



## St Mary's Catholic Primary School

URN: 149058

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

21 January 2026 – 22 January 2026

### Summary of key findings

#### Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

1

#### 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 RE

1

#### Collective worship (p.7)

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

1

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 any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

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

Fully

## What the school does well

St Mary's Catholic Primary School has a warm and welcoming atmosphere, deeply rooted in its Catholic identity and mission, which is proudly proclaimed and enthusiastically lived by everyone.

St Mary's is fortunate to have strong and dedicated leaders, who are highly experienced and deeply committed to ensuring that every pupil feels special and loved by God.

Behaviour is outstanding throughout the school. Pupils show great respect for themselves and for each other. They listen and collaborate extremely effectively. They display significant independence and confidence, and they can engage in deep conversations with ease.

Pupils at St Mary's achieve a high standard in religious education, particularly by the end of their time here. They take pride in their books, which are presented beautifully. Throughout the school, students demonstrate a strong understanding of their faith and articulate and reference this knowledge exceptionally well.

Pupils actively participate in, and often lead, prayer and celebrations of the word at school and in the parish church. They consistently demonstrate reverence, reflection, respectful attentiveness, and engagement during these times.

## What the school needs to improve

Develop spaces, where pupils, staff, parents, and the wider community can gather to pray and worship in a wide variety of formats and be reminded of God's love.

Create opportunities for pupils to listen to, and sing a wide and creative range of both traditional and modern hymns during prayer and worship.

Ensure that the monitoring of provision and outcomes by all leaders is rigorous, strategic and systematic, so that it leads to constant improvement.

## 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

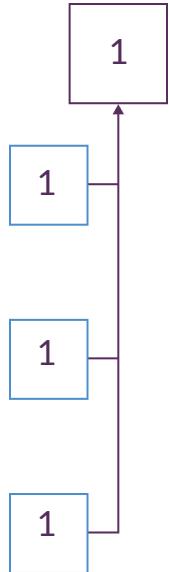
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

#### 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 at St Mary's Catholic Primary School have a strong sense of their Catholic identity and are clearly proud of it. They enjoy opportunities that promote their mission: 'I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.' They are happy, confident, and feel safe. Catholic social teaching and virtues are embedded across the school. Appropriate to their age, they articulate how these principles inspire them to think and act. They regularly visit the local care home, and engage in various charitable activities, supporting the Striding for Strokes sponsored walk, collecting for the local food bank, and Christmas present shoeboxes, donating harvest hampers to local residents, and supporting a toilet twinning initiative. They are passionate about caring for their school hens and looking after the earth. Pupils enjoy numerous other events that enhance their community and faith experience, including the 'Turn Barny Pink' initiative, MacMillan coffee mornings, World Mental Health Day, and the Jubilee Year of Hope. Pupils demonstrate high levels of self-respect, and respect for others. They collaborate with minimal adult direction or supervision. Pupils demonstrate respect for the faith and traditions of others. Behaviour throughout the school is exemplary. The Faith in Action team works with senior leaders and staff to ensure their faith life flourishes.

The school's mission statement is displayed throughout the school. Pupils know it and readily participate in activities that bring it to life. There is a warm, inclusive community atmosphere. One parent said, 'This is a wonderful school, where all feel valued, supported and welcome'. Staff are exemplary role models, consistently witnessing to their Catholic ethos. The school

works hard to provide support and encouragement to pupils and families who are disadvantaged or find learning more challenging. Several parents praise the staff for the care and support offered to their children. The well-planned chaplaincy provision is supported enthusiastically by the parish priest, who is a frequent and valued visitor. Relationships education is in line with diocesan guidelines. The internal environment is a strong and vibrant witness to the school's ethos and mission. Spaces in classrooms and on corridors are dedicated as focus points for prayer, and inspiring displays, posters, banners and artwork are reminders of the values that Jesus asks us to live up to, in our daily lives. Leaders are looking for further opportunities to extend this provision to make it more accessible and inclusive for the wider community to celebrate and pray together.

