

# SS Mary & John Catholic Primary School

URN: 146268

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Birmingham

11–12 July 2024

## 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

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 curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference

Yes

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

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

Fully

2

## What the school does well

- The school is a place of welcome where everyone knows they are safe, known for themselves, and nurtured.
- Staff know the community they serve and respond with generosity and authenticity to pupils' needs.
- Using the 'reflection of the day' in religious education lessons enables pupils to build on their prior learning sequentially.
- A daily prayer rhythm is embedded and central to the school's life.
- The school benefits from a range of well-cared-for prayer spaces which enable pupils to worship and reflect.

## What the school needs to improve

- Develop monitoring and self-evaluation processes so that well-targeted planning inspires strategic action, leading to further school improvement in Catholic life and mission, religious education, and prayer and liturgy.
- Ensure work in religious education consistently enables pupils to demonstrate their depth of understanding.
- Empower pupils to take a proactive leading role in responding to the demands of Catholic social teaching locally, nationally, and globally.

## 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

2

#### Provision

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

1

#### Leadership

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

2

2

The school's inclusive mission statement, 'Working together with God to achieve a better future for everyone', is known by all, recited regularly, and visually displayed throughout the school. Pupils know that they are loved and cared for as unique persons and feel safe. When asked what is best about SS Mary & John, one pupil responded, 'Staff are always willing to help you, no matter who you are'. While serving a diverse and disadvantaged community, staff provide the highest levels of pastoral care, meaning behaviour across the school is very good. Pupils are engaged in social action to help more vulnerable community members through membership in groups such as chaplaincy, Mini Vinnies, and Cafod. For example, these groups have written Christmas cards for older people, collected gift shoeboxes for asylum seekers, and raised charity money. Consequently, pupils respond well to opportunities to enact Catholic social teaching principles; however, many pupils do not have opportunities to take the lead in doing so. Pupils use technical vocabulary to make some connections between these actions and the teachings they enact but cannot always elaborate on them. For example, they mentioned the importance of 'the common good' but could not discuss this concept further.

There is a strong sense of family and embedded cultures of welcome and inclusivity at SS Mary & John. These reflect the school's mission and are evidenced at all levels, including governors, staff, pupils, and parents. Everyone witnesses the warm, welcoming nature of the school community, and people speak of 'Feeling loved as part of a family'. The school celebrates being a *School of Sanctuary* and holds an engaging annual refugee day. Diversity is celebrated and embraced as a gift from God. The staff know the community they serve and respond with generosity and authenticity to the children's needs, be they learning support needs or practical needs, such as providing uniforms. They go the extra mile; consequently, pupils, especially the

most vulnerable, feel a strong sense of security and belonging. The school's physical environment effectively witnesses to its Catholic identity and includes a crucifix and prayer corner in every classroom. Relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) is taught in a focused week once each term, following a diocesan-approved scheme. The programme is firmly rooted in Church teaching and celebrates a holistic vision of the human person. The school liaises with parents, informing them of the RSHE content as it is taught and fostering good working relationships.

Leaders and governors keep Christ at the heart of their school, witness to gospel values and live a preferential option for the poor. Leaders treat staff with respect for their dignity, resulting in a highly motivated and committed team. Leaders speak very positively about staff, which staff reciprocate because they feel supported and valued. School leaders have generously responded to another school's urgent need for support, thus generously putting itself at the service of the diocese. This action demonstrates leaders' conscious embodiment the Church's commitment to the pursuit of the common good by offering themselves in service to those in greatest need. The school actively participates in training opportunities offered by the diocese; consequently, staff are supported in their core Catholic life and mission responsibilities. The school has effective systems in place to engage with parents and carers. Warm and engaging relationships with parents were observed at the start of the school day. As a result, the vast majority of parents feel supported by the school. Systems are in place for leaders and governors to monitor and evaluate the Catholic life and mission of the school. However, they lack rigour and must be more robust to show impact and progress over time.

## 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

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

2

2

Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that religious education is given high status and treated as a special lesson. As a result, pupils see their work in religious education as 'distinct' and 'a gift to God'. Pupils with special educational needs or disability (SEND) are well-supported through adaptive teaching and scaffolding techniques and progress well. Pupils are religiously literate relative to their age and capacity; for example, they explained that they 'like going to Mass because it reminds me of Jesus' sacrifice'. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons, meaning they are engaged in their learning, and their behaviour is good. This is particularly true in Year 3, where excellent teacher-pupil relationships and creative teaching activities inject energy and fun into the classroom. However, work in religious education does not consistently enable pupils to demonstrate their depth of understanding because teachers do not sufficiently challenge them.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge because of the ongoing training and support provided by the school; for instance, teachers who teach the same year groups plan lessons together. All adults are deeply committed to the subject's value and communicate this effectively to their pupils. Using the 'reflection of the day' at the start of every religious education lesson enables pupils to build on their prior learning. At the end of the lesson, 'close the gap' activities are routinely used to consolidate learning, although pupils regularly offer a surface-level response without teachers challenging them to provide greater depth to their responses. This inconsistency is also reflected in pupils' written work. Planning is linked to pupils' current assessment; this helps pupils to consolidate learning and make good progress. Teachers plan challenging questions to extend pupils' learning; however, they do not routinely use further probing questions to allow pupils with higher prior attainment to extend their responses and deepen their learning in this context. Celebration of effort is evident throughout the school, with

