



St Mary's Catholic Secondary School

URN: 148499

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster

30–31 January 2025

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

2

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

2

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

2

Collective worship (p.7)

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

2

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

Fully

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 school has a sense of a community that keeps Christ at its heart.
- The embedded sense of welcome for all cultures and belief traditions demonstrates the school's inclusive nature.
- The physical environment is a witness to the identity, mission and charism of the school.
- Relationships and behaviour are exemplary allowing for purposeful learning and engagement.
- Appropriately planned prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school and embedded in the daily routine of all members of the community.

What the school needs to improve

- Further extend the existing provision of chaplaincy to maximise spiritual opportunities for all students.
- Develop a greater consistency of approach towards teaching and learning, so that all students can fulfil their potential in religious education.
- Further develop opportunities for students to plan, lead and evaluate prayer and liturgy in a consistent and progressive way.

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

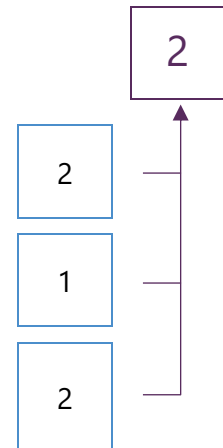
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



Students understand and value the distinctive identity of the school, commenting that they are proud to be part of 'a very good community' and appreciating the 'strong values that make it special'. Christ is at the heart of the school ensuring it is a supportive and joyful place; there is a lived sense of community throughout. Students have a clear respect for themselves and each other and they know that they are cared for and valued, consequently they value one another. Behaviour throughout the school is exemplary. Students know and understand the mission statement and explain that it 'should be reflected in everything'. There is a clear culture of welcome within the school; a student from a different faith tradition shared that he felt very much part of the community and likes 'how we can share our traditions'. Diversity is valued and staff and students of all faiths and none embrace the opportunity to participate in the life and mission of the school. Students see value in the chaplaincy provision of the school and embrace the opportunities available to them. These invitations are offered prior to pupils joining the school as part of the transition process when pupils complete a faith journal reflection which accompanies them on their school journey.

Staff are committed to and embrace the mission of the school with enthusiasm. They are role models, as witnessed by their engagement with prayer in tutor groups. Relationships and pastoral care are built upon Gospel values and rooted in love and respect, allowing students to flourish. The strong relationships result in positive attitudes and interactions. Catholic social teaching is emerging with some cross curricular links in their infancy, though this is not yet consistent across the whole of the taught curriculum. There is a well-resourced and staffed inclusion space for the most vulnerable students which they identify as a 'safe space'. The school supports a range of charities with the aim being 'not to just raise money but to be the hands and feet of Christ'. Innovative ideas for fundraising include a 'grow £10 campaign' and collecting Christmas hampers for those in need. The Year 12 Mission Team spoke with pride about the leadership opportunities that are offered including the

opportunity to lead an assembly. The care and attention given to the quality of the environment and prayer spaces contributes positively to students' spiritual formation because it highlights the school mission statement and illustrates the Catholic identity. An impressive stained-glass window created by a family in the school reflects the diversity of language and culture in the school. Relationships, sex and health education lessons meet the diocesan requirements and are grounded in Church teaching, reflecting the holistic vision for personal development.

Leaders and governors have a clear vision for the school as a Catholic community, and they are ambitious to make the school outstanding. Leaders are transparent, honest and rigorous in their monitoring and identify well targeted areas for improvements. One parent commented 'I believe the headteacher has an extremely strong commitment to the Catholic ethos'. A staff member said that the head teacher is 'an inspirational, champion of Catholic life and mission'. Leaders recognise the responsibility they have to deliver holistic Catholic education and know that they have been entrusted to do so by parents. However, student involvement in the evaluation of the Catholic life of the school is infrequent and therefore lacks impact. Leaders and governors promote the Archbishop's vision for the diocese. Governors offer occasional challenge to the leaders of the school and are fully committed to their role. As part of this they are fully committed to strengthening existing parish links. Leaders are committed to supporting new staff at the school; Early Career Teachers have a formal programme of induction which results in effective understanding of the nature of a Catholic school.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

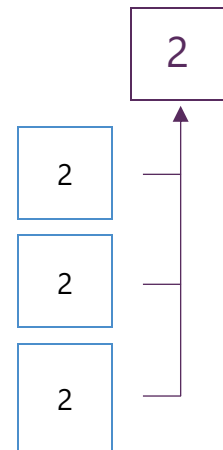
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 make good progress in religious education, developing secure knowledge, understanding and skills. Results at the end of Key Stage 4 and 5 are good and compare well to other subjects. Students are consistently respectful of their teachers and peers and value their lessons. Students are exceptionally well behaved and in the best lessons all were engaged in learning. The exemplary behaviour allows students to work independently. Student books are consistently well presented, and they take a pride in their work indicating the positive regard they have for this subject. Good levels of religious literacy were evident in student books, showing that they can use their knowledge, understanding and skills effectively to reflect spiritually and think ethically and theologically. This was further demonstrated in a lesson on parables where students responded to and engaged with specific examples of scripture, making links between scripture and life today highlighting that, most students are aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. Some students demonstrated the ability to make links to prior learning for example in a Year 11 revision lesson students reflected on the Triune nature of God demonstrating sound knowledge retrieval and that they are making progress in knowing and remembering more. Pupils produce good work that is presented well and shows signs of emerging individuality and creativity, exercise booked showed a variety in styles of assessment opportunities at Key Stage 3 allowing pupils to demonstrate their understanding in creative and individual ways.

