

Holy Family Catholic High School

URN: 104962

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Liverpool

30-01 May 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 curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

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

No
Yes
Fully

Compliance statement

- The school does not meet the requirements for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the Archbishop of Liverpool.
- The school has fully responded to the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection.

What the school does well

- A strong sense of community lies at the heart of the school, rooted in the belief that Christ is present in every person. This deep sense of belonging is consistently described by staff, students, and parents, as “a family” and “a home,” reflecting the school's commitment to aspiring to be a caring Catholic community.
- The school's inclusive ethos, grounded in a deep respect for personal dignity and that of others, is clearly reflected in students' interactions. They consistently show kindness and respect to peers from all backgrounds, regardless of differences in appearance or behaviour. This ethos is regularly affirmed and valued by both parents and staff.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary, both in lessons and throughout the school. They conduct themselves with maturity, showing respect for staff, peers, and the learning environment. This clearly reflects the school's Catholic values and a commitment to following in the footsteps of Jesus through their actions and attitudes.
- Planning within the religious education curriculum is thoughtful, insightful, and carefully considered, ensuring that learning is meaningful, rooted in theological understanding, and responsive to the spiritual and academic needs of all students.
- Deep expertise exists within the department, enabling the effective delivery of a well-planned and engaging curriculum for students.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide compliance with the curriculum requirements for religious education as set out by the Bishops' Conference, specifically allocating 10% of curriculum time at Key Stage 3 and 5% of curriculum time at Key Stage 5.
- Improve attainment and progress across all key performance indicators in religious education.
- Create more opportunities for students to take a leading role in 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

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

2

1

Students at Holy Family Catholic High School not only understand but wholeheartedly embrace the school's distinctive Catholic identity and mission. Their active involvement significantly contributes to the Catholic life of the school, consistently reflecting Gospel values that they embody and live out daily. Students express with confidence that they feel valued, cared for, and recognised as unique individuals made in the image of God. This sense of belonging fosters happiness, confidence, and a sense of safety within the school community. Their commitment to Catholic social teaching is evident through the many charitable initiatives and community outreach programs they lead, commendably raising over £26,000 in the last eighteen months for various charities and organising the annual Pensioners' Party, an event highly regarded by the local community. Students not only participate in these activities but also articulate the theological principles behind their actions. They demonstrate deep respect for the dignity of others, treating peers with kindness and respect, regardless of differences. This inclusive ethos is affirmed by both parents and staff. Additionally, students show genuine respect for those of other faiths, beliefs, and world views. Their exemplary behaviour is evident both in lessons and throughout the school, where they actively engage with the chaplaincy provision, although there is potential to further enhance chaplaincy opportunities to deepen their spirituality.

The mission statement is clear, well-articulated, and actively lived out by the school community. Recently reviewed with input from students, it reflects the lived reality of school life. Staff are regularly reminded of the mission during training days and staff induction, ensuring both new and existing staff are grounded in the school's Catholic ethos. The mission shapes the culture of the school, with the word of God underpinning all aspects of life. The school prayer, developed from the mission, powerfully expresses the school's faith foundation. Staff embrace the mission and apply it consistently across the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, reflecting the school's Catholic identity and commitment to service. At the heart of the school is a strong sense

of community, with staff, students, and parents describing it as “a family” and “a home.” This sense of belonging is evident in the inclusive, supportive, and nurturing culture that permeates the school. The Headteacher leads by example, embodying Gospel values in interactions with staff, students, and the wider community. The quality of pastoral care is exceptional, with a strong commitment to supporting vulnerable students, particularly in the SEN base. Relationships, sex and health education teaching is robust and is rooted in Catholic teaching. The lead has a clear grasp of her role and rigorously audits provision. Visiting speakers are carefully vetted to ensure alignment with Catholic values. The physical environment of the school mirrors its Catholic identity, with displays of the mission statement, crucifixes, and representations of Catholic social teaching.

