

St John's Catholic Specialist School

URN: 108120

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Leeds

11 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

- St John's is fully compliant with all the requirements for Catholic life and mission, religious education and collective worship laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- The above requirements also fulfil those of the diocesan bishop, which includes any adaptations necessary to support the school's specialist status.
- The two areas identified for improvement in the last inspection have been addressed. The curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4 has been reviewed and now includes accredited end of phase external examinations and assessments. The content provision for post 16 general religious education is progressional, appropriate and accessible.

What the school does well

- The headteacher, governors, chaplain, senior leaders and staff have a vocational commitment to the mission of the school, ensuring that everyone in this specialist community is looked after, heard, celebrated and enabled to use their personal gifts to the full.
- Provision for pastoral care is exemplary.
- Religious education is at the core of the whole school curriculum.
- Faith informed values underpin every aspect of the whole Catholic curriculum which provides personalised and inclusive study pathways in life skills.
- Staff and students are highly skilled in planning, providing and leading collective worship.

What the school needs to improve

- Undertake the school's plan for a timely review of the mission statement.
- Invite governors to attend school during the working day to observe outcomes of areas for development in Catholic life and mission, religious education and collective worship.

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 at St John's are enthusiastic in embracing its Catholic life because they are encouraged to be active participants in its mission as 'a community working together to communicate, learn enjoy and achieve'. Through their confident actions students demonstrate how this is 'an environment where every voice is heard and celebrated'. Here at St John's, they feel 'safe, valued and inspired'. Their behaviour is exemplary. Students want to do hard work because they are motivated by an overriding sense of purpose and personal joy. They are involved in numerous projects and charitable outreach to serve the common good. Those who are members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul understand that their ministry is about loving and helping people because we are made in the image and likeness of God. This is their understanding of Catholic social teaching as they serve a local foodbank, carry out work experience by cleaning the local church, and raise money for Macmillan Cancer Support. Students show mutual respect for different beliefs and specialist needs. They look out for each other. Students respond well to their chaplain because he is a priest who completely understands and supports their needs with consistency and skilled ingenuity.

The mission statement is understood, and its practicality inspires staff to lead and to serve by example. Their commitment to the specialist needs of students through their personal skills ensures this is an inclusive, happy and welcoming Catholic environment that embraces those of all faiths and none. School strives to provide the highest levels of pastoral care that eliminates student vulnerability, thereby showing through action that Christ is at the heart of life at St John's. The school environment expresses that this is a place open for the service of the Lord. Its grounds are well cared for. Religious images are meaningful. There are corridor displays signifying this is a sacred space. The school is committed to maximising the spiritual significance

of every campus area. The chapel at the centre of the campus is beautiful, held in great affection and well used. Staff have the highest regard for the priest chaplain, not least because he is a long serving member of staff who understands thoroughly the needs of St John's and, consequently, they rally to his facilitation. The programme for relationships, sex and health education is approved by the diocese. Its delivery is rooted in the specialist needs of students.

The headteacher, leaders, chaplain, governors and coordinator share a vocational commitment to ensuring that Catholic life and mission is lived through nurturing the faith of Catholic students and the beliefs of all others, thereby promoting the bishop's vision of inclusive specialism. This commitment is reflected in the school's self-evaluation, with a contribution as well from Student Voice. The content is targeted, well monitored and includes a scheduled mission statement review. An increased inclusion of governors in reviewing successfully completed areas for improvement is not fully developed. Staff feel secure, happy, welcomed and supported by school and diocesan continued professional development that includes meticulous induction for new staff. Consequently, staff can confidently articulate the Catholic life and mission of St John's. This in turn enriches their sense of belonging and motivation to remain involved. Parents and carers are frequently invited to school and kept informed through detailed newsletters. There is community partnership in the school's outreach toward serving those in greatest need at local, national and global level. There is an excellent relationship with the local parish and the diocese. The Catholic curriculum, with religious education at its core, is an expression of the living of faith in the contemporary world.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

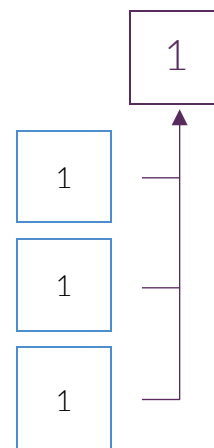
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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



A specific core feature of teaching at St John's is the abundance of specialist personal attention that enables students to flourish. They confidently share knowledge and understanding with a keenness for discussion and questioning. They benefit from the ample use of both collaborative and independent learning, showing deep levels of concentration and reflection. Students' work is of the highest standard appropriate to their age and stage of ability. They take a pride in its presentation and are keen to know their individual next steps in progress. They engage well in lessons because their prior knowledge provides a firm basis for progression. They benefit immensely from quality monitoring and assistance due to small teaching groups. They engage well with religious education because it is made entirely relevant to their lives. They also regard this as a 'happy time'. Students thrive on constant encouragement that celebrates achievement and provides affirmative direction when areas require development. The rates of student achievement are entirely in line with their personal learning plans which they thoroughly understand. For example, in one class several students shared the reasons for their work; and one student used his work folders to efficiently link the current content to past preparation.

