

# St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School

URN: 101542

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster

25–26 June 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

1

#### Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

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

1

## Compliance statement

- The school is fully compliant with the 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

- The school is a truly inspiring reflection of its deep commitment to Catholic life and mission.
- Pupils display an exceptionally positive attitude towards their school and one another, creating a warm and respectful community.
- Singing is a strength with pupils confidently leading in solo performances that beautifully enrich the prayerful atmosphere, adding depth and reverence to worship.
- The school offers a wide range of rich, engaging and joyful experiences of prayer and liturgy.
- Pupils are thriving in religious education, developing excellent knowledge and skills, supported by passionate teachers who set high expectations for their pupils.

## What the school needs to improve

- Deepen pupils' understanding in religious education by more consistently promoting higher-order thinking across the curriculum.

## 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 in St Mary Magdalen's feel happy, safe, and confident, knowing they are loved and valued as unique individuals made in God's image. Pupils understand and live the teachings of Jesus, inspired by the gospel, Catholic social teaching, and the school's charism. They grow in virtue and actively care for others and the world around them. On our tour of the school, the head boy and head girl were eager to display how the school community is committed to following the teachings and example of Jesus. The school's Catholicity shines out through the high-quality displays, the majority of which feature the pupils' work. The Last Supper display, with the disciples made from eggs is particularly impressive. Pupils take the lead in living out Catholic social teaching, responding thoughtfully to needs, near and far, and they can clearly explain the faith behind their actions. They show genuine respect for their own dignity and for others. 'Teatime Tuesday' with the parishioners, where old and young, talk, share and laugh is a moment savoured by pupils in Year 5. Pupils deeply appreciate the school's chaplaincy, eagerly take on leadership roles, and actively engage in its life and mission.

The school is a joyful, welcoming community rooted in the Word of God, where Christ is at the centre and every person is valued and supported, especially the most vulnerable. Staff are inspiring role models who live out the school's Catholic mission through loving relationships, deep care for pupils and a strong sense of pastoral responsibility. The school environment beautifully reflects its Catholic identity, with thoughtful spaces that uphold human dignity and nurture spiritual growth. Pupils explained that every topic has a link to Catholic social teaching. The school values inclusion and diversity; the care and attention given to the quality of the school environment reflects the dignity of each person and contributes positively to their formation. The Remembrance display on the stairwell depicts white poppies for peace, purple poppies for

the animals that died during the war and black poppies representing the African and West Indian communities. Equality and inclusion were demonstrated again in the display on women's history month. The provision for relationship, sex and health education is carefully planned to ensure that it fully meets diocesan requirements, is firmly rooted in the teachings of the Church and celebrates a holistic vision of the human person.

Leaders and governors are joyful and inspiring in their commitment to the Church's mission in education, placing Christ at the centre of all they do. Their decisions consistently reflect the school's Catholic identity and purpose. The executive head teacher in all her decision making 'puts the children first' and has an inspirational vision for the school. Leaders are energised and determined to implement the strong vision of what their school should look like and have been strategic in making their model a reality. Strong partnerships with the diocese and a clear commitment to Catholic social teaching guide leaders in prioritising those most in need and caring for our common home and the common good. However, leaders should ensure pupils are able to articulate how their charitable actions impact others and link to Catholic social teaching. Staff are well-supported through meaningful professional development and thoughtful induction, helping everyone to understand, share in, and contribute to the Catholic life and mission of the school. The school's self-evaluation is a coherent reflection of rigorous monitoring, searching analysis and honest self-challenge, and is clearly and explicitly focused on the Catholic life and mission of the school.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

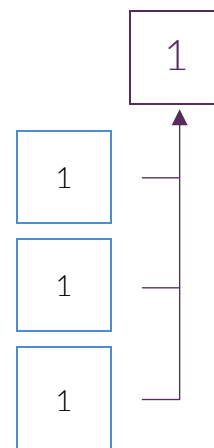
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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



Pupils, including those with additional needs, develop strong knowledge and skills in religious education, making excellent progress and achieving their best. They speak confidently and thoughtfully about their learning, showing deep curiosity, spiritual reflection and a growing awareness of how faith shapes everyday life. Pupils have strong religious literacy and readily and confidently reference scripture to demonstrate their understanding. This was seen consistently in all observations across the school. Pupils are highly engaged in their learning, producing creative, well-presented work that inspires others and reflects a deep commitment. They enjoy their learning and approach lessons with great interest and enthusiasm. Consequently, behaviour in lessons is outstanding. Pupils understand how to improve and can clearly explain their progress, leading to consistently strong outcomes, across all groups, over time. Pupils achieve above average attainment when compared with core curriculum subjects. This has been sustained for the last three years for almost all pupils.

