CATHOLIC SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

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

St Cuthberts Catholic Primary School

URN: 149036

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

07 October 2026 – 08 October 2026

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness — 2

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

Catholic life and mission (p.3) — 1

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) — 2

The quality of curriculum religious education

Collective worship (p.7) — 1

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	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

- Rooted in Christ and guided by a strong Catholic vision, St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary fosters a culture of welcome, inclusion and exceptional pastoral care, ensuring that every member of the community feels valued, respected and supported.
- The school has created a profound sense of belonging through its strong relationships and close partnership with the parish, enabling pupils and families to experience the Church's mission in action.
- Senior leaders are inspirational witnesses to the Catholic life, driving the school's mission with determination so that the Catholic ethos is fully embraced and lived out by staff, pupils and the wider community.
- Excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to learning contribute significantly to a respectful and purposeful Catholic learning environment.
- Prayer is at the heart of daily school life, with pupils participating reverently and enthusiastically in a range of prayer experiences, demonstrating a clear engagement with the spiritual life of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop a more robust monitoring and evaluation schedule in religious education in order for self-evaluation strategies to be forensic so targets are focused, specific and measurable.
- Develop a higher level of confidence in subject knowledge and teaching expertise which in turn allows teachers to adapt explanations and tasks to maximise learning.
- Increase pupils' ability to articulate a deeper sense of learning and the associated theology which underpins their understanding and actions.

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

1

Pupil outcomes

1

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

1

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

Pupils at St Cuthbert's embrace the school's distinctive Catholic identity, mission and values, demonstrating a deep sense of belonging and pride in being part of the school community. When asked what makes St Cuthbert's special, a typical response was that, 'Jesus is at the centre of everything, he is in our hearts.' Pupils are happy, confident and feel secure, knowing that they are valued and cared for as unique individuals made in the image and likeness of God. This understanding is reflected in the way they treat one another with dignity and compassion. Inclusivity is a significant strength of the school; pupils demonstrate profound respect for others and families are very well supported. The school promotes tolerance and respect for all, including through its response to local events, helping pupils to understand the importance of equality and human dignity. Pupils willingly take on leadership responsibilities and actively contribute to the Catholic life and mission of the school through charitable initiatives, Trust-wide opportunities and service to others. They show a strong commitment to caring for our Common Home, readily discussing examples of stewardship in action from Nursery to Year 6. There is an exceptional sense of community, welcome and responsibility for others that is evident across the whole school.

Christ is truly at the centre of St Cuthbert's which creates a strong and tangible sense of belonging. The mission of the school is lived out daily through the joy, enthusiasm and commitment of staff, who are exemplary role models and bear witness to the school's Catholic character through the quality of their relationships and the love and care they show to pupils. Staff provide the highest levels of pastoral care, with a particular emphasis on supporting the most vulnerable, ensuring that every member of the community is known,

valued and respected; endorsed by the comment, 'Once a part of St Cuthbert's, always a part of St Cuthbert's.' An embedded culture of welcome means that everyone is received with generous hospitality and a genuine sense of belonging. Relationships are a significant strength, with parents, parish, staff and wider stakeholders working in close partnership and describing the school as a family. The school environment contributes positively to the faith formation and flourishing of both pupils and staff. In addition, staff participate enthusiastically in activities that promote the school's mission and service to others. The provision for relationships, sex and health education fully meets diocesan requirements and reflects the Church's holistic vision of the human person.

Leaders and governors are unwavering in their commitment to ensuring that Christ is at the heart of every aspect of school life. Their determination and clear sense of mission inspire the whole community and create a culture in which the Catholic life and mission of the school flourish. They speak passionately about the school's mission, placing the needs of the pupils at the centre of their decision-making. Strong and effective partnerships with the parish enrich the spiritual life of the school and demonstrate the leaders' commitment to serving the local Church. Leaders work tirelessly to support and empower parents in their role as the first educators of their children, ensuring that families are engaged in the faith journey of the school community. The principles of Catholic social teaching are lived out authentically through leadership decisions, particularly in their determination to support the most vulnerable members of the community. Staff wellbeing is given a high priority, reflecting a genuine respect for the dignity of workers. An open-door culture, alongside practical and pastoral support, promotes both the physical and mental well-being of staff. As a result, the school community is energised and united in its mission and inspired to live out Gospel values in all that it does.

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 developing secure knowledge, understanding and skills. They make good progress in knowing more, remembering more and doing more in relation to the planned curriculum. Across the school, pupils enjoy their religious education learning and approach lessons with enthusiasm, resulting in excellent behaviour for learning and higher levels of engagement. A safe, nurturing and secure learning environment enables pupils to participate confidently. Consequently, pupils demonstrate strong concentration and are actively engaged throughout lessons. Pupils take pride in their work and strive to achieve their best. Books are well presented and reflect positive attitudes towards learning. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about reading scripture passages from the Bible and are beginning to make links to actions commenting, 'God created our world, we must look after it so it doesn't fall apart.' They are beginning to use relevant subject-specific vocabulary to explain key concepts and ideas therefore religious literacy is developing across the school. This is not outstanding as pupils need more opportunities to articulate their learning in depth, making links to the associated theology which underpins their understanding and actions. They are not able to fully explain the progress they have made and identify the next steps needed to develop further.

