

# St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School

URN: 114546

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

05–06 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

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

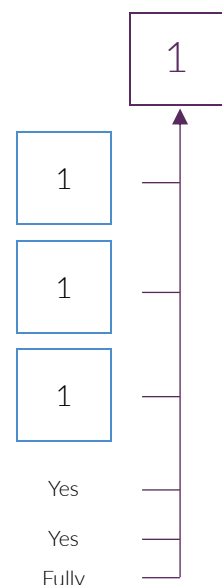
Collective worship (p.7)

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 Bernadette's is compliant with the general norms of the Bishops' Conference in relation to 10% curriculum time.
- St Bernadette's implements the diocesan bishop's requirements in relation to phased implementation of the *Religious Education Directory* and the Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum stipulation.
- St Bernadette's has fully responded to the areas of improvement from the previous inspection.

## What the school does well

- Pupils, especially the most vulnerable, feel cared for and thrive as they fully embrace the school's mission.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead with faith and vision, bringing the whole staff together with a shared purpose.
- Pupils have many meaningful ways to show their learning in religious education, leading to strong progress and high achievement.
- Pupils experience a wide range of engaging prayer opportunities that build and grow as they move through the school.
- Leaders carefully plan prayer and liturgy in line with the liturgical calendar to enrich the spiritual life of the school.

## What the school needs to improve

- To ensure that all pupils can confidently articulate how their actions link to and spring from the school's mission.
- To embed consistency of pupil self-assessment and feedback in religious education across all classes.
- To ensure that pupil evaluation of collective worship is robust, specific and leads to improvement.

## 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

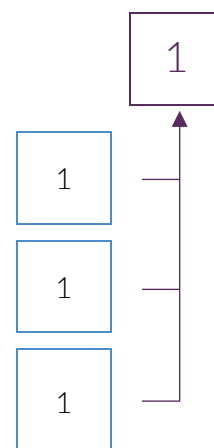
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

#### 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 at St Bernadette's wholeheartedly understand and actively live out the school's mission, acting as joyful ambassadors of its values. Many can clearly articulate the key elements of the mission statement and make meaningful links to Catholic social teaching. Pupils have taken part in charity fundraising through class-led challenges, and some have been inspired to action by the Gospel, for example, a group of pupils decided to raise money for the 'Amaze' charity by selling ice lollies after school. Pupils feel a strong sense of belonging and pride in their school community. One pupil shared, 'Even though I'm not Catholic, I feel welcomed in this school and that I belong'. They demonstrate a clear understanding of respect, which is evident in their relationships with peers, staff, and visitors alike. This respectful attitude is embedded in daily life and consequently behaviour is exemplary. Pupils thrive as they strive to be enthusiastic disciples of the Lord; amongst the abundance of examples is a pupil inspired by the call to care for our common home, who took it upon themselves to litter-pick at the beach.

All staff know that St Bernadette's is a special place and are subsequently fully committed to the school's mission of 'Reaching Up and Reaching Out'. They are exceptional role models to pupils and parents and this creates a warm, welcoming, and inclusive community. Staff express a deep sense of belonging and purpose, with comments such as, 'I feel extremely fortunate to work with such an incredible team. Christ is at the centre of all we do.' Strong pastoral provision with a commitment to the most vulnerable is a hallmark of the school; this includes initiatives such as Pupil and Family Thrive groups, a wealth of formal and informal nurture interventions and ensuring that enrichment activities are available to all regardless of family circumstances. The school's stimulating environment is fully reflective of its Catholic character, with both indoor and outdoor prayer spaces and a beautiful grotto. Vibrant displays celebrate the wide range of pupil

leadership opportunities, such as prefects, house captains and membership of the GIFT team. A particular feature is the Forest School, providing meaningful opportunities for personal growth, reflection, and development.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher are faith-filled and inspiring role models to the whole community. Together they set ambitious standards for the Catholic life of the school and foster a strong culture of support and openness. Through their open-door approach, staff feel valued, listened to, and well-supported. They are deeply committed to the holistic development of every child, recognising and nurturing each one as a unique child of God. This approach underpins the school's mission and ensures that pupils flourish academically, spiritually, and personally. Governors share this ambition and have a clear vision of the school's role as a beacon for Catholic education, collaborating with local partners and the diocese to benefit pupils within and beyond St Bernadette's. They have a profound understanding of strengths and areas for development through a detailed schedule of meetings, visits and monitoring. Leaders have prioritised building and maintaining strong links with the two local parishes: consequently, the parish priests are regular visitors to the school, celebrating the sacraments, such as Mass and Reconciliation, as well as supporting the professional development of staff. Similarly, the school has a flourishing relationship with parents, who are overwhelmingly positive about the love and care the school provides for their children. One parent summed this up saying, 'We feel very lucky to be part of the Saint Bernadette's community and are endlessly grateful for the tremendous care put in by all of the educators.'

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

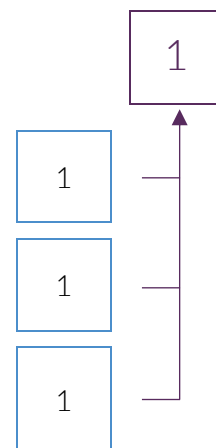
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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 are highly enthusiastic about their religious education lessons and relish the many opportunities to demonstrate their grasp of the subject. In a Year 2 lesson, for example, pupils worked excitedly in groups to relate their understanding of the fruits of the Holy Spirit to real-life scenarios. They are religiously literate and speak confidently, using subject-specific vocabulary, about how scripture links to the theology of the Church and how this informs their actions. Year 3 pupils, for instance, animatedly explored the concept of 'examination of conscience', while Year 6 pupils participated in a thoughtful discussion on the idea of 'divine reality.' Because of the school's focus on retrieval activities, pupils are very skilled at recalling prior knowledge and making links in their learning. Pupils take pride in their written work, which is of a high quality and showcases reflection and creativity in response to key religious themes. Examples include a scrapbook page used in Year 5 for pupils to display their understanding of Jesus' temptations however they chose and Year 6 pupils creating hermeneutic landscapes to consolidate their learning about the Annunciation. While most pupils know how well they are doing, they now need to develop a more profound sense of how to improve their work in order to lead to even higher attainment.

