



St Helen's Catholic Primary School

URN: 402395

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Cardiff-Menevia

18 March 2026 – 19 March 2026

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 RE

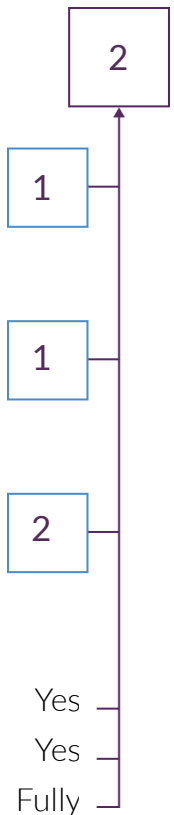
Collective worship (p.7)

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



What the school does well

- St Helen's is a distinctively Catholic school that celebrates the dignity of every community member. Christ is at the heart of school life; pupils are well cared for and nurtured and as a result pupils respond positively, respectfully, and with a high standard of behaviour.
- Good relationships are a strength of the school. Staff, leaders, and governors are positive role models, demonstrating love, care, and commitment to the school's Catholic mission. They are true witnesses to their faith.
- The Catholic life and mission and Catholic social teaching practices of the school are outstanding, permeating all areas of the curriculum, guiding all learning, and positively impacting on the whole community, even beyond the school.
- Leaders work on the implementation of a new religious education curriculum is very impressive, and leaders and governors are committed to the mission of the Church and the success of the school. The quality of pupils' work in religious education (RE) is of a very high standard, reflecting the prominence the school places upon it.
- Collective worship, Masses, and liturgical services are an integral part of school life, showing the centrality of the Catholic mission of the school. Pupils respond positively and reverently to opportunities for prayer and worship.

What the school needs to improve

- Expand the range of opportunities for prayer and pupil-led collective worship, including spontaneous prayer and to strengthen creativity and meaningful evaluations within collective worship to ensure greater consistency of provision across the school.
- Share their best practice, especially within RE and Catholic social teaching, with other schools in the diocese.

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



St Helen's Catholic Primary School is an inspirational place of learning where pupils 'Love one another' in every aspect of school life. 'Every child is loved, belongs, and is encouraged to shine.' Pupils are very happy, confident, and feel secure. One pupil commented, 'Our school helps us to be kind and caring towards everyone.' The teachings and values of Jesus are central to the life of the school and are clearly articulated at every level. Pupils enthusiastically embrace opportunities to enhance their experience and understanding of the Catholic Faith. Pupils are actively involved with Senedd Santes Helen, through which they contribute to a variety of ministries including Mission Ministry. A plethora of fundraising events take place through the school; for example, sponsoring the education of four pupils in India and fundraising for Cafod, the harvest food bank, Missio, and Velindre Cancer Centre. Pupils flourish as they learn to care for their common home, observing, for example, fairtrade fortnight to become better global citizens. Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils consistently show deep respect for one another, for example during race equality week. Pupils highly value the school's chaplaincy provision, enthusiastically taking on roles such as Super Ambassadors, prayer group leaders and leadership roles within class ministries. Pupils, rightly, are exceptionally proud of their school.

The mission of the Church is lived and witnessed as an integral part of school life, deeply rooted in the Word of God. Staff share the love of God as exemplary role models. Adults are committed to giving families and pupils the highest levels of pastoral, emotional, and spiritual care; for example, a joint Lenten Liturgy with other local schools. Staff undertake sacrament preparation on behalf of the parish. The joyful community is a strength; warm relationships

are consistent and everyone is welcomed. This was celebrated when St Helen's was recognised as an exceptional School of Sanctuary. The inclusive culture is extended through the highly valued St Helen's Community Hub, 'where our school, parish and local community come together in friendship, service, and hope.' Families receive additional support through the Mike Stafford Fund for families, offering practical help for those most in need. Prayer gardens, along with the vibrant learning environment, create a strong sense of identity and witness that Christ is at the heart of school. The school's provision for relationships and sex education fully complies with diocesan requirements. Pupils have a secure understanding of healthy relationships and human dignity in line with Catholic teaching.