Leaders and governors demonstrate a profound understanding of the Church’s mission in education and are committed to its stewardship. The Headteacher leads with conviction, inspiring the school community, and uniting staff in their commitment to live out Gospel values. Senior leadership is widely respected as a vocational role model in continuing to develop and drive the Catholic identity of the school. Consequently, school policies and daily practices reflect and reinforce its Catholic mission. Leaders actively promote the archdiocesan vision and engage with diocesan policies, reaching out to foster strong relationships with the local parish, despite unique challenges. They uphold the principle that parents are the primary educators and work in partnership with families to support them. Parental feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Leaders and governors are authentic witnesses to the Gospel and Catholic social teaching, ensuring resources support those most in need. They demonstrate care for staff, as reflected in the staff survey, where 98.7% agree their wellbeing is supported. The school curriculum expresses Catholic values, with religious education at its core.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

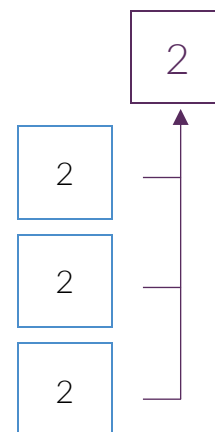
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 Holy Family Catholic High School engage extremely well in lessons, demonstrating respect, concentration, and focus, which enables positive progress. The curriculum is expertly designed to build knowledge over time and across key stages 3 and 4. In lessons, students are regularly reminded of the sequence of their learning and how it connects to prior knowledge. Class discussions are respectful, with students confidently voicing their opinions and accepting others' viewpoints. High-level questioning, observed in Year 9 and Year 11 lessons, encourages deeper learning and links to prior knowledge. Teachers employ a 'no hands up' approach and an 'every minute counts' classroom management strategy, ensuring students stay engaged and that lessons maintain a healthy pace. Differentiation is evident with students demonstrating curiosity and perceptive questioning, particularly in a Year 9 lesson. There is a strong sense of inclusion and high ambition for all students in every lesson. Students speak enthusiastically about their religious education learning, describing lessons as "enjoyable, engaging, fun, and insightful." Behaviour is exemplary, and high expectations are clear. Student progress is closely monitored through regular assessments, and the recall of prior learning is embedded at the start of each lesson. Whilst there are opportunities for extended writing and high levels of literacy, there is currently no provision for students to take religious education as an A Level in the Sixth Form, limiting continued religious education teaching at this stage.

The quality of teaching and learning in religious education at key stages 3 and 4 reflects the high cultural and academic expectations of the school. Both new and experienced staff are actively involved in and support teaching initiatives, ensuring consistency across the department. For example, teachers greet students at the door, students arrive prepared with books and assessment folders, lesson starters focus on recalling prior learning, and there is an emphasis on correct literacy. Seating plans are used effectively to differentiate tasks, track student engagement, and monitor progress. Disruption to teaching is not tolerated, and any inappropriate behaviour is addressed swiftly, with many students displaying respectful

behaviour and understanding. This ensures that occasional disruptions are readily recognised as a contradiction of the school ethos. Student workbooks are well-maintained, reflecting the pride students take in their work. There is a consistent understanding across the school of how work should be presented, with some examples being exemplary. Religious education worksheets are thoughtfully prepared, and the sharing of good practice is common. While Sixth Form general religious education workbooks meet basic standards, they should be improved. Continued professional development in religious education ensures the sharing and regular review of new pedagogical ideas. Despite recent Key Stage 4 outcomes not reflecting the department's planning, current internal data shows promising improvements.

Leaders and governors ensure the religious education curriculum faithfully reflects the Religious Education Directory. They use programmes of study and other resources creatively to enhance delivery, ensuring religious education receives the same professionalism and importance as other core subjects. Leaders prioritise high-quality professional development for all religious education practitioners, focusing on both subject knowledge and pedagogy. The subject leader has a clear vision, coupled with expertise in implementation, leading to consistently good lessons. The curriculum is well-planned in key stages 3 and 4 to meet the needs of different student groups and provides coherence across these key stages. However, opportunities for enrichment activities are limited and could be further developed to enhance student engagement. The curriculum content in Key Stage 5 could be further developed. The Headteacher, senior leaders, and subject leader share an aspirational vision for religious education, aiming for every student to achieve life to the full. Whilst Key Stage 4 meets the curriculum requirements for religious education, there is a shortfall at key stages 3 and 5.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

