



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

URN: 147929

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

04 February 2026 – 04 February 2026

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 RE

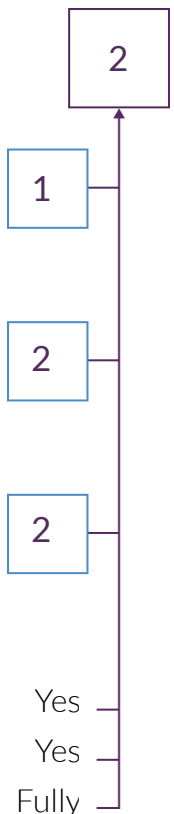
Collective worship (p.7)

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



What the school does well

- St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a caring and distinctively Catholic school community with a strong commitment to the needs of the most vulnerable.
- Governors, senior leaders and all staff are passionately committed to ensuring that pupils know they are loved by God, and can share this love with others. They are ambitious and constantly seek ways to develop provision.
- Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons because the teaching is always at least good. Teachers' use of questioning during lessons is of high quality.
- Behaviour is consistently good across the school. Pupils demonstrate high levels of respect for each other, and for the staff.
- Prayer plays a central role in daily school life and often includes joyful singing.

What the school needs to improve

- Review the school's mission, to ensure its values are fully understood, and embedded, and pupils and staff can articulate how the mission inspires them to act.
- Ensure that, when pupils evaluate the prayer and worship they have planned and led, they focus on the personal impact of these experiences, reflect on how they will adapt and improve future acts of worship and prayer, and act on this impact in their lives.
- Ensure that in Religious Education lessons, pupils experience a wide and creative variety of learning activities.

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

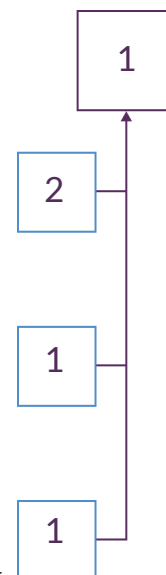
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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 the school's Catholic ethos and know its mission to 'Shine among them like the stars, lighting up the sky'. They know that God loves them, and they feel safe and happy. Pupils are developing an understanding of Catholic social teaching principles, including caring for our Common Home, supporting the vulnerable, and working together for peace. The Mini-Vinnies group act on these principles through various community and charity activities provided by the school, including visiting the local care home to sing carols, making greetings cards for residents, collecting litter in the nearby park, making poppy crosses for Remembrance Sunday and collecting for the local food bank. They craft items to sell at summer and Christmas fairs, and support national charities such as Cafod, Children in Need, and Comic Relief. They have contributed to a project providing clean water to a village in Ghana. Furthermore, pupils know about and respect people of other faiths. Pupils demonstrate deep respect for each other and themselves. Behaviour throughout the school is consistently good, both in lessons and at other times of day. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have to take lead roles in the faith life of the school, such as whole school celebrations and talks to parishioners about Live Simply.

The school's ethos places the Church's educational mission at its heart. The mission is inspired by scripture and is frequently acknowledged by both pupils and staff. However, on occasions pupils struggle to connect it with the school's values, such as Catholic social teaching, and the community or charitable activities they participate in. Staff work hard to

celebrate the school's mission in all aspects of daily life. They offer pupils a wide variety of opportunities to live their faith. There is a noticeable sense of community, reflected in the quality of relationships and the strong culture of welcome. The staff provide exceptional pastoral care, demonstrating a firm commitment to the most vulnerable pupils and those who find learning more challenging. Although this is a small school, it has a big heart, and while space is limited, all areas of the building and grounds are used effectively to witness to the Catholic identity. The provision of relationships, sex and health education is well planned and complies with the teachings of the Church.

Leaders and governors are dedicated and highly ambitious. They have high levels of commitment and are passionate supporters of the school's Catholic identity. They collaborate closely with the diocese and the Bishop Chadwick Catholic Education Trust (BCCET). A partnership, with a neighbouring Catholic school provides opportunities to share expertise, best practice, resources, and training, benefiting both schools. External providers, like the local Cafod ambassador, collaborate with pupils on initiatives such as the Live Simply Award. Despite practical challenges around the size and timetabling of spaces such as the hall, leaders work hard to involve parents and parishioners in the school's faith life, including Mass, stay and pray, and other special celebrations. Parents are very supportive and appreciate opportunities to be involved in the school's faith life. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained. Resources are targeted at pupils and families with the greatest need. A new Early Years space is under construction, with funding from the BCCET. Catholic life is seen as a core responsibility for leaders. There is an explicit commitment to staff wellbeing. The taught curriculum is based on a Catholic understanding of the world, though planning does not make deliberate connections with other subjects. Effective systems are in place to monitor, analyse, and self-challenge, ensuring leaders have an accurate understanding of the school.

Religious education

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 key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

2

Provision

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

2

Leadership

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

1

2

Pupils at St Mary's engage well in lessons, relative to their age and ability. This means that they develop good levels of religious literacy and can speak with confidence about what they have learned in their religious education lessons. They make good progress as they move through the school. Consequently, pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well. Given their age and capacity, they develop a confident level of knowledge and can reflect spiritually and ethically. Older pupils easily reference and reflect on parables such as The Two Sons, or can consider the stories of Noah, or Ruth and Naomi, from the Old Testament. Younger pupils retell the parables of The Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son and identify the lessons to be learnt from both. The youngest pupils learn the sequence of parts of the Mass and know colours or liturgical season we are in. Lesson activities are usually appropriate for pupils' age and ability. Whilst behaviour is good and almost all pupils enjoy their lessons, a small proportion appear disengaged, because activities are not varied, active, or creative enough.

Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and understand how their pupils learn. They are committed to helping pupils achieve their best. They organise educational trips, such as farm visits or residential experiences, to make learning in religious education more interesting and relevant. Teachers use questions skilfully and adapt their questions to help pupils learn more effectively. Pupils use feedback and marking to improve their work. Teachers regularly prompt pupils to think more carefully about their answers, using questions

such as 'Why?' and 'How?'. Lessons always begin with a review of prior learning. These are opportunities for them to remember, for example, the main elements of Mass, or aspects of St Francis' life, such as his love of animals and his rejection of his family's wealth. The parish priest supports learning where appropriate, for example, in the oldest class, to talk about his vocation. There are clear systems in place to reward and motivate pupils, including weekly awards presented by the headteacher. Teachers carefully plan lessons that provide pupils with opportunities to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways. However, these opportunities are largely limited to presenting knowledge through writing, rather than through broader forms of expression and activities.

Leaders and governors ensure that religious education has at least full parity with other core subjects. Staff training, resourcing, and timetabling are given the highest priority. A notable financial commitment from governors and the BCCET is the construction of a new Early Years classroom, intended to further improve teaching options and outcomes for pupils. Leaders ensure that the curriculum faithfully reflects the expectations of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*. The school is preparing to introduce a new nationally approved religious education programme in September 2026, and staff training is well underway for this. The subject leader and headteacher have an inspiring vision for the teaching of religious education and work hard, in partnership with a neighbouring Catholic school, to ensure all staff have the same vision, and are well prepared. This results in teaching being at least consistently good across the school. Leaders share their expertise with other diocesan colleagues. Furthermore they ensure the religious education curriculum is thoughtfully planned and delivered to address the needs of different year groups, and individuals. Leaders and governors have appropriate mechanisms in place to monitor religious education provision, have an accurate understanding of the school's strategic performance, and work together to improve.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

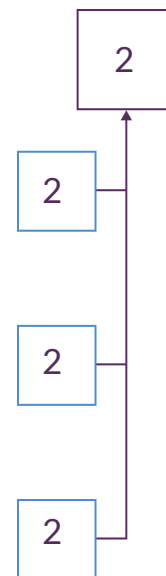
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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



Pupils respond well to their prayer experiences, participating with reverence and peaceful reflection. They are respectful and calm, responding appropriately to brief questioning or simple reflective tasks given by their peers or teachers. A strength of prayer and worship is the enthusiastic singing of hymns and songs, for example Shine and Choose to be a Light, which further enhance their engagement. The gospel is acknowledged joyfully with sung acclamations, often accompanied by hand gestures, which younger pupils especially enjoy. Pupils particularly benefit from prayer experiences that include moments of silence, reflection, background music, scripture, imagery and symbols or sacred artefacts. They have a good understanding of the liturgical year and its associated colours. The parish priest is a well-respected member of the community and pupils speak highly of him. Relevant to their age and ability, pupils develop the skills needed to plan and deliver class and whole-school celebrations of the word, though some low-level disengagement is evident in older pupils. All pupils have opportunities to evaluate their prayer experiences, but do not readily articulate how prayer has inspired them to act or how it shapes their self-understanding.

Prayer and liturgy is central to the life of the school, in all routine gatherings for pupils, parents and staff. Traditional prayers, such as the Benedictus, the Our Father, and more spontaneous prayers during celebrations of the word are part of everyday practice. Creative celebrations are planned throughout the year, including a recent celebration of the word to mark the end of the Jubilee Year of Hope, stay and pray sessions, and the Lights Out at

Christmas initiative. Scripture is always appropriate for the time of year or the celebration's theme. Teachers ensure older pupils are given challenging, longer passages to read and reflect on. These older pupils can often identify the location of a specific passage in the Bible. Staff, including senior leaders, are inspiring role models. The Rosary Club, in May and October, is led by the Mini-Vinnies. Simple prayer bags are sent home so families can pray together during Advent and Lent. Staff are skilled in helping pupils to plan and lead. They ensure that pupils have roles in prayer and worship. The school uses recorded music, online music and hymns, to enhance prayer. Effective use is made of available space, staff ensure that there are places for spontaneous and focused prayer in classrooms and shared areas such as the hall and external grounds. Mass is regularly celebrated by the parish priest in school.

Leaders use the BCCET's annual plan for prayer and liturgies, adapting this to its own needs where required. They ensure that activities are appropriate for pupils' age and ability, and that, as they progress through the school, that the pupils acquire a range of participation and leadership skills. Holy days, special feasts and other significant moments, such as the beginning of a new year, are celebrated with Mass. Parents and parishioners often attend, and appreciate these opportunities. Leaders have a comprehensive and confident understanding of the importance of prayer within the Catholic tradition. Leaders ensure that staff receive effective training and have access to activities that support their spiritual growth, often collaborating with a partner school on these. Additionally, leaders assist other staff in planning and leading effective prayer experiences. Resourcing the school's prayer life is a key priority for leaders. As a consequence, pupils and staff provide engaging experiences throughout the school year. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of prayer and worship experiences to identify opportunities for improvement. Pupils regularly evaluate their prayer times, but these evaluations are primarily focused on performative aspects and are not systematically integrated into the school's self-improvement cycle

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	147929
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	9133505
Full postal address of the school	, Wingate, TS28 5AN
School phone number	01429 838294
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Julie Hill
Chair of Governors	Mr Stephen Carter
School Website	www.st-marys-pri.durham.sch.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	4 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	22 November 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The Inspection Team

Mark Brennan Lead

Lisa Hoey

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