Leaders and governors are deeply committed to the Catholic life and mission of the school and work closely with the diocese. The head teacher and leader for RE are exemplary role models of their faith, giving generously of their time to develop the skills of colleagues. Leaders continually identify opportunities for the community to witness Gospel values through their support for staff and the inclusion of Catholic social teaching. Parents are embraced as the first educators of their children. One parent commented, 'The sense of faith, belonging, and guidance offered here is something we truly appreciate.' Family prayer boxes strengthen home-school links, suggesting creative ways to pray. The school has extensive links with the parish and its inspiring parish priest. Pupils go to weekday Mass once a week and during the inspection this fell on the Solemnity of St Joseph. Pupils, parents and parishioners attended with pupils reading and serving during Mass. Staff spoke passionately about how they are highly valued by leaders and governors. Leaders prioritise the wellbeing of staff, especially those new to the school. Focused and effective training for staff enhances the personal faith experience, including opportunities for spiritual enrichment.

Religious education

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 key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

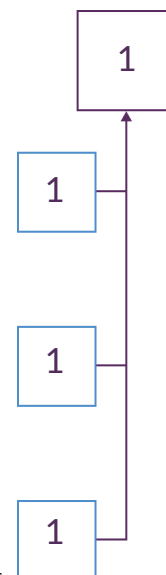
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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



High levels of engagement were evident in all lessons observed and, as a result, behaviour in lessons is very good. Pupils approach lessons with great interest and enthusiasm and respond well to a variety of engaging activities, stating that they enjoy their RE lessons. Pupils can confidently articulate what they have learnt using religiously literate language and subject-specific vocabulary, and use their knowledge and understanding to reflect spiritually, from Nursery right through to Year 6. Pupils are able to think deeply and explain their thinking clearly through the use of carefully planned big questions, 'Voice 21 Talk Tactics', and 'tier 3' vocabulary. Progress within classes, and through phases, is evident in books and in all lessons observed. Pupils are encouraged to challenge themselves and they are aware of how well they are doing, and what their next steps are, through responding to regular, positive, and precise feedback, including 'tickled pink/green for growth' comments. Pupils produce work of a consistently high quality and pupils take immense pride in their 'special' books. Achievement is in line with, if not above, other core subjects. In the younger classes observed, all continuous provision was enhanced with imaginative Holy Week activities that reinforced learning, for example, pupils acting out the events of the Upper Room and the washing of the disciples' feet.

Teachers are committed to the value of RE, and its provision is of a very high standard across the school. Teachers effectively plan and deliver lessons with adapted teaching and challenges that stimulate and build on prior learning and are designed to meet the needs of all pupils. There are clear expectations for outcomes that are communicated effectively to pupils

through feedback within lessons, RE assessment tasks, and clear success criteria. High-quality resources are used effectively, and teachers and teaching assistants optimise learning, ensuring inclusivity for all pupils. Creative teaching with clear pace and a variety of pedagogy offers authentic opportunities for pupils to learn. The use of 'awe and wonder' ensures pupils have a deep enjoyment of RE, with opportunities to respond to religious artwork of the Last Supper, musical compositions on the *Magnificat*, a courtroom trial of Peter complete with judge and gavel and 'Mystery Boxes'. The comprehensive development and promotion of the principles of Catholic social teaching and Catholic Pupil Profile Virtues are threaded through pupils' experiences. Pupils are consistently encouraged to ask 'what would Jesus do?' when thinking about their actions, for example, making good choices through following the Ten Commandments.

