

Sabden Primary School

Address: Whalley Road, Sabden, Lancashire, BB7 9DZ

Unique reference number (URN): 119165

Inspection report: 24 February 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 high and compares very favourably with national figures. Attendance is also consistent across pupil groups, with no significant variation. Leaders apply clear, systematic procedures that address absence from the first day. They analyse patterns regularly, identify pupils at risk of becoming persistently absent and use staged communication and meetings with families to address any concerns. Leaders are quick to act when absence becomes a concern. Their actions follow local authority processes and, more recently, have led to notable improvements in reducing persistent absence. Leaders' monitoring systems are thorough, and their actions have had a clear impact on improving attendance for pupils who previously missed too much school.

Behaviour across the school is positive and reflects a consistent whole-school approach that promotes a calm, orderly and respectful environment. Pupils are polite, confident and settled in their routines. Staff apply behaviour policies consistently and support pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to manage their emotions and behaviour through appropriate and supportive strategies. Low-level disruption occurs only occasionally, typically when activities in lessons do not sustain engagement. Pupils report that bullying is rare and that issues are dealt with promptly when they arise. They say that they feel safe, well supported and cared for.

Early years

Expected standard 

Adults provide warm, trusting relationships that help children to settle quickly, feel secure and engage confidently with routines. Adults model positive language and nurture cooperation. This supports children's communication and social development.

The curriculum places a clear emphasis on communication and language, early reading and early mathematics. Phonics teaching is introduced from the start of the Reception Year, and prior learning is typically revisited to embed learning. The environment is organised to reflect children's needs, for example developing finger and hand strength and skills. It offers purposeful areas that promote independence and sustained engagement.

Many interactions between children and adults extend vocabulary effectively. Adults use modelling and well-judged questions to prompt talk and exploration. Children respond with enthusiasm to practical tasks that invite discussion. However, the consistency of these exchanges varies, and on some occasions opportunities to deepen and extend children's language are not fully developed.

Children take part in mark making, number tasks and imaginative play. They select activities with interest. Practical tasks, including outdoors, encourage language use and early problem-solving. Children's work shows emerging progression. Prompts around the environment reinforce early reading and writing behaviours. Routines for supporting children with additional needs, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are established and help them engage successfully. Partnerships with parents are constructive and contribute to positive experiences in the setting.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have established inclusive practices that enable pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged to access the full curriculum. Systems for identifying individual needs are in place and typically lead to appropriate support. For example, provision includes personalised interactions, targeted interventions and adjustments that reduce barriers to learning. When pupils and families face additional challenges, leaders respond quickly and work with them to help ensure that attendance and access to learning remain a priority.

Staff adapt learning in classrooms, and typically, this enables pupils to access learning. However, approaches are currently more universal and leaders have not secured a fully consistent approach that aligns adaptations precisely with pupils' individual needs. As a result, while pupils participate in lessons, a small proportion do not secure the intended curriculum content with the depth and clarity that leaders expect.

Leaders monitor pupils' progress and use this information to shape targeted support. Staff training contributes to increasing capacity. Leaders engage with families and external agencies to inform their decision making and promote pupils' aspirations.

The pupil premium strategy identifies barriers accurately and targets support that is typically effective. Leaders also work with families to enable equitable access for pupils to learning and wider opportunities.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that require further improvement. They have taken appropriate action to stabilise the school following a period of organisational change and have prioritised key areas such as curriculum development, special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) practice, tackling persistent absence for pupils and improving outcomes in mathematics. Feedback from parents and staff reflects confidence in leadership, with many highlighting effective communication, clear expectations and a prominent focus on staff wellbeing.

Governors meet their statutory duties and have taken steps to strengthen their oversight of the school's work. They use appropriate quality-assurance processes to check leaders' actions and evaluate the impact of improvement priorities. The governing body provides suitable challenge and support. Governance plans align with wider school development priorities. Decisions made by leaders and governors are firmly rooted in the best interests of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND and those who face additional barriers to learning or wellbeing.

Leaders ensure that staff access relevant professional development, including training on curriculum delivery and adaptive practice. While the impact of this work is still developing, staff report that the programme is coherent and helpful. Current reviews of impact are highly positive. Leaders' decisions take staff's wellbeing into account, and staff describe feeling supported and valued.

Although leaders have had limited time to embed all aspects of improvement, they have acted with appropriate urgency, re-established stability and created the conditions for sustained progress.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well across the school. Pupils reflect on their beliefs and experiences through leadership roles, charitable work and engagement in community projects, such as fundraising for a library at a school in Tanzania. Pupils cooperate well with one another and demonstrate respect, tolerance and fairness in their interactions. They typically show an understanding of fundamental British values and of people's various rights. Pupils demonstrate respectful behaviour and acceptance of differences. They engage positively with cultural, creative and aspirational experiences, including the school's 'dream big' programme, which broadens pupils' awareness of future career possibilities.

The school's personal development programme is wide ranging and appropriate for pupils' needs. Pupils access a broad set of enrichment activities, clubs, visits and wider curriculum opportunities that extend learning beyond academic subjects. Leaders track participation in clubs carefully. They tackle challenges and barriers so that disadvantaged pupils, including those eligible for the additional funding, can take part fully. Pastoral support is accessible, and pupils speak confidently about how staff care for them and support their wellbeing.

Relationships education, health education and wider safety provision are implemented effectively. Pupils learn about how to stay safe both online and offline and develop a clear understanding of healthy relationships, mental wellbeing and personal safety. Programmes such as fire-safety workshops and developing skills in riding a bicycle enhance pupils' awareness of risks and how to respond to them.

