



# St Michael's Catholic Academy Billingham

URN: 139656

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of Bishop Stephen Wright, Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

09-10 April 2025

## 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

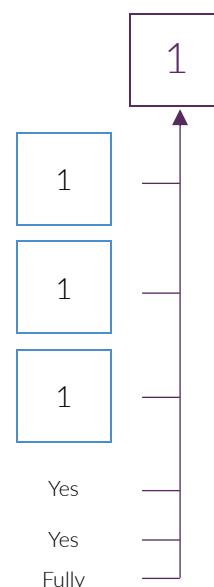
#### Collective worship (p.7)

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



## Compliance statement

- St Michael's Catholic Academy is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- St Michael's Catholic Academy is fully compliant with the requirements of the Diocesan Bishop.
- St Michael's Catholic Academy has fully responded to all areas for improvement from the last inspection.

## What the school does well

- This is a welcoming, inclusive, genuine and authentic Catholic school where students and staff 'love to be', where all students feel valued, cared for, loved and included. The school goes the extra mile to support those in the greatest need and to serve the wider community.
- The school provides an outstanding array of chaplaincy opportunities which students regularly take leadership of.
- The leaders of the school are visionary; constantly striving to inspire students and staff to embrace and develop their own faith.
- The religious education department is staffed by passionate and talented subject specialists who endeavour to make religious education exciting and inspiring for all students.
- The experience of prayer and liturgy at this school engages students deeply and powerfully. The school utilises a wide range of innovative approaches to collective worship.

## What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that there is greater consistency with questioning in lessons to maximise deeper thinking amongst students.
- Consider the different level and skills of students in form prayer time so that all acts of worship are accessible to all students.

## 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



Students love being members of St Michael's Catholic Academy. They feel welcomed, valued and safe. One student commented that their favourite thing about this school was their relationships with the teachers. They feel that it is a true faith community, and they fully embrace the school's mission 'to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly'. This leads to students who are inspired into action and who regularly take the initiative to lead innovative social action projects for a variety of causes including the Billingham Family Hub, the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) and the '4Louis' charity. Students are inspired into action by Catholic social teaching, which is deeply embedded in their hearts. Students demonstrate exceptional respect for each other, which leads to students of all faiths and none feeling valued at this school. Students embrace the wide variety of lay chaplaincy opportunities such as the Faith in Action award, SVP groups, Catholic social teaching councils and trips to FLAME festival, Rome and Holy Island. Participation rates in these opportunities are impressive.

Staff exemplify the school's mission statement and actively seek out opportunities to be involved and lead the Catholic life and mission of the school. Staff know that they are in true service to the children, their families and the local community. They describe this school to be a family, a haven and a community. Pastoral care is exemplary; staff seek every opportunity to support the most vulnerable and work with an array of external agencies including the parish and mental health support agencies such as MIND and Daisy Chain. This ensures that students know they are all loved, supported and cared for. Staff ensure that this school is a beacon of Christ's love for the community it serves. Sacred spaces around the school are beautiful. One student described the chapel as, 'an oasis of peace and calm'. The school's Holocaust Memorial is humbling. Staff stand in inspirational solidarity with students and staff of other faith traditions,

for example by collectively fasting with staff and students of the Muslim faith during Ramadan. This leads to a culture of inclusion in which diversity is celebrated, and members of other faith traditions feel valued. The relationships, sex and health education programme is well-planned and firmly rooted in Church teaching.

Leaders and governors ensure that Christ is at the heart of every decision. As a result, faith is lived out by everyone, and students and staff are fully immersed in the Church's mission. The Headteacher epitomises what a true Catholic servant leader is called to be. She has inspired her team to create a truly, 'honest, authentic and lived faith community' which has led to students and staff calling St Michael's their, 'spiritual family' and their, 'home from home'. The dignity and rights of all staff are given the highest priority. Staff commented that the Headteacher, 'sees the potential in every staff member' and that she invests heavily in staff development. As a result of her exemplary care, staff retention is exceptional. She has created a genuine culture of love within this school. Leaders are building strong links with the new parish priest and the priest's support and involvement is outstanding. Leaders and governors place the highest emphasis on the Catholic life and mission of the school and the appointment of an Assistant Headteacher has led to transformational change. Leaders have created an exceptional programme of Catholic life and mission professional development for both new and existing staff. Staff felt this gave them the confidence and the skills to help them live out the Church's mission in this school.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

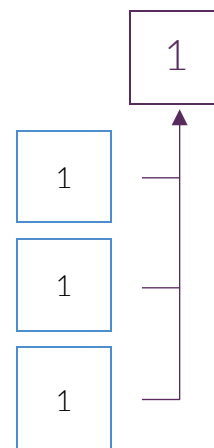
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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 show an outstanding depth of knowledge and excellent religious literacy in religious education. They can confidently and with great theological accuracy use key religious terms such as Fratelli Tutti, Brit Milah, transubstantiation and Laudato Si. Students are mastering key skills such as the ability to understand a wide range of beliefs, discern differing views and respond to the demands of religious life. The emphasis on skill development and the deepening of religious literacy is leading to an impressive increase in pupil outcomes at Key Stage 4. Students speak with confidence about their love of religious education. Many students stated that they know their teachers care and want the best for them. Many articulated that religious education was their favourite subject and that their teachers always make the lessons fun. Students are enthusiastic about religious education, they concentrate exceptionally well and as a result they take great pride in the work that they produce, and they are keen to meet the high expectations that their teachers model in lessons. Students understand how well they are doing in religious education and can identify what they need to do to improve further.

