



# St Michael's Catholic High School

URN: 137922

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster

10–11 October 2024

## Summary of key findings

### Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

#### Catholic life and mission (p.3)

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission

#### Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

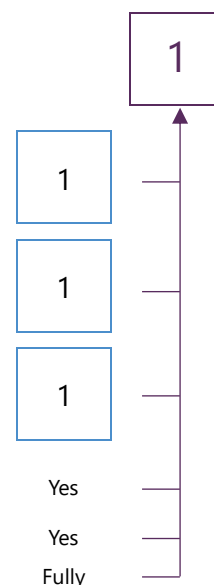
#### Collective worship (p.7)

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference

The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection



## Compliance statement

- The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- The school is fully compliant with the additional requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- All areas for improvement outlined in the previous diocesan inspection have been addressed in full.

## What the school does well

- The celebration of the Eucharist on an almost daily basis and the overall chaplaincy provision enables students' faith to flourish.
- Students enjoy religious education and truly appreciate the efforts of their teachers to make lessons interesting and engaging, leading to outstanding behaviour.
- St Michael's is a supportive school where students feel that staff genuinely care for their well-being and development.
- The generosity of students, their families and the wider school community towards charitable causes is outstanding.
- The high standard of displays in classrooms, communal areas and corridors are an effective witness to the school's Catholic identity, mission and charism.

## What the school needs to improve

- Students need to be able to articulate the theology underpinning their actions in support of Catholic social teaching.
- The religious education department needs to ensure all students are fully conversant with their target grades and what they need to do to achieve them.
- Students need to be more involved in evaluating the quality of their prayer and liturgy.

## Catholic life and mission

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

### Catholic life and mission key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

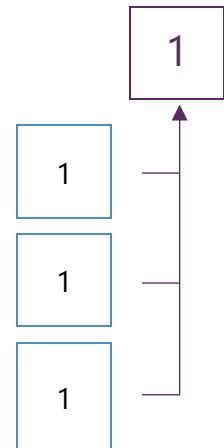
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

#### Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

#### Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school



Catholic life and mission is outstanding. The Dominican values of prayer and promoting the gospel are visible everywhere; not just through the displays and images all around the buildings but also in the kindness, compassion and respect shown by students and staff towards each other. St Michael's is an inclusive, welcoming community where students are nurtured and feel valued; one member of staff commented, 'The chaplain meets and greets the students every morning and even students from other schools stop to chat to him'. Unsurprisingly, the behaviour of students is excellent both in lessons and around the school. They strive to live out the school mission, 'Bringing Christ to all and all to Christ', by putting their faith into action; supporting charitable causes with strong links to the school including 'The Mission of Hope' in Ethiopia and water projects in Nigeria. The generosity of the students, their families and the local community towards these causes is truly humbling and has led to the development of an irrigation system, boreholes for drinking water, a school and plans to build a hospice. At a local level the school regularly makes donations to a foodbank in Watford. Students gladly embrace their personal responsibility to pursue the common good and serve those in need with their generosity of spirit through the sponsored activities that occur throughout the year. The school has recently introduced the principles of Catholic social teaching and now needs to ensure that students can link them to their charitable work and articulate the theology underpinning their actions.

Loving attention has been given to the school's Catholic character which is proudly displayed in the physical environment. St Dominic's chapel is the heartbeat of the school and is widely used by students and staff. For many the chapel is seen as a spiritual haven and students fully appreciate the welcome to all who step through its doors - every child matters at St Michael's. A parent commented, 'The chapel is a lovely place to pray and is so peaceful'. Pastoral care is of the highest quality with one

parent commenting, 'Teachers are great role models to all the children, especially the pastoral support team'. The school goes the extra mile to provide an exceptionally supportive and joyful community for each of its members. Students feel confident going to staff for support or to talk about problems. The RSHE programme meets all the statutory and diocesan requirements. It is carefully mapped to meet the needs of each year group and resources are constantly reviewed.

