

Notre Dame Catholic Secondary School

URN: 140737

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Diocesan Administrator of Plymouth

19–20 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

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

- A culture of welcome, inclusivity and support permeates all aspects of school life.
- The Notre Dame ethos is lived out through the range of provision for the pastoral care of students.
- The school's leadership has a clear vision for the school which is based on accurate self-evaluation.
- Leaders and governors have identified areas of development for the prayer life of the school and this focus is supported by knowledgeable staff.
- The members of the religious education department are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and committed to inspiring students to be reflective, enquiring young people.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop and implement a strategy to increase opportunities for all students to plan, lead and evaluate a range of prayer and liturgy reflective of their age and ability.
- Ensure a more consistent experience of tutor prayer for students.
- Within religious education ensure that feedback techniques fully reflect the needs of students and the impact of this is reflected within the planning.

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

Students understand and value the distinctive identity of the school as part of the Notre Dame family. They sing the school song with enthusiasm, are able to reflect on the life of Saint Julie and understand how the philosophy of 'head, hands, heart' affects the life of the school. They see the school as a supportive, inclusive and welcoming community where individuals matter. One pupil saying that 'If I had a crisis, I know I could go to someone'. Students understanding of Catholic social teaching is implicit rather than explicit, but they seek to put into practice the aims of Catholic social teaching through their concern for the environment, demonstrated for example through their rewilding project. their charity work and their desire to respect others' beliefs and cultures. The members of the GIFT (Growing in Faith Together) team value the opportunities this provides to support others in their faith journey however at present this is small team and their leadership roles need to be expanded. Members of the sixth form speak of positively choosing the school because of its ethos, with one student saying that, 'they regard us as people not products' and 'you know that even when you leave school the teachers will still care about you'.

The mission statement itself is in the process of being reviewed. However, the Notre Dame philosophy of 'teach what is necessary for life' is lived out through the whole of school life. This is clearly demonstrated through the pastoral care programme. The school is a Trauma Informed school, organises a club for the children of those in the military, and a young carers club. In addition, there is a mental health and wellbeing practitioner and a Kaleidoscope club to support bereaved students and parents. The work of the latter led to the school being recognised as England's first Compassionate School. Staff enthusiastically support this work as well as contributing to programmes like Year 7 retreats and joining in the school's charity work. The school is an exceptionally supportive, joyful and inclusive community with one member of staff

commenting, 'The school lives and breathes the word of the gospel and it is a pleasure to work here even as a non-Catholic as they truly stick to their ethos and values'. The chapel is a welcoming, well thought out space that reflects the ethos of the school and is used on a regular basis. One sixth form student explaining, for example, that it provided an opportunity to have a moment of reflection before doing an exam. The program for personal social and health education has been carefully planned through to the sixth form and is adaptive to the needs of students.

Leaders and governors are able to clearly articulate the mission of the church in education and give priority to ensuring that the Catholic ethos of the school is a lived reality. This is supported through the allocation of resources and training. Leaders are well regarded within the school and act as role models. Staff feel supported and that leaders are concerned about their well-being. The school works in partnership with the diocese, the Notre Dame federation, (recently hosting the annual Notre Dame Federation retreat), the local parish and supports initiatives within the wider church. The Year 7 retreats, for example, adopted the theme of 'People of Hope'. Governors are ambitious to support and develop the Catholic life of the school and carry out regular monitoring visits which enables them to challenge effectively. Leaders know the school well and through effective self-evaluation, which includes student voice, are able to set clear targets for school improvement.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

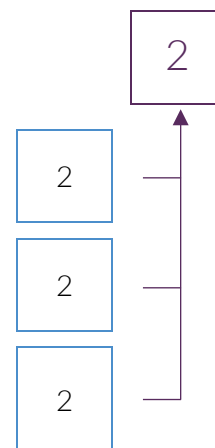
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 are developing secure knowledge and are confident in describing theological concepts. Students' religious literacy is strong. They confidently use and understand progressively more complex subject-specific vocabulary. They are able to think through issues and ask thoughtful questions. For example, when looking at the imagery connected with Christian burial one student reflected on the fact that the crown shown could either symbolise a crown of thorns signifying suffering or signify kingship. They understand the value of religious education appreciating the opportunities to explore their own and others' beliefs. The majority of students enjoy the subjects especially the opportunities for active learning, like taking part in a debate and as a consequence their behaviour within lessons is good. They are able to work independently and produce good quality work. The introduction of the assessment booklets has improved students' understanding of how to improve their work and the progress they are making however some students felt that more ongoing feedback would help them improve. Sixth form students speak highly of the 'Faith and Life' programme which they feel enables them to be more reflective as individuals and consider issues which are important to their lives. Those students doing A level philosophy and ethics speak highly of their course and the demand for this subject is increasing reflecting students increasingly positive views of religious education.

