CATHOLIC SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE INSPECTION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND ACADEMIES

St Augustine's Catholic Primary School

URN: 139531

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Hexham & Newcastle

15 October 2026 – 16 October 2026

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 diocesan directives	Yes
The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection	Fully

This Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection was carried out under canons 804 & 806 of the code of canon law. For maintained schools and academies in England it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.48 of the Education Act 2005. For maintained schools and academies in Wales it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.50 of the Education Act 2005.

What the school does well

- St Augustine's Catholic Primary School demonstrates a deeply embedded commitment to pupils and their families. As a result, there is a strong sense of belonging, with Catholic values permeating the life and work of the school and underpinning relationships, decision-making, and daily practice.
- A seamless partnership between the school and parish makes a substantial contribution to pupils' spiritual and faith development, enabling them to engage meaningfully in the life of the parish and recognise their role within the wider Catholic community.
- Leaders, including the religious education subject leader, have successfully implemented the new Religious Education Directory resource, 'The Way'. Through strong strategic leadership, effective pedagogical approaches, and purposeful feedback, pupils are enthusiastic in their learning. As a result, they demonstrate increasing confidence in articulating their understanding using subject-specific and theological vocabulary.
- The progressive development of pupil leadership in worship is a notable strength of the school. Inspired by the authentic witness and skilled guidance of staff, pupils confidently and reverently plan, lead, and evaluate worship, enriching the spiritual life of the school and fostering a deeply prayerful community.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop pupils' understanding of Catholic social teaching, including its theological foundations, and strengthen their ability to articulate the relationship between its principles, their own actions, and their contribution to the wider community.
- Refine the balance between teacher input and independent learning opportunities to maintain a brisk pace and ensure pupils are fully engaged in applying and developing their knowledge and understanding.
- Develop pupils' ability to articulate the personal and spiritual significance of creative prayer, including the relationship between prayer experiences, attitudes, decision-making, and daily living within the Catholic community.

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

2

Pupil outcomes

2

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

Provision

1

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

Leadership

2

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

Pupils speak warmly about being part of St Augustine's Catholic Primary School and recognise that they are valued as individuals, created in the image and likeness of God. They feel loved, respected and cared for, resulting in a strong sense of belonging. Behaviour is consistently positive, and warm relationships contribute to a welcoming and inclusive environment. The school's mission statement is understood by pupils as underpinning the life and work of the school. While most recognise its importance in promoting the school's values and ethos, some are less confident in articulating its influence on their daily choices and actions. In contrast, the school's 'Three Bs' approach is readily understood and referenced when discussing behaviour and personal responsibility. Pupils demonstrate a strong desire to grow in virtue and serve others through roles such as Mini Vinnies and buddies. Opportunities to support the wider community, including singing in residential care homes and serving parishioners, contribute positively to their personal development. A typical comment from one parent was that, 'He loves being a Mini Vinnie and has a strong moral compass from the values instilled in school.' While some pupils can connect these actions to Catholic social teaching, many are less able to articulate the theological principles, including the preferential option for the poor, which underpin them.

There is a strong sense of community at St Augustine's, rooted in the school's Catholic identity and reflected in the quality of relationships across the school. Staff and pupils speak positively about the welcoming and supportive culture, with staff commenting, 'Catholic life is lived out

in everything that we do. St Augustine's is not just a place of work but a family where everyone looks after each other.' Staff are positive role models who make a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school. They actively support pupils' spiritual development and willingly embrace additional responsibilities to enrich pupils' faith journey. The personal development of pupils is enhanced through a well-planned relationships, sex and health education curriculum, which is carefully mapped across all year groups and supports both personal and faith development. This area benefits from strong leadership, ensuring that the curriculum is meaningful and relevant to pupils. Pupils and families from a range of cultures and faith backgrounds are welcomed warmly into the school community. New families speak positively about the support they receive. The school's Catholic identity is highly visible through high-quality displays, prayer spaces and religious artwork, contributing to a distinctively Catholic environment.

Catholic life is at the heart of St Augustine's and clearly underpins the work of leaders. A clear vision for Catholic education is shared by the school leadership team and reflected throughout the school community. As the Headteacher stated, 'We live it and breathe it. As the hands of Christ, we serve others for God.' Leaders have established highly positive relationships with parents and families, who are overwhelmingly appreciative of the support and care provided. Parents comment that the Headteacher, 'makes my child's school life wonderful every day.' These strong partnerships contribute significantly to the welcoming and inclusive nature of the school community. Parish links are well developed and enrich pupils' understanding of service and community. For example, members of the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) support pupils through classroom volunteering and the Mini Vinnies programme. Leaders also ensure practical support is available for families facing difficulties, reflecting the school's commitment to dignity and inclusion. Governors support the Catholic life of the school and have a developing understanding of its strengths, informed through some monitoring and self-evaluation activities. Staff value the strong culture of collaboration and support, with well-being remaining a clear priority for leaders.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

2

Pupil outcomes

2

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

Provision

2

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

Leadership

2

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

Pupils engage well in religious education and approach their learning with interest and enthusiasm. The implementation of *The Way* resource enables pupils to develop secure knowledge and understanding, which they discuss with increasing confidence. Most pupils recall and apply prior learning effectively, supported by consistent use of summary feedback, recap activities and opportunities to revisit key concepts. As a result, they retain knowledge securely and make steady progress over time. The school's marking and feedback policy is implemented consistently. Effective questioning supports pupils in refining their understanding and contributes to their growing confidence in discussing religious concepts using subject-specific and theological vocabulary. For example, Year 1 pupils explain how Cafod supports communities in caring for creation, while Year 4 pupils confidently articulate the significance and virtues associated with a cardinal. Pupils demonstrate secure knowledge of topics such as Creation and Covenant and show increasing religious literacy. They generally work independently, sustain concentration and take pride in their work, which is presented to a high standard. While adaptations are identified for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, these are currently more focused on learning outcomes than on the specific scaffolds and strategies needed to support full access and participation in learning.