Teachers bring strong subject knowledge and a deep commitment to religious education, setting high expectations and inspiring pupils through their passion and expertise. Religious education is the core of the core at St Mary Magdalen's. Each lesson commences by lighting a candle to welcome Jesus into their classroom. Teachers use questioning effectively and skilfully to deepen understanding. To consolidate pupils' understanding further, the school needs to ensure it consistently promotes higher-order thinking. Teachers celebrate effort, give clear, helpful feedback, and plan engaging lessons that support all learners, using creative approaches and high-quality resources to help every pupil thrive. They have a profound understanding of the impact religious education has on the moral and spiritual development of pupils, allowing time and space for purposeful reflection in lessons. In one year group the focus was on understanding how the legacy of Pope Leo XIII, and Pope Francis will impact on our current Pope. The hot

seating activity, with the nominated 'Pope' on each table, answering questions on Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, brought forth clear moral arguments. This highlighted the seamless links between Catholic social teaching, the Church's history and current church leadership. In another lesson observed, the teacher's skillful explanation was a foundation to inspire pupils to develop their understanding of 'What is heaven like for you?'

Leaders and governors ensure that the school curriculum for religious education is faithful to the *Religious Education Directory*. Leaders and governors give religious education the same parity as other core subjects, ensuring it is well-resourced, well-staffed and fully supported. Governors explained that the 'executive headteacher is always looking for more and she knows what she wants'. Leaders are deeply committed to providing regular, high-quality professional development that strengthens both subject knowledge and teaching practice. They have invested significantly in bespoke professional development and the impact of this is evident across the school. Each year group receives quality online training each half term. Staff feel well supported by this and the religious education leader is on hand to guide staff if additional support is required. Consequently, the curriculum is carefully planned and thoughtfully sequenced, growing in depth and challenge while meeting the needs of all learners at every stage. Leaders have an inspiring vision of outstanding teaching and learning and a high level of expertise in securing this vision. The induction of the new religious education lead utilised the expertise and experience of the RE lead at the Convent of Jesus and Mary, their federated school. This has had a great impact on standards and teacher understanding.

## 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

Pupils are deeply engaged in prayer and liturgy, showing reverence, joy and full participation through silence, song and thoughtful response. They have a strong understanding of Catholic prayer traditions and the liturgical year, confidently using a range of prayerful practices in school life. Pupils help plan and lead meaningful prayer and liturgy, working creatively with others and making thoughtful links to their learning and school experience. Pupils are rightly proud of their leadership and delivery of prayer and liturgy. The Mini Vinnies lead the Wednesday Word at the infant school each week. They plan class Masses and have set up prayer stations all around the school including one dedicated for staff. They lead with confidence, displaying maturity and reverence and told us that 'God guides them'. They recognise that their mission statement, which is their school prayer, 'is a good thing as it teaches us how to behave'. Pupils also facilitate the rosary in the prayer garden at lunchtime.

Prayer and liturgy are a natural part of daily life at the school, thoughtfully planned and rooted in the Church's rhythm, marking both joyful and sorrowful moments with care. Staff and pupils confidently lead creative, meaningful acts of worship that reflect the richness of Catholic tradition, with Scripture, music, and art woven beautifully throughout. Well-chosen scripture passages form the heart of prayer and liturgy and there is an intrinsic link between these and the whole celebration. The Year 6 prayer and liturgy in the prayer garden, on the theme of trust, demonstrated the talents of pupils: singing solo, linking faith and supporting the transition to Year 7. Prayer spaces across the school are welcoming, encouraging reflection and helping everyone feel connected to the spiritual life of the community. Singing greatly enhances prayer and liturgy. The Westminster Diocese Singing Programme is utilised by the school to great effect. Prayer was relevant, reflective and moving. In an observed Year 3 celebration, pupils welcomed the liturgy in various languages. The scripture at the centre was The Parable of the Seed. Each

pupil picked up their own seed, as the prayer leader read 'God knew all about you before you were born'. The teacher effectively created a calm, inclusive and welcoming prayer environment where each pupil was asked to reflect on one quality they would like, in order to be more like Jesus. The chapel and prayer garden are cherished and regularly used by staff and pupils. Time and attention are given to ensure that these spaces are well cared for and are conducive to prayer. Each class has a prayer book that is shared at home to develop the prayer life of pupils and their families. There is a flourishing partnership with the local parish which helps pupils participate more fully in the liturgy.

The school's policy on prayer and liturgy is carefully formulated, regularly reviewed, and fit for purpose. Leaders, including governors, thoughtfully nurture pupils' ability to participate in prayer and liturgy, with a clear strategy that grows with pupils as they mature in age and understanding. The school calendar is carefully planned to ensure regular opportunities for Mass and key liturgical celebrations, with the Sacrament of Reconciliation offered at meaningful points such as Lent and Advent. The centrality of prayer in the leadership vision resonates across the school. The authentic leadership of prayer and liturgy has created a spiritual environment where everyone can flourish and develop on their faith journey. Staff are well-supported to lead rich, engaging prayer experiences; leaders prioritise this through dedicated resources, ongoing evaluation, and valuing the voices of pupils and the wider community.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	101542
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3043505
Full postal address of the school	St Mary Magdalen's Catholic Primary School, Linacre Road, Willesden Green, London, NW2 5BB
School phone number	02084593159
Headteacher	Elsa Fonseca
Chair of governors	Robert Allan
School Website	<a href="http://www.marymag.brent.sch.uk">http://www.marymag.brent.sch.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	June 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

## The inspection team

Deirdre Finan  
Evelyn Ward

Lead  
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