Teachers of religious education are all passionate subject specialists, and they use their knowledge and skills to enthuse, inspire and motivate learners. Teachers model high expectations and demonstrate a true love for their vocation in Catholic education. They ensure that all pupils can write reflective, theological and extended answers and students take pride in the opportunity to do this. Presentation of work uses a variety of forms to ensure progress including written reflections, artwork and displays. Staff embrace the opportunity to regularly celebrate students' work and the school's 'What Went Well Wednesdays' initiative deeply motivates students to create work that is of a constantly excellent standard. Students are keen to show their learning and explain the theology behind what they have created.

The Headteacher personally praises students for their good work and holds a refreshment celebration for some of the best work produced by students each week. Teachers in the department give students significant opportunities to engage in purposeful reflection in religious education lessons. Students are often taken to the chapel to discuss and discern ethical or philosophical issues that they have been studying in a reflective space. This leads to students becoming passionate and motivated theologians who can reflect spiritually upon a wide variety of teachings, beliefs and practices. In most lessons questioning is used to maximise deeper thinking amongst students.

The religious education department is led by an outstanding and inspirational subject leader who has a clear vision for outstanding teaching and learning. She supports her department to produce the highest quality lessons and has developed a culture of collaborative working to utilise the gifts and talents of all her department. Staff called the subject leader, 'the ultimate example of a curriculum leader who is truly a servant'. This has led to robust planning and to the new *Religious Education Directory* (RED) being seamlessly embedded within the religious education curriculum. The RED has been thoughtfully and creatively planned to maximise engagement and progress. Religious education is held in high regard by staff across the school and has often been called 'a trailblazer' for both teaching and learning initiatives and for student progress. Leaders and governors ensure that religious education receives full parity with other core curriculum subjects with regards to professional development, resourcing, timetabling, and staffing and they offer constant support and challenge to ensure the highest of standards in the department.

## 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

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

1

The experience of prayer and liturgy provided at St Michael's engages students deeply and leads them to full, active and conscious participation in their faith. Students are inspiring in their use of music within prayer and liturgy, and they are keen and proud to lead their peers in musical praise. They are also passionate about leading readings, prayers and reflections, which they do so skilfully. Students reflect on their experience of prayer and liturgy regularly and with confidence. Students can describe a wide variety of ways of praying and can articulate a clear understanding of the liturgical year. One student commented that she loved celebrations of the word because, 'they set me up for the day' and they, 'give me a sense of peace'. Students can clearly articulate the ways in which these experiences have shaped how they think about themselves and others. In form groups, students have also created outstanding prayer journals, and most students reflect deeply upon the prayer for each day. One student stated that, 'Prayer journaling helps me to reflect and understand my faith.'

Prayer and liturgy is central to the life of the school. Every day begins with prayer and every afternoon students have the opportunity to take part in the Examen which is created and led by students, teachers and support staff. Students commented that they find these experiences 'refreshing'. There is an impressive range of opportunities to engage in both traditional and creative expressions of worship including the rosary, Visio Divina, Lenten 'Walks of Witness' and a Marian procession that involves the wider parish, where students demonstrated boundless enthusiasm and excitement when sharing their experiences of it. Mass is offered weekly for form classes on a rotation and regular staff Mass is offered. These opportunities are highly valued and attendance is strong. Staff, including senior leaders, are excellent models of good practice as leaders and participants of prayer and liturgy.

The school's policy on prayer and liturgy is thoughtfully formulated, it is accessible to all staff and used as a reference point when preparing prayer and liturgy. Leaders have given key staff time to work with each form class to help them construct meaningful acts of worship which inspire and impact those who attend. Leaders have embedded the policy amongst staff that, 'we are all chaplains'. This has led to a passionate drive from all staff to help develop the faith and worship experiences of all students. The newly appointed parish priest has transformed the sacramental preparation course for confirmation, and this has led to a rapid increase in students choosing to become confirmed and they are enthusiastic in their participation. The parish priest is devoted to serving this community and ensures that students have regular access to the Eucharist. Leaders have created an inspiring professional development programme called Foundation Stones. This immerses new staff in the importance of prayer and liturgy. It equips them with the relevant knowledge and skills to plan meaningful acts of prayer and liturgy. Staff constantly commented how supportive, engaging and useful this course was for them. One member of staff chose to convert to Catholicism because of this programme, stating that it had led to him having a spiritual awakening. Leaders and governors are committed to their evaluation, support and challenge and they have an inspiring vision for how they want prayer and liturgy to develop. Leaders do not always consider the different level and skill of every student in form prayer time therefore, some acts of worship are not fully accessible to all students. Leaders have created an outstanding worshipping community, which has become a beacon of faith.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Michael's Catholic Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	139656
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8084002
Full postal address of the school	St Michael's Catholic Academy, Beamish road, Billingham, Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland, TS23 3DX.
School phone number	01642 870 003
Headteacher	Clare Humble
Chair of governors	Maurice Whelan
School Website	<a href="http://www.stmichaels.bhcet.org.uk">http://www.stmichaels.bhcet.org.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	February 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

## The inspection team

Andrew Young	Lead
Francesca Craik	Team
Rachael Blackburn	Team
Lisa Ord	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