Teachers demonstrate a clear commitment to the value of religious education and effectively communicate its importance to pupils. Across the school, the celebration of effort is clearly evident, resulting in high levels of pupil motivation and engagement in learning. Relationships are positive and pupils respond well to the encouragement and recognition they receive. Teachers understand the contribution that religious education makes to pupils' moral

development. Where developed, this is reflected in learning that helps pupils make meaningful connections between faith and everyday life, including discussions around online safety through the concept of the '11th Commandment', stewardship of the local environment and carefully planned opportunities within continuous provision. As a result, pupils are developing their understanding of how faith can inform their actions and decisions in the wider world. Strategies such as 'think, pair, share' are allowing pupils time to reflect on their personal response to learning. Where questioning is used skilfully, it deepens pupils' understanding and enables teachers to assess learning within lessons. However, practice is not consistent across the school. This area is not outstanding due to some inconsistencies in subject knowledge and teachers' expertise in adapting explanations and learning tasks to secure the highest outcomes for all pupils.

Leaders and governors demonstrate a strong commitment to religious education, ensuring that it has full parity with other core curriculum subjects through appropriate resourcing, timetabling and the general school environment. The religious education curriculum is a faithful expression of the *Religious Education Directory*. Leaders work collaboratively and have a clear vision for religious education and a secure level of expertise, which supports the continued development of teaching and learning. Leaders ensure that staff access external professional development opportunities provided by the diocese and Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust. The school benefits from a supportive and collaborative culture; however, opportunities for internal coaching and mentoring by the most skilled practitioners are not fully utilised and could further enhance the quality of teaching across the school. Excellent links with the parish, wider community and external agencies enrich pupils' experiences and promote high levels of engagement with religious education. Leaders and governors have established monitoring systems to evaluate provision and outcomes. However, these are not outstanding as monitoring is not forensic enough to enable leaders to articulate targets which are more focused, specific and measurable. Strategic monitoring is not consistently informing improvements in teaching and learning, resulting in variable outcomes for pupils.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

1

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

Pupils engage fully with the rich experiences of prayer and liturgy provided by the school, leading to full, active and conscious participation. This is evident in their reverent conduct, attentive responses, beautiful singing and ability to enter into meaningful moments of prayerful silence. During prayer and liturgy, pupils participate with confidence and genuine engagement. Pupils readily explain how prayer punctuates their day, proudly describing St Cuthbert's as a place, 'where we pray five times a day'. They show a developing understanding of the liturgical life of the Church and the importance of prayer in shaping the mission and identity of the school. Pupils work collaboratively with staff to prepare and lead prayer and liturgy, undertaking roles with confidence and reverence. They demonstrate the ability to evaluate the quality of the experiences they have planned and can suggest improvements, often reflecting thoughtfully on what would make future celebrations even more effective. A calm and prayerful atmosphere permeates the school. Pupils reflect maturely on their experiences of prayer and liturgy and recognise their importance within school life. Pupils can describe the experiences they have of prayer and liturgy; however, they are unable to clearly articulate how these experiences influence their actions and daily lives.

Prayer and liturgy are central to life at St Cuthbert's and are woven into the daily experiences of pupils, staff and the wider community. From the Nursery prayer room, which nurtures children's earliest spiritual development, to the rich pattern of prayer reflecting the Church's liturgical year, opportunities for faith formation are deeply embedded throughout school life. Creative initiatives such as prayer ribbons and prayer journals help pupils develop a personal relationship with God, while Rosary Club and seasonal liturgies encourage active participation

in the life of the Church. The impact of prayer and liturgy is evident across the school community, with stakeholders highlighting the powerful and profound impact the Key Stage 2 portrayal of the Stations of the Cross has. Staff are inspiring role models whose commitment to prayer is reflected in their enthusiastic participation. Pupils contribute confidently through music, art and liturgical ministries, enriching worship through creativity and engagement. Prayer spaces across the school, including the prayer garden, are imaginative, well maintained and highly valued by pupils. These spaces extend opportunities for prayer beyond the classroom and into family life. Strong partnerships with families and the parish further strengthen pupils' spiritual development, ensuring a vibrant, authentic and flourishing prayer life throughout the school community.

Leaders and governors place prayer and liturgy at the heart of St Cuthbert's. The school's policy for prayer and liturgy is carefully constructed ensuring it remains a practical and effective guide for planning and leading worship. Opportunities for prayer are thoughtfully embedded within the daily and weekly rhythm of the school, making them routine, authentic and meaningful. Leaders and governors demonstrate a clear understanding of the progressive skills required for participation in prayer and liturgy. Through a carefully planned programme of formation, pupils develop increasing confidence in ministering and participating in worship as they move through the school. This is evident in the maturity and reverence with which pupils engage in prayer and liturgical experiences. The liturgical calendar is planned to ensure regular opportunities for the celebration of Mass, Holy Days of Obligation, reconciliation services and significant feast days. Parents and parishioners value the weekly opportunities for Mass within school. Leaders and governors provide regular formation opportunities for staff, parents and pupils, fostering a deeper understanding of Catholic prayer and worship. There is a tangible commitment and genuine desire to provide high-quality, reverent and spiritually enriching experiences of prayer and liturgy for the whole school community.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Cuthberts Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	149036
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3943302
Full postal address of the school	Grindon Lane, Sunderland, SR4 8HP
School phone number	0191 5285094
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Jane Ward
Chair of Governors	Mr Paul Cook
School Website	www.stcuthbertsprimaryschool.co.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	02 May 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The Inspection Team

Claire Garbutt	Lead
Ruth Whyte	

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