



## St Mary's Catholic Academy

URN: 140114

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Birmingham

27–28 February 2025

### 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

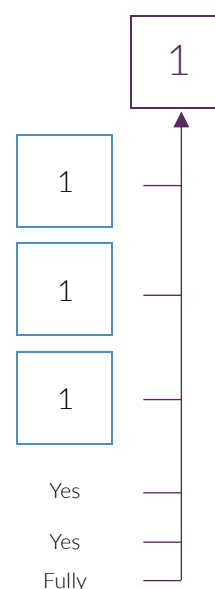
#### Collective worship (p.7)

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

- This school fully complies with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- This school is fully compliant with the additional requirements of His Grace.
- This school has fully addressed all previous areas for improvement.

## What the school does well

- The school provides a safe, welcoming, inclusive, and loving community for parents, pupils and staff, with Christ at its heart.
- It prioritises the faith formation of all staff, resulting in them and, through them, the pupils being living examples of the Gospel values and the principles of Catholic social teaching.
- The quality of teaching in religious education is consistently excellent: dynamic, engaging, knowledgeable and inclusive.
- All senior leaders provide inspirational leadership of Catholic life and mission, religious education, and collective worship.
- All pupils demonstrate profound reverence and commitment to all forms of prayer and liturgy and a thoroughly embedded knowledge of the Church's traditional and contemporary prayers and liturgical practices.

## What the school needs to improve

- Share the school's good practices and unique quality with other diocesan schools.
- Enable pupils to develop a profound understanding of their progress in religious education, including ways to move their learning forward through self-reflection and evaluation.

## 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

1

**Provision**

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

1

**Leadership**

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

1

1

The school's mission statement, 'Many hearts, one accord: in God's love we grow and learn together to build the kingdom of God,' is understood and lived by all. All staff strongly agree that Christ is at the heart of the school, as reflected in the way pupils show concern for the less fortunate and vulnerable and in the profound sense of the importance and relevance of Catholic social teaching to their own lives. Pupils describe the school as 'loving, safe and comforting', and parents comment that it 'has played a significant role in nurturing my child's relationship with God.' The behaviour of all pupils is exemplary: they are welcoming, polite, and interested in others. The school rules focus on respect for God, for others and for themselves, and pupils understand that this profoundly influences all aspects of their academic and wider school life, explaining that the Catholic nature of the school is seen in the quality of their relationships with each other. Pupils and staff exude great pride in their school, and the discipleship group provides a significant lead to other pupils and is committed to their work, which they see as a gift to God.

The mission statement is regularly discussed and is lived out in the loving and supportive community, frequently described as 'a family'. Its inclusive nature can be seen in empowering a pupil of another faith to lead a discussion of her faith with her class. The pastoral support of all is a particular strength, with the familiar presence of the parish priest in school, informal and formal provision from senior leaders, external well-being, and counselling services. The staff provide exemplary role models, caring deeply about everyone's well-being; the most vulnerable are a particular priority, as seen in the provision of uniforms for some pupils, all of whom wear them proudly. Parents comment, 'The emphasis on spiritual growth provides a strong sense of purpose and inner peace, helping children navigate challenges with resilience and clarity.' The school's attractive and well-cared-for physical environment makes its Catholic character very

clear, with displays of pupils' work reflecting upon their chosen class saints and how they can contribute to the mission statement's focus on building the kingdom of God. There are strong links with the parish and the parish priest; parents agree that the school works well with the local parish.

All highly value the senior management team who are inspirational in their dedication. Staff feel they are very approachable: '...fantastic role models and a great inspiration to us as staff, as well as to the children in our care...supportive, kind, understanding, they encourage us to follow our faith.' Catholic life and mission are always a conscious focus of reports to governors and their discussions. The governors and directors support the senior management team in their faith formation by, for example, fully funding their participation in national formation courses, as well as providing a range of mental health well-being and pastoral support for all staff, including supervision, support and counselling for those involved with safeguarding concerns. The subject leader for religious education has driven forward the development of the Catholic curriculum with all subject leaders, with a powerful emphasis on Catholic social teaching. School development plans are very well detailed, self-critical, positive, and carefully monitored and evaluated, informing a generous training programme for all staff. The support for staff new to the school and those in the early stages of their careers is exemplary and highly valued, and this continues for all staff.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

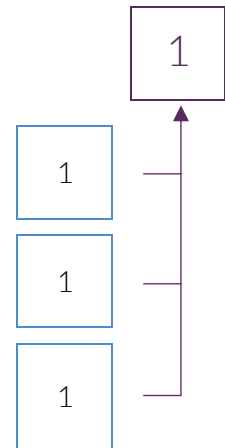
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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



All pupils demonstrate excellent prior knowledge and recall, are religiously articulate, and readily apply all learning to their own experience, explaining how it informs their actions. A consistent focus on scripture means it becomes a fundamental part of the pupils' knowledge base and is frequently used to make sophisticated connections and explain their actions. Appropriate use of religious vocabulary is a particular strength; the pupils also understand the learning process. Books are consistently very well-presented and thorough, without any gaps; the pupils respond readily to all feedback. They all enjoy lessons 'because they are longer than other lessons', showing their engagement and enthusiasm. Parents comment: 'It's lovely to see how much our children are enjoying religious education lessons and sharing their knowledge at home,' and 'My daughter has found religious education lessons...brought her comfort during a difficult year;' staff add, 'We are blessed to have such amazing children who live out the gospel values so naturally in everything that they do and love to take part in their religious education lessons.' Attainment is consistently higher than in other core subjects because of the fundamental importance and commitment given to the subject by pupils and staff.

