



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

URN: 151182

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Birmingham

15–16 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

1

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 complies with all additional requirements of His Grace.
- The school has fully addressed all previous areas for improvement.

What the school does well

- The headteacher is energised and joyful and effectively communicates the Church's mission in education. He has a clear vision and is ambitious in his drive for change.
- The school environment embodies its identity and mission through prominent and impactful displays of its Catholic character.
- Strong morning routines allow for a calm and dignified entrance and provide 'A doorway to a life of love and learning in the light of Christ'.
- Pupils' religious literacy is extensive.
- St Mary's is a warm, welcoming, cohesive community that embraces the joy of the gospel. This is particularly evident in the pupils' joyful singing in assemblies and class liturgies.

What the school needs to improve

- Build upon pupils' excellent understanding of Catholic social principles so they can confidently apply them to social actions locally, nationally, and globally.
- Consistently promote thoughtful and in-depth responses in religious education by all pupils, particularly those with higher prior attainment, through appropriate challenge.
- Provide frequent opportunities for pupils to confidently plan, lead, monitor, and evaluate a wide variety of high-quality prayers 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

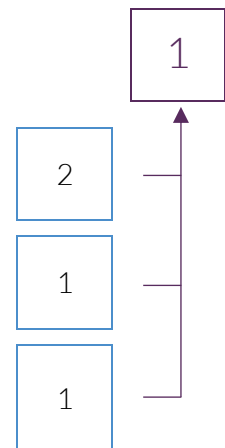
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



Pupils understand and greatly value the distinctive nature of St Mary's and joyfully recite the school's motto at the start of every day: 'A doorway to a life of love and learning in the light of Christ'. The recent strong focus on Catholic social teaching, evident throughout the school, has enabled pupils to acquire an excellent understanding of it relative to their age. They can apply this understanding to their immediate social interactions in the classroom and playground. As a result, behaviour is excellent. As one pupil said, 'We show subsidiarity by making sure we listen to one another and allow everyone to have their say'; another pupil said, 'We respect people because God made everyone'. Several opportunities exist for pupils to take on leadership roles, including being a Catholic Ambassador or a Year 6 Guardian Angel, whose ministry is to welcome a Reception child into the community. Pupils support the local food bank and have raised money for Cafod. The next step for the school to take is to build upon pupils' excellent understanding of Catholic social principles so that they can confidently connect them to social actions locally, nationally, and globally.

Christ is at the centre of this community and inspires all the activities of each day. For example, each day starts with pastoral staff welcoming pupils at the gates while Christian music is played on outdoor speakers. The phased entry into school is punctuated by morning prayer. This enables everyone to start their day calmly and dignifiedly and ensures all are cared for, including the most vulnerable. The school environment clearly embodies its identity, mission, and charism through prominent and impactful displays of its Catholic character. Introducing Catholic social teaching animal mnemonics, evident throughout the school, enables pupils to develop their understanding of these principles. Staff serve as outstanding role models for pupils. Through their mutual relationships and the genuine love and care they demonstrate for pupils, they

continually reflect the school's Catholic values and mission. Staff model prayerfulness in assemblies and share their musical gifts. As a result, St Mary's is a warm, welcoming, cohesive community that embraces the joy of the gospel.

The headteacher is energised and joyful and can convey the Church's mission in education. Leaders and governors are meticulous in their responsibility as stewards of the school's Catholic life and mission. The headteacher works effectively with the new parish priest to ensure the joy of the gospel is lived out in school and is shared in the local community. This is especially evident during Advent and Lent when the parish morning 8am Mass is held at the school so the whole community can unite to mark these significant liturgical seasons. It is well attended by staff, parents, pupils and parishioners. New pupils in reception class receive a special blessing as they begin their school career and are assigned a personal Year 6 Guardian Angel to help them settle into the community. Parents are invited to take place in this service. Parents have enthusiastically supported the school by raising funds for outdoor speakers and a radio station. The radio station allows students to interview inspirational figures from the local community and broadcasts *Wellbeing Wednesday* weekly. As a result, parents understand the school's mission and are highly supportive of it. Governors are deeply committed to and prioritising the school's Catholic life and mission. They led the school through a significant transition period as it prepared to join The Pope Francis Multi Academy Company (PFMAC) in January 2025. They are ambitious for school improvement and bring a high level of expertise, further developing the school's Catholic identity.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

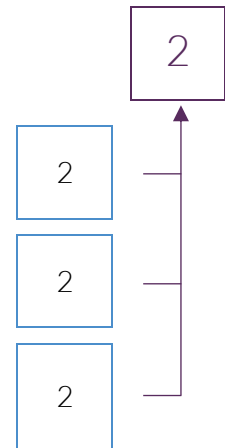
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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



Pupils are secure in their religious knowledge relative to their age and capacity, and their religious literacy is particularly well-developed. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is commendable because they enjoy religious education and are keen to improve their learning. Most pupils are engaged in lessons. They feel valued by staff and secure in their classrooms, as evidenced by their willingness to take risks in learning. For instance, when pupils are not quite sure of the value of the 'connection in learning' being made, they are unafraid to risk volunteering an answer because they know it is safe. As a result of the secure learning environment created by staff, pupils have the courage to fail to progress their learning. Pupils are progressing in knowing more, remembering more and doing more. However, pupils are not consistently challenged in their learning, particularly those with higher prior attainment, and their presentation of work in their exercise books often lacks high quality and care.