It is evident throughout the school that teachers have a deep commitment to and high expectations for religious education. Because of the excellent training they engage with from within the school and beyond, they are confident explaining complex aspects of theology, such as the Christian belief of the Holy Trinity, so that even the youngest pupils understand them. Teachers plan a broad range of creative learning experiences, which enable pupils to demonstrate their understanding in meaningful and engaging ways. In Reception, for example, godly play was used to explore the concept of a church, while in Year 3, pupils thoroughly enjoyed the task of putting the 7 stages of reconciliation in the right order. Teachers use

questioning skilfully to reshape learning, as seen in a highly effective Year 1 lesson about Pentecost, where the teacher made informed decisions during the lesson and adapted tasks. The consistent and highly effective use of adults around the classroom is a real strength, and careful thought is given to the best ways to capture pupils' learning, which might otherwise be lost. Adaptations and scaffolding are in place to ensure that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, for example the consistent use of Widgit symbols in all classes.

Leaders and governors ensure that religious education remains a core subject within the school and has equal priority to other core curriculum areas. They have rightly prioritised staff development, so that all teachers are well supported and equipped to deliver effective lessons. The subject leader works diligently to promote a dynamic and inspiring vision for religious education and is highly competent in securing this, together with the head teacher, using a range of strategies, such as coaching, modelling and training. Staff are very positive about new approaches, saying that they feel 'extremely well-supported by the senior leaders.' Leaders are reflective and committed to continuous improvement. They follow a robust monitoring cycle that includes staff, governors and input from the local parish priests, all of which contribute to improving staff subject knowledge and strengthening provision. Governors are very pro-active and know about learning in religious education through the regular committee 'workshops' that take part in at school. The weaving of Catholic social teaching throughout the religious education curriculum is a particular strength of the school and is reflected in the pupils' experience and 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 engaged deeply by experiences of prayer and liturgy provided by the school. This is because of the embedded expectations and routines surrounding worship. In a Year 4 Visio Divina, pupils demonstrated a strong sense of reflection and tranquillity, while in a Year R pebble prayer session, pupils responded in an age-appropriate way by sharing what they were thankful for. They highly value the variety and inclusiveness of these prayer experiences, with one pupil telling inspectors, 'everyone's included, no one is left out'. Older pupils show a secure understanding of the liturgical year and a variety of prayer forms; they can confidently describe for example that purple is used in Advent and Lent, and that reconciliation is a feature of these seasons. All pupils have regular opportunities to prepare and lead each other in worship, with growing independence. This ranges from choosing and setting up the prayer focus for the younger pupils through to older pupils preparing and reading their own prayers as part of classroom celebrations of the word. Whilst pupils undertake these responsibilities confidently, their capacity to evaluate the experiences of prayer and liturgy they have created is limited; as such, they do not always have secure ideas for how to improve them in the future.

A range of prayer experiences offer participants, including pupils, parents, and staff, engaging and creative forms of worship. This includes meditation, prayerful silence, music and reflection. In addition, pupils have many opportunities to pray through traditional daily prayers, Gospel assemblies, regular Masses, and both teacher and pupil-lead prayers based on celebrating God's word. This means there is a naturally embedded rhythm to prayer, which reflects that of the Catholic Church and balances the provision of creative and routine prayers. Staff are highly skilled and dedicated to nurturing the school's prayer life. They create impactful and appropriate prayer environments within class collective worship, using beautiful prayer focal points, reflective music, and sensory experiences to engage pupils deeply. This was seen for example in

a deeply reflective Year 2 meditation, where the pupils were encouraged to reflect in silence on a scripture passage from the Gospel of St John about unity and the link to the principle of solidarity. One staff member commented that, 'our mission is lived daily through a meaningful prayer and worship, which helps us (me and the children) pause, reflect and keep Jesus at the centre of our thoughts'. Parents are actively involved and warmly welcomed to participate in collective worship. For example, during Advent, the Travelling Nativity encourages families to engage in prayer at home and a recent dressing of the cross liturgy inspired one parent to write, 'the quiet dignity of the dressing of the cross gave our family a moment of stillness and reflection'.

Leaders and governors produce an annual plan of provision which thoughtfully outlines a wide variety of prayer opportunities and serves as an effective evaluative tool. It makes meaningful connections to Catholic social teaching and leaders use it to reflect on and improve the school's prayer life. Leaders place the highest priority on staff training and formation, as shown through the excellent professional development provided by them in the form of coaching, modelling and providing constructive feedback. One example is the training on Visio Divina delivered by the subject leader which staff described as 'captivating' and helpful in deepening their spirituality. Prayer and liturgy are well resourced and leaders have prioritised this in their planning. For example, prayer tables offer a wide variety of choices for pupils and the school environment has been thoughtfully arranged to provide meaningful prayer opportunities, such as the grotto and prayer alcoves.

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	114546
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8463318
Full postal address of the school	St Bernadette's Catholic Primary School, Preston Road, Withdean, Brighton, BN1 6UT
School phone number	01273 553813
Headteacher	Claire Smith
Chair of governors	Janet Silva
School Website	<a href="http://www.stberns.brighton-hove.sch.uk">http://www.stberns.brighton-hove.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	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	6 <sup>th</sup> June 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

## The inspection team

Michael Lobo  
Emma Daly

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