Teachers consistently demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and are deeply committed to teaching the subject. Consistently dynamic and challenging lessons engage and enthuse all pupils because of the pace, commitment and enthusiasm with which they are delivered. Questioning is a real strength: it is always open, reflective and thought-provoking. Recall of prior knowledge is a consistent feature of all lessons, oral and written feedback are used consistently well, and pupils are always encouraged to make thorough responses, creating important links to their own lives as a key part of each task. Extension tasks challenge the pupils, and lessons are very inclusive, with extensive support provided by teaching assistants for those with special educational needs and disabilities. A wide range of tasks and resources, including creative,

artistic and musical, are very well used. Lessons include time for prayer, reflection and singing. Supported by the subject leader for religious education, all staff engage in thorough and regular assessment analysis, which leads to focused planning. Parents comment, 'The combination of academic excellence and a deep commitment to developing the whole person sets this school apart, creating a foundation for lifelong success and fulfilment.'

The subject leader for religious education is inspirational in her vision that all pupils and staff know that they have been created to love and be loved and in her drive to achieve this. She uses coaching and mentoring to monitor and develop teaching; this collegiate approach enables excellent teaching by all. She is extremely thorough in all monitoring and evaluation and provides exemplary support for all staff: initiatives such as collaborative analysis of work across all year groups are particularly valued, with staff appreciating the consequent development of understanding of how the curriculum builds upon prior knowledge each year. Teachers in the early stages of their careers feel very well supported, commenting, 'I have received outstanding training from the religious education lead...I feel well equipped to teach my children about Christ and how we can grow the kingdom of God.' The governors have a very well-informed understanding of the school's religious education provision and outcomes, ensure parity of funding with other core subjects and encourage staff to participate in a wide range of training. Enrichment is provided in various ways, including visits to places of worship of other faiths and religions.

## 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

1

#### Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

#### Leadership

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

1

1

All pupils are thoroughly engaged, reverent and enthusiastic in all aspects of prayer and liturgy. They demonstrate excellent knowledge of the traditional prayers of the church, well beyond age expectations, and joyful and passionate singing, which is also a great strength of the school, both in formal prayer and liturgy and spontaneously in class. The pupil discipleship team provide a strong lead to other pupils who feel called to serve God through their ministries. Because of a progressive approach that builds upon their skills and involvement each year, all pupil-led prayer and liturgy is carefully planned and prepared, well-structured, and delivered with care and pride, including formal elements but reflective and spontaneous as appropriate. Extensive pupil evaluation, recorded in the class 'Catholic life books' and regularly referred to by pupils, leads to thorough and effective further planning and development. Appropriate scripture is at the heart of all prayer and liturgy. Still, it is so well embedded that it is also part of the pupils' lives, as can be seen by a pupil making a spontaneous link between John the Baptist making his way through a crowd and Moses leading the Israelites through the Red Sea, for example.

Pupils and staff confirm that prayer is central to the life of the school, with a regular daily pattern and opportunities for reflection and spontaneous prayer, for example, in lessons. The staff gospel reflection, running concurrently with the Monday gospel assembly for pupils each week and, like that assembly, is based on the Sunday gospel, is highly valued by staff, who are open and generous in its non-judgemental atmosphere and carry the essence forward into their lessons. Staff know who to go to for help planning and preparing prayer and liturgy. Support is not just 'available' but offered proactively by senior leaders, particularly the subject leader for religious education. All generously share materials and ideas for prayer and liturgy, and other talents of staff, especially musical, are used to enrich prayer and liturgy. Prayer spaces in each classroom and the hall are prominent, linked to Catholic social teaching and the jubilee year, and

very well cared for. With the help of the parish priest, the school provides extensive sacramental preparation, and parents praise 'good support for children in Year Three for Holy Communion, with opportunities for parents to develop their own knowledge and strengthen their faith.'

The detailed prayer and liturgy policy, readily available on the website, serves staff well and makes the approach very clear; various forms of prayer enrich the formal structure of worship in the school. Leaders and governors demonstrate an excellent understanding of the progression of pupil skills as foundations are built upon, and greater responsibility is given, as seen in the increasingly active engagement and pupil leadership as they move up the school. There are frequent opportunities to receive the Blessed Sacrament in Mass, including all staff, pupils, and parents. Liturgy is delivered inclusively, including those of other denominations and faiths and those with no faith. Family Masses encourage parents and pupils to join the parish at weekend Masses, and all parents agree that they are invited to be involved in the school's prayer life. The faith formation of staff is a priority and is very well-resourced by the school and collegiate, for example, in funding fully national formation courses for senior leaders. Considerable support for all staff aids the planning and delivery of all aspects of prayer and liturgy, with comprehensive, honest, regular and effective monitoring and evaluation by pupils, staff, senior leaders and governors, who also offer appropriate challenges.

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary's Catholic Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	140114
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	861 3403
Full postal address of the school	Ford Green Road, Norton-le-Moors, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 8EZ
School phone number	01782 234820
Headteacher	Sarah Rathbone
Chair of governing board	Gillian Meller
School Website	<a href="http://www.stmarysstoke.co.uk">www.stmarysstoke.co.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	The Newman Catholic Collegiate
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	July 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

## The inspection team

Andrew Maund  
Gerry O'Hara

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