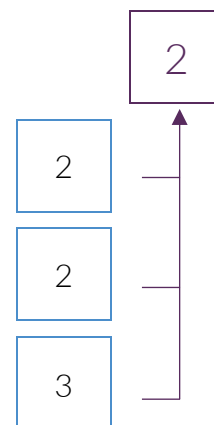
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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



Students respond positively to the school's provision for prayer and liturgy. In large and small settings, they participate with reverence and confidence, demonstrating a mature ability for silent reflection and communal prayer. Across all age groups, students show a sound understanding of different forms of Catholic prayer, including the use of scripture, symbols, silence, and personal reflection. They describe key elements of the Church's liturgical year and explain how it shapes the rhythm of prayer and worship within the school. Students often make meaningful connections between what they learn in religious education and in other subjects. Their experiences in the prayer life of the school, demonstrates how the whole curriculum inspires themes for worship and supports their spiritual development. Although students occasionally take part in liturgical ministries such as reading, their opportunities to plan, prepare, and lead acts of prayer and liturgy are limited. When they do contribute it is usually as part of a group rather than individually. Expanding these opportunities would enhance their sense of ownership and deepen their engagement with the Catholic life of the school. Students are increasingly reflective and articulate about the impact of prayer, often linking it to action, including participation in initiatives like the termly Walks of Faith.

Prayer and liturgy hold a central place in the life of the school, shaping the daily rhythm of the community. Content is thoughtfully planned and regularly features in both staff and student gatherings, marking moments of joy and sorrow with reverence and compassion. This was exemplified by the school's response to the recent death of Pope Francis, when form periods were dedicated to commemorative prayer and reflection. Throughout the school there is a consistent daily pattern of prayer that supports the liturgical calendar. Students engage meaningfully with a range of experiences from the Catholic tradition, including seasonal scripture, silence, and communal reflection. Scripture is carefully chosen to reflect the Church's seasons and is used effectively, particularly during form time, where themes such as 'community' are explored and linked to students' spiritual development. Staff, including senior leaders, are

strong role models, regularly leading prayer with integrity. Those staff who guide students in the leadership in prayer are well-trained and supportive. However, there is scope to enhance prayer through greater use of music and creative expression. Improved prayer spaces, including a chapel, would further enrich the school's spiritual life. The development of stronger links between home, school and parishes remains a work in progress.

The school's policy for prayer and liturgy is well-crafted, purposeful, and widely used by staff. In a recent survey with 91.5% of staff found it supportive in planning acts of worship. However, while effective in its current form, there is no clearly articulated strategy from leaders and governors for progressively developing student leadership in prayer and liturgy. This is a key area for growth to ensure that students of all ages are given increasing opportunities to participate and lead as they mature. Currently, opportunities to celebrate the Eucharist are limited. Other liturgical moments are not always marked, largely due to challenges around clergy availability. As a result, regular access to Mass is restricted for the school community. Professional development in liturgical formation is provided and valued by staff, with 84.1% feeling well supported in leading prayer and worship. Leaders demonstrate a deep understanding of Catholic prayer traditions which is evident in the responsive and liturgically rooted form time programme. Student leadership in prayer remains underdeveloped, with limited opportunities and structured support. The appointment of a chaplain, though not yet prioritised due to financial constraints, is recognised by governors as essential. Leaders also review prayer and liturgy regularly, though student voice could contribute further to this process.

Information about the school

Full name of school	Holy Family Catholic High School
School unique reference number (URN)	104962
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3434624
Full postal address of the school	Holy Family Catholic High School, Virgins Lane, Thornton, Liverpool, L23 4UL
School phone number	0151 924 6451
Headteacher	Matthew Symes
Chair of Governors	Margaret Evans
School Website	http://www.holyfamilyhighschool.co.uk/
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	14 th November 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The inspection team

Anthony Pontifex
Angela Corless
Michelle McGlown

Lead
Team
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