The subject leader has a clear vision for teaching and learning within RE. RE programmes and resources are used imaginatively and innovatively to enhance the delivery of the *Religious Education Directory*, which is planned to meet the needs of different groups of pupils and to mirror the creative expectations of the Curriculum for Wales. Leaders and governors ensure that RE is identified as a core subject, is prioritised across the school, and ensures opportunities for excellence to be achieved. This was evident in timetabling, staffing, and resourcing. There are calm, purposeful learning environments, resources, and displays around the school, which provide focus and stimulus. Leaders and governors are committed to securing regular, high-quality professional development in RE for all practitioners, in relation to both subject knowledge and pedagogical development. Leaders and governors have been fully involved in the formulation of the Catholic self-evaluation document, and RE lessons are regularly monitored with thorough self-evaluation being carried out. Action planning reviews have a direct impact on future planning for improvement and ensure consistently high-quality teaching and learning.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

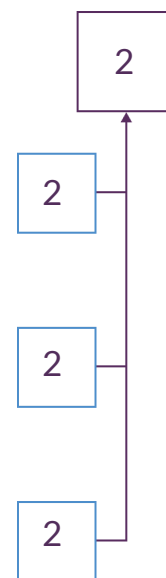
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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



Collective worship is an integral part of school life and pupils respond positively and reverently to opportunities for prayer and worship. There is excellent pupil engagement with communal singing, with older classes playing instruments to enhance their pupil-led worship. During inspection, pupils could clearly articulate that lighting a candle showed that Jesus was 'with us' and that it was time to pray. Pupils experience a variety of ways of praying, including meditation, which is consistently strong and meaningful across the school. This is excellently modelled by staff, and pupils appreciate having a peaceful time to 'calm down' and talk to God. Pupils led the weekly Upper School Gospel assembly confidently, and Mission Ministers spoke enthusiastically about leading the Celebration of the Word. Scripture sits at the heart of collective worship and is chosen to focus on Catholic social teaching principles and the Virtues, as well as in line with the liturgical year. Pupils confidently plan and record their collective worship using the *Gweddiwn* gather, listen, respond and go forth model. The dissemination of guided meditation across the school and the development of more meaningful evaluation of pupil-led worship would further enhance collective worship. Praying together is a well-planned part of the daily experience for all pupils and staff and contains a clear message and action. There are well-established routines of daily prayer, together with adult-led and pupil-led worship, which reflect the Catholic character of the school.

The school environment, both indoors and outdoors, is effectively used, with the inclusion of two gardens dedicated to Our Lady that enhance the provision for collective worship and personal prayer space. All classes have well-resourced, dedicated prayer areas and there are 'prayer boxes' for pupils to take home, with messages encouraging pupils and their families to

actively pray, for example, 'choose a place on the map and ask God to bless it and the people who live there.' The school works well within the local parish to help its pupils participate in the liturgy through such means as attendance at weekly Mass and leading liturgical celebrations such as 'Thanksgiving for the Harvest' Mass, May Procession, Holy Souls and Easter. All staff are models of good practice as participants of prayer and liturgy and capably guide pupils in their planning of prayer and worship. There are many strengths, however, more rigorous monitoring and dissemination of good practice of collective worship would strengthen consistency and further enhance provision across the whole school.

Leaders and governors provide strong guidance within prayer and liturgy for both pupils and staff, and the RE lead has a clear strategy for building skills of participation to enable pupil skills to progress through the school. Masses, liturgical services, and other religious events are an integral part of the school year, showing the centrality of the Catholic mission of the school, and pupils are encouraged to put the key messages of the Gospel into practice in their lives. Pupils receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent and Advent and Sacramental preparation for Holy Communion. Leaders offer regular opportunities for professional development and have worked well to develop staff skills in, and understanding of, the delivery of prayer and liturgy. Early Career and teachers new to Catholic schools speak highly of the formation and support given. The school's collective worship policy is well formulated and the implementation of the Prayer and Liturgy Toolkit is a 'school development priority'. Governors are involved in monitoring, for example, identifying the need to simplify prayer areas and to restock resources, which was addressed. Strengthening the monitoring of collective worship sessions and developing the use of spontaneous prayer will improve consistency and deepen the experience of prayer across the school.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Helen's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	402395
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	6733373
Full postal address of the school	Tynewydd Road, Barry, CF62 8BB
School phone number	01446 700034
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Michelle Clawson
Chair of Governors	Mrs Valerie Simpson
School Website	www.sthelenscps.co.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	0

The Inspection Team

Mary Mort

Lead

Diana Pearce

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