All leaders clearly articulate the Church's mission in education, guided always by Christ's example. They respond proactively to diocesan initiatives and work closely with other schools, especially within the Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust (BHCET). Regular activities enhance the school's faith life, fostering a flourishing partnership with parents and parish. Parents support the school and the headteacher, stating, 'School is an extension of our family.' They are well informed through the website, newsletters, Facebook, and text messages. Resources prioritise those in greatest need. There is a commitment to service and the common good. Leaders show respect for staff well-being, especially during challenging moments in their lives. The curriculum includes religious education at its core, with efforts to integrate a Catholic understanding of the world through virtues and social teaching. They demonstrate a commitment to raising pupils' awareness of climate change, and achieved the Live Simply Award last year. Pupils in the Faith in Action team contribute to Catholic life initiatives with energy and confidence, often suggesting charitable activities and good works themselves. Governors are involved in the school's life, taking pride in all it achieves and are frequent visitors. However, their monitoring of Catholic life is not systematic or rigorous enough.

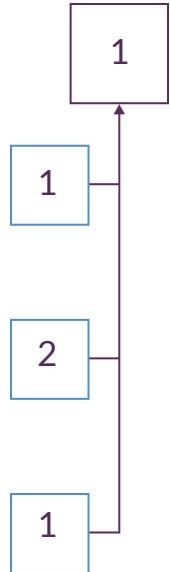
## Religious education

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



#### 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 display a high level of knowledge appropriate to their age, particularly in the older classes. They demonstrate impressive religious literacy and readily discuss and explore their faith and understanding with their peers and teachers. Pupils with special educational needs receive strong support from caring, experienced staff, enabling them to achieve successful outcomes. In lessons, pupils can easily reference prior learning, such as the lives of saints, the letters written by St Paul, parables, the names of holy books like the Bible, and church furniture such as the thurible and the tabernacle. They are also familiar with important Church documents, such as Laudato Si. Pupils demonstrate exceptional organisational skills during individual and collaborative tasks, maintaining focus for extended periods with minimal adult intervention. The quality of presentation in books is consistently high, reflecting good progress throughout their time at school. Pupils enjoy their learning and remain engaged and interested, resulting in outstanding behaviour in lessons. Feedback and marking from teachers, both informal and formal, help to ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of their progress and what they need to do to improve. By the time they leave, their attainment is consistently above average compared to other core subjects.

Teachers have high expectations of pupils and provide relevant and effective feedback to help progress learning. Their subject knowledge is good and all teachers have a deep commitment to improving their practice. Effective systems are in place to celebrate pupils' achievements and motivate them, including the awarding of stickers, stamps, and certificates. Pupils,

appropriate to their age, can use the feedback they receive to improve their work. These are linked to the school's virtues and Catholic social teaching principles. They help all pupils feel their efforts are valued. Resources enhance learning effectively and include skilled classroom support staff. The support for pupils facing learning challenges is focused and excellent. Teaching is adapted where appropriate, ensuring good learning progress. Teachers are committed to ensuring pupils understand the relevance of what they learn in lessons and its implications for their lives beyond school. Teaching is good, and is strongest in Key Stage 2. In strong lessons, pupils are given time to reflect, discuss, and engage in active tasks, both independently and collaboratively. They are asked open questions and challenged to provide high-quality answers. In one older class, a pupil was asked to think of a better word than 'changed' when discussing St Paul's conversion. He immediately responded with 'transformed'.

The school uses an approved religious education resource to support the delivery of the Religious Education Curriculum Directory. There is core parity with other subjects in terms of funding, physical resources, time allocation and training opportunities for staff. They appreciate the training they receive from school leaders, the diocese and the BHCET. New staff particularly appreciate the support they receive, which helps them quickly gain confidence in their subject knowledge where needed. Leaders provide additional enrichment activities for pupils, such as residential retreats, opportunities to learn an instrument or join the school choir, and visits to the parish church or local care home. The subject leader, who is also the headteacher, has expertise and a deep personal vocation as a Catholic educator. She generously shares this commitment with colleagues, both in the school and within the BHCET. Monitoring of religious education outcomes and provision is carried out by enthusiastic governors. They are often in school for events such as assemblies and demonstrate an awareness of the current, and future strategic needs of the school. However, this monitoring is not rigorous, systematic, and directly linked to identified school improvement objectives.

