

St Paul's Catholic School

URN: 110517

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Northampton

06–07 November 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 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 fully to the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

What the school does well

- The pastoral care on offer and the clear commitment to others, especially the most vulnerable, ensures that resources are targeted to those in greatest need.
- The wide range of enrichment activities promote students' learning and engagement in religious education.
- The strong links with the local parishes enable the school community to support and promote the Catholic identity of both the school and the parishes.
- The large staff chaplaincy team has encouraged excellent student participation and engagement in prayer and liturgy thereby deepening their faith.
- The authentic Catholicity of the leadership team enables the faith development of all to flourish and grow.

What the school needs to improve

- Generate greater levels of pace, challenge and adaptive teaching in religious education lessons.
- Empower students to plan, deliver and review their own prayer and liturgy.
- Enable students to articulate the theology underpinning all the principles of Catholic social teaching.

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

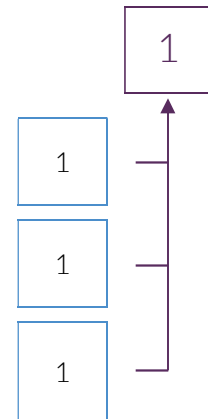
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



The school mission, 'Love, serve, do the best possible', is fully lived out by students and staff. The duality of Catholic mission and academic excellence enables all students to receive a genuinely holistic education. The strong sense of community ensures that all students feel valued, supported and loved. This was confirmed by a parent who commented, 'St Paul's has allowed both of my children to thrive and become the best possible version of themselves'. The Jesuit virtues that make up the 'gifts we grow' framework provide students with a structure to guide them morally. As a result, students flourish as they seek opportunities to grow in virtue. They gladly embrace their personal responsibility to serve those in need and are proactive in finding ways of responding to local, national and global charities such as Cafod, Cancer Research UK, Willen Hospice and Harry's Rainbow. Students are growing in their knowledge and application of Catholic social teaching with a focus on a core principle every half term. Posters linking Catholic social teaching to the 'gifts we grow' framework are displayed in corridors, communal areas and classrooms. The school now needs to ensure that students become familiar with all the principles and the theology underpinning them. Students highly value the school chaplaincy provision and actively participate in and contribute to opportunities provided by the school as altar servers, readers and extra-ordinary ministers of the Eucharist.

The school's focus on service ensures all are received in a spirit of generous hospitality, especially the most vulnerable. This was reinforced by a staff member who said, 'The school has taught me the importance of love and helping others'. Staff genuinely care for the well-being and development of students. The school's commitment to inclusivity manifested itself during the Year 7 collective worship with a member of staff signing the entire event. A prayer room for staff and students of other faiths is currently being built. The cultural awareness day is celebrated

through dress, music, food and dance. The commitment and dedication of the pastoral care team and year leaders are backed up by the school's investment in resources, such as robots used by students with anxiety to enable them to access learning. A lot of work has gone into developing the outdoor physical environment since the last inspection, including a colourful mosaic of the school mission, produced by art students, in the playground. Every outdoor zone displays a thought-provoking piece of scripture chosen by the students. The chapel also contains students' awe-inspiring artwork. There is a group of chaplaincy representatives and an adult chaplaincy team who are also pastoral care leaders. They offer a wide range of spiritual opportunities, including days of recollection, residential retreats and a day of prayer for all tutor groups. The relationships, sex and health education programme is carefully and sensitively planned and fully meets diocesan requirements.

Leaders and governors are diligent in exercising their duty as guardians of the Catholic life and mission of St Paul's. The headteacher is an inspirational witness to the Gospel and, more specifically, Catholic social teaching in relation to the principle of dignity in work. A member of staff said, 'It is lovely to work in such a safe and inclusive place where Catholic social teaching is taught and practised by the whole community'. The school has a dynamic partnership with the diocese, actively participating and leading in the services offered, but also organising events such as the annual 'Faith in Action' day for groups of Year 10 students in the diocese. Links with local parishes are strong, to the extent that the school has provided a large classroom as the new parish church. The senior choir performs at church concerts while art students designed stained glass windows for another local church. School leaders are rigorous in their monitoring, and this leads to well-targeted and planned improvements. Early-career teachers and new staff feel well supported and inducted, showing a secure understanding of the Catholic life and mission of the school.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

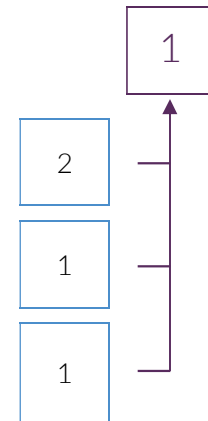
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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



Students make good progress in knowing more and doing more when measured against the planned curriculum. As a result, students, including disadvantaged and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve well in all age phases. The best progress in lessons occurred when good levels of pace, challenge and adaptive teaching were applied. However, in other lessons, retrieval tasks and questioning techniques enabled students to remember more, but often at the expense of the pace of learning and opportunities to develop writing skills. The varied starting points of students in terms of religious education and religious literacy are quickly overcome, and they make good progress by the time they reach GCSE, with results that are on par with the rest of the core subjects. Students produce work that is presented well, showing signs of emerging individuality and creativity. They engage in lessons and show a willingness to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. Most students report that they enjoy the subject, and they approach their lessons with interest and enthusiasm. Behaviour in lessons is good, and students were welcoming and polite at all times. Nearly all students have a good understanding of how well they are doing, what they are working towards, and how to get there.

