skills. Pupils with barriers to learning are achieving better and in line with their peers. All are increasingly well prepared to take their next steps. Leaders are creating systems to identify and address gaps in pupils' foundational knowledge. This work is beginning to have a tangibly positive impact on pupils' achievement on the ground.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Leaders have prioritised behaviour and attendance, but there is still much work to do. Rates of overall attendance are consistently below the national average. Current data shows an increase in attendance and a reduction in persistent absence. These improvements are starting to be sustained. The attendance of pupils with barriers to learning has also changed for the better. Despite these positive trends, overall attendance figures remain below national averages. Staff recognise that attendance is everyone's business. Leaders analyse attendance information in forensic detail. They use this information strategically at whole-school, group and individual pupil levels to bring about positive change.

There is much to celebrate about leaders' work to improve behaviour. The school is a calm and orderly environment because leaders have set high expectations for pupils' conduct. Staff follow these with consistency. Typically in lessons, pupils behave well. However, many pupils do not fully engage with learning. Fixed-term suspensions remain high. They have declined significantly over time, including for pupils with barriers to learning. Leaders make suitable adaptations to the policy for pupils who struggle with their behaviour. Staff ensure that they deal with any incidents of bullying and inappropriate behaviour, such as the use of derogatory language, quickly.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

The quality of the curriculum and teaching across the school is inconsistent. Due to historic weaknesses in teaching, many pupils do not have the secure foundations needed for the demands of GCSE study. This negatively affects their engagement and progress. Leaders are refining the curriculum in all subjects. The new curriculum is ambitious and well sequenced. It identifies the key knowledge and skills that pupils need while drawing on prior knowledge.

Leaders are taking action to improve pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills. This work is starting to have a positive impact, particularly on the reading ability of the most vulnerable pupils. Staff understanding of the needs of pupils with barriers to learning is secure. However, the quality of adaptations in lessons is inconsistent.

Typically, staff have secure subject knowledge. Where teaching is effective, there is a clear structure to the lesson with well-chosen activities that help pupils to recall previous learning. In these cases, teachers check pupils' understanding and address any misconceptions effectively. Too often, teaching misses opportunities to draw out more extended verbal and written responses from pupils. Sometimes, teaching involves tasks that occupy pupils instead of deepening their knowledge and encouraging greater independence.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Leaders' inclusive work is at an early stage of development. The school has sharpened its approach to identifying pupils' individual barriers to learning this year. Staff understand pupils' contexts well and provide care and support for pupils who are known or previously known to social care. They identify special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) accurately and in a timely way. Leaders have provided appropriate training for staff about inclusive practices. This training is not consistently well implemented by all staff. As a result, there is variability in how well pupils' needs are met in the classroom, particularly for pupils with SEND.

Leaders plan, review and adapt strategies to support individual pupils' needs using the graduated approach. They engage with the local authority to arrange additional specialist help where needed. Typically, this is purposeful and has some impact. The school's 'thrive' space is a calm and supportive environment where staff cater for pupils' SEND and behavioural needs.

The school carefully checks alternative provision placements. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance and progress closely. Pupils attending alternative provision benefit from suitable learning and additional activities. The school also uses additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils with their behaviour and academic progress. Leaders work well with the virtual school.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Many aspects of leaders' work are relatively new. They are not embedded enough to have a consistently tangible impact. Leaders have a clear and realistic plan for school improvement. Their high aspirations for pupils mean that there are no excuses for poor attendance and achievement. Leaders engage well with staff so that everyone is working towards the same goals. Leaders understand the school's context well. Their thorough analysis of pupil information, including about barriers to learning and attendance, means that their actions are well targeted and bringing about many positive changes.

Trust support, including work on attendance and in subjects such as mathematics, helpfully contributes to the impact of leaders' work. Trustees and the local governing board meet their statutory duties. They also understand the school's context well. They use this knowledge to check that leaders' decisions are in pupils' best interests. Leaders are committed to ensuring

that pupils feel more engaged in school life. As a result, there is an increasing offer of enrichment opportunities, which are valued by pupils. While parents' views of the school are mixed, many are more supportive of leaders' work as they move the school forward.

The professional development programme for staff is suitable. It has included training on meeting the needs of pupils with barriers to learning, as well as one-to-one coaching. Leaders ensure that staff are well supported, including those who are starting out in their careers. They are particularly mindful of staff workload and wellbeing given the pace of change in the school. Staff are on board with leaders' priorities because they know they will have the most beneficial impact on pupils.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

Leaders are keen to further enhance the school's personal development offer. They recognise that this work will enhance pupils' happiness and sense of belonging. While the curriculum offer for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is secure, there is still work to do to enrich pupils' experience of school. Pupils benefit from suitable pastoral support.

Pupils' knowledge of their learning in PSHE is developing. Pupils understand the importance of mental health and of keeping themselves safe offline and online. For example, they can explain the dangers of toxic relationships. Typically, pupils understand the fundamental British values and why they are significant. Many can speak about the different characteristics that are protected in law, showing knowledge of concepts such as diversity and discrimination. However, this knowledge is not consistently secure.