Teachers demonstrate a strong commitment to religious education and have embraced the new Directory. As a result, pupils engage positively with religious education and benefit from learning experiences that develop secure knowledge and understanding. High-quality

provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that children receive a strong foundation in religious education. A consistent whole-school teaching and learning pedagogy underpins planning and classroom practice. The effective use of sentence stems and emphasis on subject-specific vocabulary support pupils in articulating their understanding with increasing confidence and accuracy, contributing to growing religious literacy across the school. Teachers use questioning effectively to assess understanding, address misconceptions and deepen thinking. Consequently, most pupils remain focused and engaged in their learning. While teaching is effective overall, there are occasions when teacher input is too prolonged, slowing the pace of learning and reducing opportunities for pupils to work independently and take ownership of their learning. Creative approaches support pupils in expressing and consolidating their understanding. For example, Year 5 pupils use art to explore Moses and the Burning Bush, while Year 3 pupils use comic strips to communicate their learning effectively.

Leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate religious education effectively, ensuring that it remains at the heart of the school's mission and work as the 'core of the core'. The religious education subject leader has a clear vision and has managed the implementation of 'The Way' resource successfully. Priorities for improvement are accurately identified and informed by effective self-evaluation. The subject leader provides valued support for staff, contributing to growing confidence and consistency in the delivery of religious education. Senior leaders have established a clear vision for high-quality teaching and learning, resulting in a consistent pedagogical approach across the school. Regular monitoring activities, including learning walks, book scrutinies and pupil discussions, enable leaders to identify areas for development and take appropriate action. This has contributed positively to the quality and consistency of pupils' work. Governors have some understanding of strengths and priorities within religious education, although their role in providing challenge is less well developed. Leaders, working closely with the diocese and the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust, prioritise professional development, ensuring that staff are well equipped to deliver the curriculum and continue to develop their practice. Consequently, leadership is effective in driving improvement and maintaining religious education as a strength of the school.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

2

Pupil outcomes

2

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

Provision

1

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

Leadership

2

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

Pupils participate in prayer and liturgy with enthusiasm and engagement. They sing with confidence and joy, with the choir making a valuable contribution to the prayer life of both the school and wider community. The newly formed liturgical dance group further enriches worship, performing with reverence, concentration and a clear sense of purpose. Pupils show reverence during worship and value opportunities for quiet reflection, recognising the importance of spending time with God. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on and evaluate prayer and liturgy, helping to inform future experiences. While they engage readily with a range of creative prayer opportunities, many are less able to articulate how these experiences influence their choices, actions and daily lives. Pupils lead worship confidently and with increasing independence. Older pupils, particularly those in Year 6, demonstrate strong skills in preparing worship and speak positively about contributing to the spiritual life of the school. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of the Church's liturgical year and the significance of key feast days and seasons. Through their class patron saints, including Saint Carlo Acutis, they deepen their understanding of Christian witness and discipleship. Through their active participation in prayer, worship and liturgical celebrations, pupils make a valuable contribution to the school's faith-filled community.

Pupils are well supported in developing the knowledge, skills and confidence required to plan and evaluate worship. As a result, older pupils undertake these responsibilities with increasing independence, selecting themes, choosing scripture and planning opportunities for

prayer and reflection confidently. Effective staff modelling supports pupils' understanding of the centrality of scripture within worship. For example, the deputy headteacher demonstrated the respectful proclamation of the gospel during celebration of the word, providing a strong model for pupils' own leadership of worship. Class-led worship is a regular and valued aspect of school life. A consistent structure supports pupils' understanding of prayer and liturgy and contributes to high levels of engagement. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for prayer and reflection, making effective use of indoor and outdoor spaces. Pupils speak particularly positively about the school's Be Spirited sessions, which introduce a variety of prayer experiences. A common view is that, 'Be Spirited is my favourite thing. Prayer feels fun and different.' A seamless partnership between the school and parish, including the parish priest, further enriches pupils' experiences of prayer, worship and liturgy. Through the parish's learning to lead ministries programme, pupils participate in liturgical ministries, including proclaiming readings, participating in the offertory procession and welcoming parishioners. Parents value this strong relationship and comment, 'There is a close connection between the parish and the school, and we feel like one community.'

Leaders and governors have established a clear policy for prayer and liturgy, supported by a well-planned progression of knowledge and skills that enables pupils to grow in confidence as they plan, lead and evaluate worship. The Headteacher's strong understanding of the school community ensures that prayer and liturgy remain central to school life. The school calendar and worship timetable reflect the liturgical year and provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to engage with key seasons, feast days and saints. Families and parishioners are regularly welcomed to participate in these celebrations, strengthening the sense of community. Professional development ensures that staff have the knowledge, skills and confidence required to support pupils' prayer and liturgical formation. Staff speak positively about the support they receive, with one commenting, 'As a non-Catholic, I have truly been welcomed and supported.' High-quality resources enhance prayer and liturgy throughout the school. Regular monitoring of focal areas, undertaken alongside the pupil chaplaincy team, informs ongoing improvements and ensures that prayer spaces remain engaging, purposeful and responsive to the needs of the school community.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Augustine's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	139531
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8413308
Full postal address of the school	Beechwood Avenue, Darlington, DL3 7HP
School phone number	01325 380819
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Katie Whitehead
Chair of Governors	Mr Steven Williams
School Website	www.staugustines.bhcet.org.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	2 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	27 September 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The Inspection Team

Paul Craig	Lead
Maria Elliott	

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