Leaders promote pupils' character development well through activities that encourage responsibility, teamwork and service to others. Pupil leadership is established and pupils speak with confidence about their roles and the contribution that they make to school life.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Pupils' progress is inconsistent across their education. In mathematics, progress has remained below national averages for several years. Pupils' work shows some early impact of leaders' actions, but sometimes, written work still contains repeated errors, surface-level responses and limited application of taught knowledge.

Pupils' attainment is usually in line with national outcomes where data is published. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities generally make progress from their starting points.

In the early stages, pupils, including children in the early years, typically secure effective understanding of phonics, word reading and number facts. However, handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar remain inconsistent and are not improving quickly enough. Variations in the robustness of pupils' knowledge, along with gaps in some specific aspects of the basics, make it harder for pupils to apply learning across the curriculum. As a result, while most reach expected standards in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar and punctuation, progress is limited and some pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Until recently, teachers have had limited opportunities to develop expertise in curriculum design, pedagogy and subject knowledge. As a result, teaching sometimes does not help pupils to connect new learning with prior knowledge, key concepts or vocabulary consistently well. At times, there is a focus on completing a task rather than ensuring that work helps pupils to understand what they need to learn. Teachers do not identify or address misconceptions and gaps in pupils' knowledge consistently well. Consequently, pupils' handwriting, spelling, grammar and punctuation remain variable. This reduces the accuracy and clarity of their written work.

Leaders understand the variability in curriculum implementation and have prioritised staff's development, introducing training to improve consistency and the effectiveness of practice. However, it is too early for the impact of this work to be embedded, leading to variation in pupils' experiences and outcomes.

Adaptations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for other pupils who face barriers to learning, typically support access to the curriculum. For a small number of pupils, approaches are overly general and do not support them to learn as effectively or as deeply as leaders intend.

Leaders have constructed an ambitious, sequenced curriculum, intended to enable pupils to learn the full content. Early reading and phonics teaching begin promptly. Children in the early years and pupils across the school engage in reading with evident enthusiasm and enjoyment.

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

Pupils feel valued and well cared for. They describe feeling happy and safe because of the positive relationships that they have with adults. Warm greetings at the start of the day help pupils to attend well and feel welcome. They settle quickly into purposeful routines.

Pupils enjoy learning and speak with notable enthusiasm about reading. A wide range of books in classrooms and the library exposes them to different cultures and viewpoints. Leaders support pupils who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities to take part fully in the school's offer.

Due to limited prior training, teaching quality is inconsistent. At times, tasks do not help pupils to learn as well as they could, and checks of pupils' learning do not consistently

identify misconceptions. Basic skills remain insecure for some pupils. As a result, a proportion of pupils do not make the progress that they are capable of. Where published data exists, pupils' attainment is typically in line with national outcomes, but progress over time is more variable, meaning some pupils are not as well prepared for their next steps as leaders intend.

Pupils feel a clear sense of belonging. They describe the school as friendly and inclusive, stating, 'You always have a friend here.' Pupils say that bullying is rare and that staff deal with any issues quickly and effectively. They talk about different faiths and cultures and understand the fundamental British values. Pupils enjoy a wide range of clubs, visits and enrichment. Some pupils even had the opportunity to meet King Charles in their roles as members of 'the mini police' recently.

Pupils thrive in a calm, orderly environment. They behave well and show positive attitudes to learning. Low-level disruption is rare and dealt with quickly. Pupils explain how to stay safe online and offline and talk about healthy relationships and mental wellbeing. Pupils are active members of their community and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that checks of pupils' learning identify gaps and misconceptions across all subjects and that these are addressed promptly so that errors do not persist.
 - Leaders should ensure that the agreed curriculum is implemented consistently well so that all pupils benefit from high-quality learning experiences that enable them to deepen and apply their knowledge.
 - Leaders should ensure that pupils secure basic knowledge in reading and writing, including handwriting, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and mathematics so that they can build learning more securely and make better progress over time.
 - Leaders should further develop staff's understanding and application of adaptive teaching so that it is more attuned to meeting pupils' individual needs.
 - Leaders should ensure that interactions between adults and children in the early years consistently enhance and extend children's language and thinking.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Hannah Cartmell.

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 executive headteacher and lead teacher during the inspection.

The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body, including the chair of the board of governors.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school has undergone significant changes in leadership since the last inspection. The current executive headteacher took up the role in September 2025. A substantive headteacher has been appointed from April 2026.

The school does not use any alternative provision.

Executive headteacher: Nicola McArdle

Lead inspector:

Sheena Clark, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Tony McCoy, 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 24 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

98

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

105

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)

10.87%

Below 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

14.29%

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

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	64%	61%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	50%	62%	Below
2023/24 (final)	89%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	57%	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	86%	74%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	75%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	89%	74%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2022/23 (final)	100%	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	89%	72%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	83%	72%	Above
2023/24 (final)	100%	72%	Above
2022/23 (final)	86%	71%	Above

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	79%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	67%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	100%	73%	Above
2022/23 (final)	71%	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		46%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	47%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	46%	S
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%	
2024/25 (revised)	S	63%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	62%	S
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)	S	59%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	58%	S

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
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)	S	61%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	59%	S
2022/23		59%	

'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		68%	

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	S	69%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	67%	S
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)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	80%	S
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)	S	78%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	78%	S
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)	S	81%	S
2023/24 (final)	S	79%	S
2022/23		79%	

'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)	3.5%	5.2%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	3.3%	5.5%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	3.0%	5.9%	Below

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)	2.5%	13.3%	Below

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	4.0%	14.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	2.9%	16.2%	Below

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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