Most teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and committed to the value of religious education. They use various questioning techniques to aid knowledge withdrawal and consolidation of prior learning. Skilful questioning during lessons often identifies where pupils are in their understanding. Consequently, teachers modify their explanations, enhancing most pupils' learning experience. Frequent oral recognition of pupil effort in lessons fosters high levels of motivation and engagement and makes pupils feel secure. However, feedback does not always ensure that most pupils understand what they need to do to progress in their learning, meaning they are often unsure how to do so. A general overreliance on whole-class teaching and common tasks for all sometimes restricts opportunities for pupils to respond creatively to what they are learning about and their independence in doing so. The pace and depth of learning in lessons often limit the progress of those with higher prior attainment. The use of resources,

including other adults, requires refinement in some classrooms to maintain a sharp focus on progress for all pupils.

The headteacher and the new lead teacher for religious education have a clear vision of teaching and learning and the expertise to drive this forward. The school has a significant number of new staff who teach religious education. Leaders and governors ensure that training opportunities are available for practitioners concerning subject knowledge and developing teaching skills to sustain and contribute to the school's good standards. This includes access to diocesan training, national professional qualifications, and PFMAC training. Leaders and governors ensure that religious education is equally important to other core curriculum subjects. Leaders structure the curriculum to allow learners to progress sequentially through the subject content. Leaders and governors have a monitoring schedule that informs their analysis and improvement planning. Governors have supported the headteacher by creating a deputy headteacher post responsible for teaching and learning and by completing the process of joining the PFMAC, demonstrating their commitment to the high priority they place on religious education within their strategic planning, which is to be commended. As a result, St Mary's is well placed to make rapid progress in the quality of teaching and learning in religious education. As one staff member said, 'We are in a period of huge transitional change, and we have confidence in our headteacher and staff to ensure our pupils get the best education possible at St Mary's. He has already made a significant difference.'

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

Whole-school prayer and liturgy is well planned, engaging, and fosters pupils' active, and conscious participation. This was evidenced in an assembly to practice hymns for a Mass to mark the school joining the PFMAC. Led by a staff band, the pupils participated in heartfelt, joyful, and enthusiastic communal singing, which is typical at St Mary's. Parts of the Mass are skilfully explained, enhancing pupils' liturgical formation and understanding. Pupils are respectful and reverent because they follow clear morning prayer routines, meaning they understand what is expected of them and why this is important for the school's prayer life. Prayer further contributes to pupils' understanding of Catholic social teaching principles. For example, a creative and well-planned Key Stage 1 assembly expertly explored the principle of subsidiarity. Subsequently, pupils could articulate how the principle should shape their interaction with one another by 'ensuring everyone can have their say', and they asked for God's support through prayer. Relative to their age and capacity, pupils understand the Church's liturgical year and know a range of traditional prayers. In daily classroom prayer, the school has focused on 'gather and listen', and pupils undertake some liturgical ministries; however, they are not always well prepared to do so, resulting in a lack of confidence. Frequent opportunities for pupils to plan, lead, monitor, and evaluate a wide variety of high-quality prayers are needed to address this.

The importance of prayer and liturgy in the school's life is demonstrated through various evidence sources. The school makes good use of space; for example, a dedicated prayer table is evident in every classroom, which is appropriately furnished and well cared for. Prominent and high-quality art conducive to prayer is displayed in corridors and the main hall. The school has a dedicated prayer garden accessible in the summer months. Parents are invited to join the school's prayer life, such as celebratory assemblies and Masses. Prayer bags are sent home to include families further, although some pupils reported this to be inconsistent. The staff band

provides models of good practice in their support for and enrichment of the liturgical life of the school, which pupils can aspire towards as they grow older. The school collaborates strongly with the local parish, often leading Sunday Masses and hosting weekday Masses during Advent and Lent. The daily pattern of prayer reflects the prayer life of the Church. Although this is modelled to a high standard by senior leaders, it is not yet fully embedded in classroom routines, where teachers do not consistently prioritise prayer.

Leaders of whole-school liturgy clearly understand the diverse forms of prayer within the Catholic tradition. They skilfully lead and model liturgical ministry and are well-versed in the Church's liturgical sources, such as the lectionary, missal, and liturgical calendar. Leaders and governors recognise the importance of prayer and liturgy when setting budgets and allocating resources. The headteacher provides staff with training opportunities, and the school has invested in high-quality resources to support classroom liturgy; these are used well, including to enrich the community's celebration of the liturgical seasons of Advent and Easter. All holy days and other significant days, such as the start of the school year or marking the beginning of the school's belonging to the PFMAC, are taken as opportunities to celebrate the Eucharist. The school collaborates with the parish priest to provide sacramental preparation programmes. Governors are involved with monitoring prayer and liturgy; however, an embedded cycle of self-evaluation and planned improvements involving all stakeholders is yet to be developed. The school's prayer and liturgy policy is in the process of renewal.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	151182
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	931 3824
Full postal address of the school	Queen's Avenue, Bicester, OX26 2NX
School phone number	01869 252035
Headteacher	Daniel O'Connor
Chair of governing board	Paul Concannon
School Website	www.st-marys-bicester.oxon.sch.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	The Pope Francis Catholic Multi Academy Company
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	March 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

The inspection team

Marina Smith
 Claire Restell

Lead
 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