Teachers are committed to value of religious education, and they communicate this effectively to their pupils demonstrating high expectations. Some teachers have strong subject knowledge and ask good questions of pupils. In the best lessons observed, effective questioning deepened student understanding, although questioning needs to be developed more consistently in order for it to be a tool to move learning forward at pace and in depth. Live feedback was observed in a Year 8 lesson on

parables to which students were responsive. Lessons demonstrated peer support, an example of which was a 'phone a friend' activity which contributed to a supportive atmosphere. Lessons are well resourced with a good variety of materials. At times though, tasks and resources are not always adapted to meet the needs of all abilities. In a core religious education lesson, teachers demonstrated high expectations and student participation was strong. Students work hard and can see the relevance to their lives. One student reflected that the teacher 'keeps it relevant to our lives.'

Leaders have ensured that the religious education curriculum faithfully follows the *Religious Education Directory* and are on track to continue to implement the Directory beyond year 7 and 8 over the coming year. The curriculum is appropriately designed and sequenced ensuring that subject content is developed systematically across the year groups. The department is supported by the school leadership team and is well resourced and has parity with other core subjects. Religious education lessons take place in a suite of classrooms positioned centrally within the school. Communication is effective within the department - there is evidence of shared planning, and a department newsletter is circulated when needed. Parents are appreciative of the work done by the department with one parent commenting, 'my children have really blossomed in their education and in their faith because of this school.' Self-evaluation is rigorous and comprehensive and indicates the path that needs to be taken to improve teaching and learning. Further development of a cycle of evaluation which identifies actions and reviews them will enable planned improvements to be implemented. This, alongside the sharing of good practice and would also ensure greater consistency across the department in the provision of high-quality teaching and learning.

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

2

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

2

Leadership

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

2

2

Students respond well to the experiences of prayer and liturgy offered by the school; they are reverent and respectful. This was demonstrated in morning prayer where pupils received a consistent experience across tutor groups. Students pray to their house saint daily and are also given the opportunity to write their own prayers which are displayed on the 'living prayer wall'. There is some evidence of students reading these prayers in tutor time for example when a student read her prayer for the homeless. Students have a good awareness of the variety of ways of praying, having the opportunity to pray many traditional Catholic prayers. However, pupils appear passive in the development of prayer experiences, demonstrating a need to incorporate greater opportunities for pupils to lead prayer. Students value the time dedicated to the Friday examen and this is clearly embedded in the rhythm of the week. One student shared that they valued the experience and found it a 'calming and peaceful time,' expressing that it 'helps us connect with God.' Students can articulate the cycle of prayer and how this mirrors the liturgical year and prayer life of the Church, and this is supported by a monthly prayer focus incorporating the rosary, remembrance 'SI- LENT' and the Advent angelus.

Planned prayer is embedded in the calendar and daily life of the school for students and staff. A range of staff model exemplary practice to students and prayer spaces feature in classrooms. The school chapel is a beautiful space and central to the school with frequent opportunities for staff and students to reflect and pray there. Students contribute to focus prayer material in the chapel, for example the prayer map which was displayed on the altar. The staff liturgy observed was prayerful and reflective, and staff shared that they 'love attending the Friday prayer meeting'. There are many visual spiritual prompts for students and staff as they navigate their way around the campus - these incorporate artwork and scripture quotes. Students experience a range of collective worship, and sixth form students were able to talk with pride about the opportunities they have to lead this. Strong links to

the local parish and local clergy support the liturgical life of the school, this includes providing students with the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Students regularly attend Mass at the parish of St Joseph, and further work is being undertaken to strengthen such links. Students are given the opportunity to participate in a retreat programme which is varied and provides a range of spiritual experiences, including the opportunity to apply to participate in a pilgrimage to Lourdes.

Leaders have developed a well formulated and fit for purpose prayer and liturgy policy which is accessible and useful for staff. Leaders plan and promote frequent opportunities to celebrate the Eucharist. Reconciliation is offered during Lent and take up is good, there are plans to enhance this provision further. The recently appointed lead of the Catholic life of the school is dynamic with a clear vision for the development of prayer and liturgy in the school. Prayer and liturgy are led by example and a clear strategy for building skills of participation as pupils progress through the school is being developed. Leaders assist others to lead experiences of prayer and liturgy - this means that opportunities provided are engaging and of good quality. Opportunities are accessible and relevant to pupils - this was evidenced in the month of remembrance and the beautiful and poignant bench that was created to form a lasting memory for pupils and staff. This also reflects the fact that the needs of the school community are considered when planning prayer and liturgy. This could be further enhanced through continued professional development to ensure staff are sufficiently trained and supported in their own leadership of prayer and liturgy alongside the provision of greater opportunities for pupils to review their experiences of prayer and liturgy.

Information about the school

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| Full name of school | St Mary's Catholic Secondary School |
| School unique reference number (URN) | 148499 |
| School DfE Number (LAESTAB) | 9195422 |
| Full postal address of the school | St Mary's Catholic Secondary School, Windhill, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 2NQ |
| School phone number | 01279654901 |
| Headteacher | Deirdre McHugh |
| Chair of governors | Paul Carroll |
| School Website | http://www.stmarys.net |
| Trusteeship | Diocesan |
| Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable) | St Francis Of Assisi Catholic 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 | December 2017 |
| Previous denominational inspection grade | Outstanding |

The inspection team

| | |
|----------------|------|
| Laura Maw | Lead |
| Alison Berwick | Team |
| Martin Fahey | 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 |