pupils routinely praised in lessons; this leads to good levels of motivation from pupils. Teachers have an excellent understanding of the impact of religious education on pupils' moral and spiritual development and regularly give time and space for reflection during religious education. One child said, 'I like quiet time to pray in RE. It makes me feel calm.' A range of teaching strategies is used, particularly in Reception and Key Stage 1. However, lessons are sometimes led from the front, relying on PowerPoint presentations being spoken through, which restricts the pace of lessons and pupils' opportunity to make more progress.

Early career teachers (ECTs) appreciate the range of support offered, including planning partners, opportunities to observe religious education lessons in other classrooms, and moderation opportunities organised by the multi-academy company (MAC). All ECTs have attended the two-year support programme offered by the diocese. The link governor is knowledgeable because they meet with the subject leader regularly. The requirements of the *Religious Education Directory* are being followed; however, there are gaps in the units covered in some year groups. Leaders have provided a range of high-quality, age-appropriate enrichment experiences for all students, such as music-based retreat experiences and vocation day, which complement the religious education curriculum, *Laudato Si'* day, refugee day and a multi-faith day. The school aspires to restore its multi-faith visits to enhance its teaching about other religions and faiths but has yet to do this. Staff follow the feedback policy, showing that some expectations are embedded. However, there is a lack of clarity of expectation from leaders including coverage of the units and challenge for pupils with higher prior attainment. Moderation occurs, but the subsequent next steps are not clearly identified. Leaders' and governors' self-evaluation of religious education is insufficiently informed by monitoring and analysis and is shallow in its self-challenge.

## 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

2

#### Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

2

#### Leadership

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

2

2

Pupils respond well to a wide variety of experiences of prayer and liturgy. They confidently join and sing readily, especially in response to liturgical music resources. Prayer follows the 'gather, listen, respond and go forth' model and always includes sacred scripture. Pupils undertake ministries, such as altar serving, reading, leading prayers, preparing the class prayer space, monitoring and maintaining the classroom prayer corners and school prayer gardens, and being part of a choir. Pupils are always respectful in doing so. For example, a reflective atmosphere was maintained at a service in the school prayer garden, even as a gentle rain fell, and the service suddenly had to be moved inside. Key Stage 2 pupils work well with others to prepare prayer. For instance, at a whole school Mass in the parish church, a Year 5 boy led the singing of the gospel acclamation with actions. This engaged pupils and enabled them to participate joyfully. However, creative, vibrant pupil-led worship must still be developed to allow for students to respond in depth. Prayerful, spontaneous pupil responses were seen in Year 2, which indicates the underlying capacity for liturgical leadership, though this is not yet typical throughout the school.

A daily prayer rhythm is embedded and central to the school's life. This includes prayer at the start and end of each day and grace before meals. The school benefits from a range of well-cared-for prayer spaces which enable pupils to pray and reflect. There are opportunities for pupils to experience retreats; the use of external experts is much appreciated by all. As many pupils witnessed, 'It was very exciting to meet them in the flesh during our retreat day'. Various Catholic traditions include the opportunity for Mass and other provisions such as the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, and a May Procession. Scripture is used in all prayer times. Staff are good role models, and invitations to prayer are extended to parents and parishioners; prayer bags are sent home regularly. The school successfully introduced 'Stay and Pray' sessions with parents at

the start of the school day for each year group. These sessions were well attended; parents say, 'Prayer time with our children in school has been a beautiful and powerful experience. It gives us time and space to reflect.'

The school's excellent prayer and liturgy policy is well-formulated and sets clear expectations. Leaders have invested in a series of retreats, which have enhanced the school's prayer life. Staff feel well-supported to lead prayer and are now developing the skills to empower pupils to plan, organise, and lead it. Liturgical seasons are planned and celebrated, as are holy days and other significant times of grace, such as First Holy Communion and Confirmation. The religious education leader regularly communicates with the parish priest to organise Masses across the year and sacramental preparation meetings with parents. All staff attend the sacramental Masses for pupils, emphasising the sacraments' importance to them. Leaders understand various ways of praying that are part of the Catholic tradition and are familiar with the Church's liturgical sources, including the lectionary, the missal, and the calendar. However, there is a lack of evidence of a comprehensive strategy for building up participation skills and liturgical leadership as pupils progress through the school. There are examples of formation being provided through the MAC for leaders, though the impact is in its infancy.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	SS Mary & John Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	146268
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	330 2187
Full postal address of the school	Beaufort Road, Erdington, Birmingham, B23 7NB
School phone number	0121 382 3522
Headteacher	Mary Lynch
Chair of governing board	Maria Stirrop
School Website	<a href="http://www.stmryjon.net">www.stmryjon.net</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	St John Paul II Multi Academy
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	April 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

## The inspection team

Marina Smith  
Vivien McDonald  
Karyn Oakley

Lead  
Team  
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