Lesson observations revealed that religious education teachers have strong expertise. Students have confidence in teachers' ability and subject knowledge. Teachers demonstrate high expectations for religious education, and they communicate them effectively. Relations between staff and students are excellent, creating a respectful and engaging learning environment where every learner feels valued and supported. In a Year 12 lesson on the 'Summa Theologica', the teacher drew out impressive responses from students, which he developed with his confidence and enthusiasm for the subject. In a Year 9 lesson on women in the Old Testament, the teacher displayed excellent questioning to enable students to show full reasoning and understanding. The celebration of effort is acknowledged weekly with a 'pupil of the week award' focusing on

effort rather than attainment. Green stamps are issued regularly on class charts and praise post cards are shared with parents. This ensures that parents are involved in their child's learning and promotes positive relationships. Teachers allow space and time for purposeful reflection in lessons. Students are encouraged to reflect spiritually on what they are being taught, and support assistants are used effectively in lessons to optimise student learning.

Leaders view religious education as the core of the core with parity between the subject and the rest of the core subjects in relation to resourcing, timetabling and accommodation. The religious education department avails itself of every opportunity to attend diocesan training and to work closely with other Catholic schools. A member of the department has been supporting the diocese with advisory work, and this has meant that religious education has been well supported with developments in subject knowledge and pedagogy. Religious education has two relatively new heads of department who work in collaboration with each other and are responsible for separate key stages. They have an inspiring vision for teaching and learning, which they model in their own teaching. This should now be shared so that most teaching becomes outstanding. Enrichment activities have included visits to the local Gurdwara to learn more about the Sikh religion and trips to Coventry Cathedral to explore peace and reconciliation. Students have also attended a memorial service for Srebrenica at St Paul's Cathedral. Governors and leaders' self-evaluation of religious education is informed by thorough monitoring, analysis and personal challenge. The department provides reports which are scrutinised fully, resulting in strategic action and well-targeted planning.

Collective worship

The quality and range of liturgy and prayer provided by the school

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

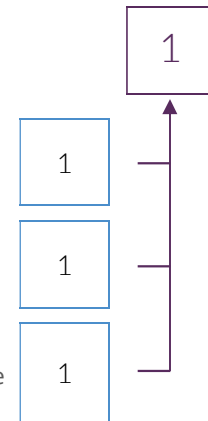
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

Leadership

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



The experience of prayer and liturgy engages students deeply and leads to wholehearted participation. This was particularly evident in the Year 7 celebration of the word with joyful hymn singing. Students are respectful and attentive when prayers are said during morning registration by the form tutor or a member of the class. St Paul's also has an end of day prayer which gives students the opportunity to reflect and give thanks to God. This was clearly evident in a Year 7 lesson where students wrote prayer requests and placed them on the whiteboard before being dismissed. Their prayers showed a good level of spiritual maturity and included prayers for Remembrance Day and deceased family members, forgiveness, protection and world peace. The chaplaincy team is embedding a programme of liturgical formation and there was some evidence of Year 11 planning and presenting prayer and liturgy. However, students' planning, delivering and reviewing of their own prayer and liturgy presentations is an area for development. The programme of annual retreats and days of prayer in the chapel for every form class are impactful and something that students clearly value and enjoy. Students are clear that worship leads to action and were keen to cite examples including monthly contributions to local food banks.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of St Paul's, shaping its rhythm and reflecting a deep authentic Catholic identity. A wide range of significant moments of both joy and sorrow are marked with reverence and creativity, allowing pupils and staff to share their prayer intentions and feel spiritually supported by their community. This was reinforced by a member of staff who stated, 'I have gone from being someone who has felt sceptical of the value of organised religion to someone who is very grateful for the role it plays within my vocation at this school'. In a Year 9 assembly on the feast of All Saints, students reflected on how radical Jesus' teachings on the beatitudes were, and they were asked to think how they relate to the school's jubilee pledge. The

chapel is the beating heart of the school, complemented by sacred spaces such as the garden of reflection and the grotto of Our Lady which ensure prayer permeates the entire environment. The school choir and orchestra are another strength. Their musical talents enable them to use their gifts to enhance worship. The school works hard to secure a flourishing partnership with local parishes to help students participate more fully in the liturgy.

The prayer and liturgy policy is written in such a way that makes it accessible and useful to staff. Leaders and governors have put a lot of investment into chaplaincy with seven chaplains who are also pastoral care leaders. Staff stressed the important role they play in promoting and supporting prayer as well as the spiritual sustenance they offer to all. A staff member commented, 'The chaplaincy department nurtures the faith of pupils helping them to understand and live out Catholic teaching in their lives'. Holy days of obligation are celebrated with two Masses due to the size of the school. The day retreats offered by the chaplaincy team to every tutor group have a focus on the house saints. However, this could also be an opportunity to focus on the patron saint as many students struggled to describe the life and teachings of St Paul. All staff receive professional development on prayer and liturgy so that there is a consistent approach across the school. Consequently, staff are confident in leading morning and afternoon prayer. Prayer and liturgy are well resourced and receive significant donations from the parent teacher association. Collective worship remains part of the school improvement plan and is a consistent and regular feature of governors' meetings with monitoring reports presented by the link governor.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Paul's Catholic Secondary School
School unique reference number (URN)	110517
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8264702
Full postal address of the school	Phoenix Drive, Leadenhall, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK6 5EN
School phone number	01908669735
Headteacher	Jo-Anne Hoarty
Chair of governors	Paul Herbert
School Website	http://www.st-pauls.org.uk/
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	June 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Dermot O'Neill	Lead
Alison Berwick	Team
Natasha Wilmore	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