The school affords opportunities for pupils' spiritual development through the weekly liturgical assembly. Pupils appreciate time for quiet reflection and prayer on topics such as how they can bring joy into the lives of others. Roles such as membership of the school leadership and chaplaincy team encourage pupils to take responsibility. These pupils organise assemblies, coffee mornings for parents and the Christmas party for grandparents. All pupils recently took part in the school's 'Mission day'. Year 10 pupils had a session on physical and mental health. This encouraged them to be active and to consider the type of adult they want to become. Pupils are excited to go on outings again. The recent football trip to Spain was a big success and enjoyed by both pupils and staff.

The school's work around careers and preparing pupils to take their next steps is progressing but not widely embedded. Leaders continue to build relationships with local colleges and employers. Older pupils benefit from a purposeful work experience placement. The school prioritises pupils with barriers to learning, including those attending alternative provision, for one-to-one careers advice.

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

Pupils are welcomed by staff each morning and clear expectations are established from the start of the day. Pupils report that behaviour has improved compared with previous years, helping to create a calmer learning environment. Most pupils behave appropriately in

lessons and around the school. They know who to approach if they need support, including for concerns about bullying, and staff generally respond promptly. Pupils say they feel safe and value the support available to them.

There is a growing sense of belonging across the school. Most pupils feel included and able to be themselves. Leaders have provided training to strengthen inclusive practice, and support for pupils facing barriers to learning is improving. However, implementation remains inconsistent and there is still variation in how effectively the needs of some pupils are met in classrooms.

Pupils have opportunities for prayer and reflection through assemblies in the school chapel. They also value the expanding range of extra-curricular clubs and educational visits, including trips to local colleges and universities for older pupils. Pupils recognise the greater stability in staffing and appreciate opportunities to share their views through the school's democratic processes. They are developing their understanding of important topics about their personal development, although this knowledge is not consistently secure.

The quality of teaching across the school is variable. At its best, teaching is well structured, builds on prior learning and supports pupils in retaining key knowledge. Typically, learning activities do not consistently deepen pupils' understanding or encourage independent learning. Although pupils generally enjoy learning more than they have in the past, some continue to show low levels of engagement.

Historical weaknesses in teaching, staff turnover and poor attendance have resulted in gaps in learning, particularly for older pupils. However, there are encouraging signs of improvement. Younger pupils are developing stronger foundations, pupils with barriers to learning are increasingly keeping pace with their peers, and leaders' actions to address gaps in knowledge are beginning to improve achievement.

Next steps

- The school should continue to implement, and further embed, strategies to secure increased improvements in pupils' attendance at school.
 - Leaders should continue their work to secure consistently high-quality teaching so that pupils' outcomes, including for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), improve swiftly.
 - The school should ensure that the strategies identified to support pupils with barriers to their learning, including those with SEND, are implemented consistently well by staff.
 - Leaders should support staff in providing more opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their learning, deepen their knowledge and increase their independence.
 - The school should enable all pupils to secure the foundational reading, writing, speaking and numeracy skills needed to successfully apply and deepen their learning across the curriculum.
 - Leaders should continue to develop their work on careers so that pupils are consistently well prepared to take their next steps.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Pope Francis 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 (CEO), Andrew Dawson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Isobel MacDonald-Davies.

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, the CEO, trust staff, staff, a representative of the archdiocese, a representative of the local authority, trustees and members of the local governing body during the inspection.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school is registered as having a Roman Catholic religious character. It is in the archdiocese of Liverpool. Its last section 48 inspection was carried out on 20 and 21 September 2023.

Headteacher: Clare McKenna

Lead inspector:

Lisa Strong, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Stephen Ruddy, Ofsted Inspector

Jenny Jones, His Majesty's Inspector

David Marchant, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This was the data available at the time of the full inspection, taken from [different sources](#). More recent data may have been published since the full inspection took place.

 The inspector(s) used this data during the full inspection on 30 June 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

757

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: 1,067

School capacity

1,050

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: 1,154

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

50.20%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last 6 years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

3.17%

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: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

20.34%

Well above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

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

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	11.3%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	16.9%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	22.9%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	30.2	46.1	Below
2023/24 (final)	31.5	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	33.9	46.3	Below

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.01	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.11	-0.03	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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	5.0%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	9.8%	25.8%	Below
2022/23 (final)	13.5%	25.2%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (final)	26.0	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	24.9	34.6	Below
2022/23 (final)	25.0	35.0	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.37	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.54	-0.57	Below

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' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	5.0%	53.1%	-48.1 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	9.8%	53.1%	-43.3 pp
2022/23 (final)	13.5%	52.4%	-39.0 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (final)	26.0	50.4	-24.4
2023/24 (final)	24.9	50.0	-25.1
2022/23 (final)	25.0	50.3	-25.3

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.37	0.16	-1.53
2022/23 (final)	-1.54	0.17	-1.70

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (revised)	84%	92%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	82%	93%	Below

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)	16.2%	8.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	14.5%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	14.2%	9.0%	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)	47.8%	23.4%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	39.7%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	41.3%	26.5%	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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