Leaders and governors place Catholic life and mission at the centre of all they do; 97% of respondents to the staff survey agreed or strongly agreed that Christ is at the heart of this school. The head teacher and senior team provide inspirational and joyful leadership in the pursuit of the school's Catholic mission. As one member of staff noted, 'I am grateful to work here, I feel cared for and supported. The senior leadership team lead by example in the way they treat their staff'. The chaplaincy provision is a central and celebrated aspect of the life and mission of the school and witnesses to the school's commitment to the flourishing of every member of the community. Consequently, the school has a dynamic and well-planned chaplaincy programme with Masses almost daily, weekly prayer and liturgy services in the chapel for each year group. Student leadership teams provide spiritual support across the school and assist the Chaplaincy in providing First Communion and Confirmation programmes for students who wish to receive the sacraments. As a result, the school has a strong partnership with the diocesan bishop who regularly visits the school. Professional development includes an annual Catholic identity day which enables all staff to have a profound understanding of the school's mission. A member of staff commented, 'It is a day for staff to reset and think about the purpose of teaching in a Catholic school'.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

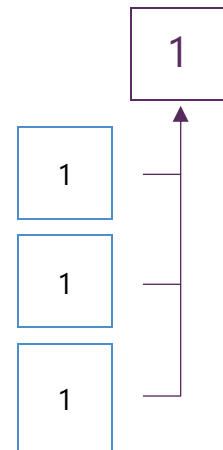
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

#### Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education



Students at St Michael's are developing excellent knowledge, understanding and skills that reflect the learning required for the *Religious Education Directory*. As a result, consistently good progress by knowing more, remembering more and doing more, when measured against the planned curriculum, is made by students for each year. Fully focused in all lessons observed, students repeatedly spoke about how they enjoyed religious education. In an excellent lesson on Shabbat students received a guided meditation to generate self-awareness and peace so that they could appreciate the need for a time of rest and reflection. One parent commented, 'My child is thriving in religious education and even tells me that it is one of his favourite subjects. This is clearly down to the fun, engaging lessons which he receives at school'. In the majority of lessons observed teachers demonstrated very strong subject knowledge and used this to good effect to support students in their learning. A wide range of activities and approaches were observed in lessons and books including extended writing tasks, paired discussions, student led question and answer time, retrieval starter tasks and challenge through higher order questions. Another parent commented, 'Religious education is a lesson that regularly allows my children the opportunity to debate, form opinions and share knowledge'. Attainment in religious education at St Michael's is either in line or surpasses other core subjects at Key Stage 4. However, some students were unaware of their target grades and what they needed to do to improve their work. This is an area for the school and religious education department to develop so that results can be even better in the future.

All religious education lessons are mixed ability taught from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 5, with high quality resources that are challenging, engaging and suited to students' abilities. Students spoke with enthusiasm about the new reward system which acknowledges attainment and effort and the trips on offer each year to the theatre and even Disneyland Paris. Teaching assistants are used well in lessons and offer support to all in class, not just specific students. Teachers have a high level of confidence

based on authentic subject knowledge and teaching expertise as witnessed in an A level lesson on the Messiah. The teacher's subject knowledge facilitated students' understanding of the Suffering Servant. Questioning was targeted and enabled all students to participate and share their ideas. Homework consolidated learning with students sharing what they have learnt. Clear evidence of religious literacy was on display throughout the lesson. Teachers have a profound understanding of the impact of religious education on the moral development of students and their ability to meaningfully make sense of their experience of the world. This was perfectly illustrated in another Year 12 lesson where students had to link utilitarian theories to real life moral dilemmas. This certainly made the learning memorable.

Senior leaders ensure that the teaching of religious education is well monitored. Governors and leaders have a strong understanding and clear vision for the development of religious education within the school. A carefully planned sequential curriculum is in place which ensures students' achievement is strong as they progress through the school. Enrichment activities have included visits to a local synagogue, a Hindu temple and a mosque, enabling students to experience religion as real and alive. Religious education has parity with the other core subjects in terms of resourcing, professional development and accommodation. Professional development is seen as a key priority for the whole department and a member of the department is currently following the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies course.

## Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

### Collective worship key judgement grade

**Pupil outcomes**

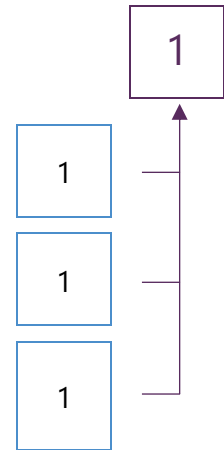
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

**Provision**

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

**Leadership**

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship



The quality and variety of prayer and liturgy provided by the school is outstanding. Students are respectful and attentive when prayers of intercession are said during daily form time by a different member of the class. This was reinforced by a teacher who commented, 'The prayers that the students write are thoughtful and read with confidence'. In another form room a student read the Hail Mary in French and recently World Languages Day was acknowledged in school with students reading the traditional prayers in various languages. An observed assembly led by a senior leader was a model of good practice. It linked Catholic social teaching with the Lourdes pilgrimage by highlighting the principles of human dignity and solidarity with the theme of service. Students gave impressive, unscripted testimonies of their life changing experiences on pilgrimage in Lourdes. This pilgrimage included twenty-five Year 10/12 students and past students of the school. The various youth ministries include eucharistic ministers, altar servers, chaplaincy team, prayer monitors, Lourdes ambassadors and a choir. Students spoke of their pride and joy in belonging to a youth ministry and how it allows them to reflect on their own faith. Further opportunities for faith development are offered by Just Youth retreats for most year groups. During Advent a service is celebrated in a different parish each year incorporating music and drama. This enables the school to support the prayer life of the wider Catholic community. An area for development is for students to formally evaluate and record the quality of their own prayer and liturgy so that they can identify what went well and what could be improved.

The centrality of prayer and liturgy is very well evidenced. Prayer and liturgy are fully embedded in the life of the school. There is a carefully planned programme that ensures students experience the richness and breadth of the Catholic tradition. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is provided at key times in the liturgical year with the support of the chaplain and other local clergy so that students can experience the healing gift of the Sacrament. Also, the Sacrament is made available by the chaplain

on a daily basis for any student or member of staff who wishes to receive it. The chaplaincy team draws upon the creative skills of students and relevant staff to enhance prayer and liturgy. The wide variety of artwork displayed around the school helps create a prayerful atmosphere and provide opportunities for reflection. Masses are celebrated almost daily with form Masses in tutor rooms, year Masses in the chapel and whole school Masses for holy days of obligation and special school feast days such as St Michael and St Dominic.

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that prayer and liturgy have a high profile in the school. Staff have received training about the structure of prayer and liturgy and there is a clear understanding among staff that the delivery of high-quality prayer and liturgy in all its forms is a priority within the school. The impact of the chaplain on the broad range of ways of praying in the school cannot be overstated. He can confidently articulate the Church's understanding of the relationship between participation and ministry. Leaders including governors ensure that students feel supported and able to produce prayerful daily activities. Staff, including senior leaders, are inspiring models of exemplary practice, engaging in prayer and liturgy that is genuine and authentic. The school works hard to secure a flourishing partnership with parents and parishes which was echoed by a parent: 'The care and all round family feel at St Michael's is second to none'.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Michael's Catholic High School
School unique reference number (URN)	137922
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	9195417
Full postal address of the school	St Michael's Catholic High School, High Elms Lane, Garston, Watford, WD25 0SS
School phone number	01923673760
Headteacher	Edward Conway
<b>Chair of governors</b>	Matthew Holt
School Website	<a href="http://www.stmichaelscatholichighschool.co.uk">www.stmichaelscatholichighschool.co.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	The Diocese Of Westminster Academy Trust
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	May 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

## The inspection team

Dermot O'Neill	Lead
Susan Grace	Team
Roberto Giovanelli	Team

## Key to grade judgements

Grade	England	Wales
1	Outstanding	Excellent
2	Good	Good
3	Requires improvement	Adequate and requires improvement
4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and in need of urgent improvement