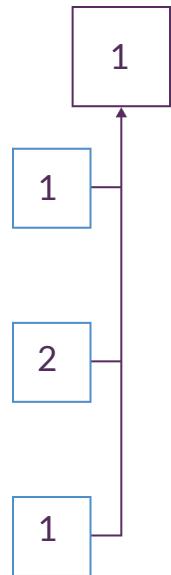
## Collective worship

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 enjoy their prayer and liturgy activities, in class and as a whole-school community.

Alongside traditional prayers, they experience more creative formats such as crafting cards and ornaments, making prayer wheels, venerating a pilgrimage cross, creating kindness rocks, constructing prayer trees and keeping personal prayer journals. They particularly enjoy taking home Advent, Lent, and Rosary prayer bags at the appropriate times throughout the year, so they can pray with their families. They respond positively to prayer and celebrations of the word. Pupils consistently demonstrate respect, reverence, and reflection. They read and understand short passages of scripture as part of their prayer life. In the older classes, they can engage with longer passages of scripture. They collaborate exceptionally well, with peers and adults, and as they move through the school they acquire the skills to plan, lead and evaluate simple celebrations of the word and prayer gatherings with confidence. Pupils say that prayer, 'shows our uniqueness in God's eyes', 'It feels personal to me and Jesus', 'It helps me to know we are all different but the same'. Relative to their age and capacity, pupils can discuss how prayer influences their actions. They understand the cycle of the liturgical year and the colours associated with it.

Prayer is at the absolute heart of the school day. There is a secure and natural pattern of daily prayer. Senior leaders are excellent examples of outstanding practice and personal faith commitment. Teachers and support staff have a good understanding of the liturgical norms of the Church, enabling them to model the skills needed to participate in, and eventually plan

and lead prayer themselves. Internally, displays and prayer spaces are a clear and genuine witness to the ethos of the school, referencing the school mission, inspiring scripture, Catholic social teaching, Christian virtues, the work of the Faith in Action team and charitable works. Resourcing for prayer and liturgy is appropriate. Parents appreciate the opportunities offered to participate in the prayer activities of the school, especially the termly family Masses at church, occasional stay and pray sessions, and the travelling prayer bags. The school does not yet have a dedicated prayer space for pupils, parents, parishioners and families to pray and worship together. Music and singing during worship does not consistently provide enhanced and stimulating experiences for pupils.

The prayer and liturgy policy is well structured, covering a variety of celebrations and liturgies throughout the year. Holy days and special feasts for example those linked to the school's patroness, Our Lady, Epiphany and the beginning and end of the school year are appropriately celebrated with Mass. Harvest and Remembrance celebrations are also included. The recent focus on reciting traditional Catholic prayers every Tuesday is already showing positive results. Leaders including governors are strongly committed to ensuring that pupils progressively learn the skills needed to plan, lead, and evaluate their prayers. The parish priest leads a fortnightly prayer group, which pupils look forward to and enjoy. Leaders are strongly committed to staff training. This training provides them with a secure understanding of the centrality of prayer in school life. School leaders place a high priority on including pupils in the evaluation of their prayer and liturgy. Numerous prayer experiences are offered through visits to the church and in school worship. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is not offered directly through the school. The Faith in Action team often take leading roles in whole school worship and are involved in evaluating the prayer life of the school.

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	149058
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	9133461
Full postal address of the school	Birch Road, , Barnard Castle, DL12 8JR
School phone number	01833 637029
Executive Headteacher	
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Lesley Ann Box
Chair of Governors	Mrs Emma Curran
School Website	stmarysbc.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	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	22 June 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

## The Inspection Team

Mark Brennan	Lead
Nicola Noble	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