This school provides an abundance of specialist teaching expertise that is apparent in all class groups. They expect the best from each of their students and offer the highest quality through the planning of lessons in which every minute counts. This planning is concisely linked to student personal learning targets which also provide scope for some aspirational progress according to their individual needs. Teachers are highly skilled in asking constructive questions, keeping students focused and thereby maintaining engagement. Each classroom is an oasis of calm and careful progress. Learning support assistance, the vital component of any specialist provision, is to be commended at St John's for its commitment and care, effective deployment and support of individual students in the whole process of teaching and learning. Students' work folders are

consistently marked according to school requirements, much of it undertaken in the presence of the students to ensure rapid feedback and pathways to improvement. Areas for development are carefully followed up. Personal commentary from teachers is strategic and encouraging. Students' spiritual and moral development is enriched by periods of reflection and personal space in class. Teachers provide an extensive range of adaptive resources creatively pitched towards the needs of each student.

Leaders and governors have implemented the Religious Education Directory according to schedule. The religious education coordinator has prepared the programme, adapted according to the needs of students and identified as 'St John's branches' of content which are entirely faithful to the Directory. There is a well-managed focus on scripture, religious literacy, key words and skills. Timetabling of religious education, staffing, financing and resourcing ensures parity with other core subjects. St John's staff takes a full part in diocesan training as well as an ongoing programme of continued professional development of school specialism training. The coordinator is a servant leader with inspiring vision to maintain the best in religious education, ably supported through the expertise of her team of two. The religious education curriculum provides formal, semi-formal and personalised study pathways that are appropriately accredited by examination boards and other educational providers. Each content pathway is managed to increase in its demands from students in a way that is searching, motivational and joyful. There are established and meaningful links with other world faiths and religions which include visits to and from school. The self-evaluation provides ongoing evidence of searching monitoring and evaluation in pursuit of identified best outcomes in religious education.

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

Students are engaged by prayer and liturgy at St John's because its content is rooted in present, personal and community intentions. Consequently, because it is relevant, they participate. They respond well to strategies focused on their needs. This includes sign, visual and kinaesthetic participation. They are aware of the liturgical year and use of prayer that is traditional and creative. They respond well to the use of scripture, times for reflection and for silence. Students are confident, reverent and respectful in their participation which may include actions as simple as the placing of a candle or by personal expression. They are experienced in working together with adults to prepare and lead liturgies. Students understand why prayer is important as a means of spending time with the Lord and praying for the needs of home and school. One student spoke about how a member of staff encourages them to pray 'in a way that you mean it', rather than by simply reciting prayer without any thought. Students are well practised in listening out for the needs of others and remembering them in private prayer. Students are at ease during prayer and liturgy because they can share or simply use the silence.

The self-evaluation is clear that prayer and liturgy upholds the Catholic life and mission of St John's. Certainly, its provision ensures inclusivity for all levels of specialist needs with an emphasis on connection as a family. This is one reason why prayer and liturgy is celebrated mainly toward the end of the day, to gather in thankfulness for what has been achieved and to share special intentions. School takes a pride in providing a wide range of resources including music, art, readings and structured periods of reflection. The use of scripture is central to provision and informs the selection of prayer. Knowledge and understanding of the liturgical year is provided with care and includes a display of a chasuble in the colour of the liturgical season. The chapel is at the heart of gatherings for Masses, services and for daily prayer. Staff train students to plan, participate and to lead. This training also occurs during times of worship

through the provision of practical prompts. Prayer and liturgy is used meaningfully to encourage an encounter with personal faith. It provides partnership between home, school and parish who are invited to share and celebrate worship as part of the St John's community.

The policy on prayer and liturgy is concise, practical and subject to review. The content is entirely fit for purpose because it is an expression of the understanding and commitment of leaders, governors, and chaplaincy in ensuring that the management of prayer and liturgy underpins the Catholic life and mission of St John's. This is why there is careful management, through inspired and creative coordination that organises the whole process for regular training of staff and students in its delivery. The Monday gathering of the whole school at the start of the day in chapel, as well as later in the day on Thursdays and Fridays is a coordinated balance that provides a school family experience, with gatherings on the other days taking place in the form room prayer areas. Each form group takes a turn in planning and leading worship on Friday to enrich their ongoing training. There is a budget both for the induction and ongoing training of staff. Careful management ensures that teachers and learning support assistants work together to manage a standard of prayer and liturgy that at its best is rich in provision and outcomes and remains regularly monitored and reviewed by staff and students.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St John's Catholic Specialist School
School unique reference number (URN)	108120
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3837016
Full postal address of the school	Church Street, Boston Spa, Wetherby, LS23 6DF
School phone number	01937 842144
Headteacher	Kevin Harrington
Chair of governors	Clare Brooks
School Website	www.stjohns.org.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	All Through
Type of school	Non-maintained special school
Admissions policy	N/A
Age-range of pupils	3-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	17 May 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The inspection team

Paul Mannings
Christopher Power

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