Teachers display high levels of authentic subject knowledge and confidence in delivering religious education. They are ambitious for their students and have recently embraced and developed more active learning techniques which encourage students to think more deeply. This also enables students to present their learning in different ways, through for example the use of art. These strategies have been welcomed by students. The new Religious Education Directory has been introduced in all of Key Stage 3 and there is a clear framework for planning and delivery. The change to a different GCSE has also resulted in more engagement in lessons.

Lessons on other faiths are planned into the curriculum and students value the opportunities to learn about other perspectives. Students are offered the opportunity to be reflective and consider what this information might mean to them personally. Although scaffolding takes place to support those students who require more structure this is not always as effective as it could be. Feedback is provided orally in class and through the use of assessments. However occasionally opportunities to correct misunderstandings are missed and there needs to be a closer link between assessment and planning. Where other adults are present in the classroom they are used effectively.

Leaders and governors ensure the curriculum meets the requirements of the Religious Education Directory (RED). They have been proactive in introducing the new RED to all of Key Stage 3. The subject leader is enthusiastic and knowledgeable and has a clear vision for the subject. Leaders have ensured that religious education practitioners have benefitted from high-quality training in subject knowledge as well as techniques to improve teaching, and learning. This has led to high-quality and adaptive teaching, and the provision of a carefully planned, sequential curriculum. The Ubuntu and Kairos programmes in Years 7 and 8 are incorporated into the religious education syllabus and provide students with time for reflection and an opportunity to connect faith to life. Monitoring by leaders and governors takes place on a regular basis and the views of students are included ensuring that priorities for improvement are clear.

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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

3

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

Students generally respond well to the opportunities provided for prayer and worship however their experience of tutor prayer is not consistent. This effects both their opportunities to actively participate and to actively plan and lead prayer. When prayer takes place outside of tutor time it is often more engaging and creative. The Year 7 pupils on retreat for example made their own lanterns for a procession down to the abbey church and were all invited to participate in creating a cross of light and reflecting on the theme of People of Hope. Those students who are part of the GIFT team, together with the senior students in the sixth form, do work with staff in planning and leading prayer. Through their participation in the whole school masses, special celebrations like Remembrance Day, Ash Wednesday and the Christmas carol service, students have the opportunity to learn about the liturgical life of the Church and have some understanding of the wide variety of prayers and experiences that are part of the Catholic tradition however they find it difficult to articulate the relevance of the liturgical year to the life of the school.

Prayer is central to the life of the school and relevant staff used their talents to enhance celebrations through for example the use of music. The lay chaplain and the school's leadership team are excellent role models and encourage and support other staff to be confident in their delivery of prayer. Within the school the chapel exemplifies the ethos of the school and is a well-used quiet reflective space. Around the school each subject area has a prayer board with a prayer specific to that subject and the entrance area displays highly visible signs of the Notre Dame ethos. In the school grounds there is a reflective garden created with the help of the Fire Brigade and students. This is a peaceful oasis and well used by the Kaleidoscope group. Pupils from other faiths are provided with space to support their own prayer requirements. The local clergy support the school on a regular basis and their visits are appreciated by students, who value

their opportunities to engage with clergy and learn from them. Some parents feel there could be greater opportunities to participate in the school's prayer life.

There is a clear policy for prayer and worship. The school calendar is planned in advance to provide opportunities for the celebrations of the Eucharist, holy days and the Sacrament of reconciliation. At the start of the school year the school community is involved in the blessing of the school site. The reintroduction of Founders Day has been welcomed by pupils and staff and this year was planned by sixth form students. It provides another opportunity to reinforce the distinctive ethos of the school. Leaders including governors recognise the importance of prayer within the school community and have introduced a consistent monitored structured program for tutor prayer. Training for staff is in place and all staff are able to seek support in the delivery of prayer if required. The importance of developing the prayer life of the school is recognised through the allocation of staff time to support activities like retreats and the allocation of budgets to support events. Year 7 students are provided with copies of the New Testament and psalms. Leaders and governors regularly review the delivery of prayer and this enables clear targets for improving and enhancing the prayer life of the school to be in place. Although student voice activities are in place as yet students do not regularly evaluate prayer.

Information about the school

Full name of school	Notre Dame Catholic Secondary School
School unique reference number (URN)	140737
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8794605
Full postal address of the school	Notre Dame Catholic Secondary School, Looseleigh Lane, Derriford, Plymouth, PL6 5HN
School phone number	01752775101
Executive Headteacher	Michael Antram
Head of School	Ann Morgan
Chair of Local Governing Body	Jane Bailey
School Website	http://www.ndonline.org/
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Plymouth Cast
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Date of last denominational inspection	May 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The inspection team

Ann Fowler
Colleen Collett

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

