



St Joseph's Catholic Junior School

URN: 148844

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Hexham & Newcastle

20 May 2026 – 20 May 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

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Yes

Yes

Fully

What the school does well

- Leaders and governors are exemplary role models who promote all aspects of Catholic life with integrity and purpose, fully embodying the Church's mission in education.
- Pupils are exceptionally proud of their school, demonstrated through their exemplary behaviour and the consistent respect they show to everyone they encounter throughout the school day.
- Relationships with parents are highly positive, creating an exceptionally strong sense of community in which all families feel welcomed and valued.
- Teachers' high expectations and strong subject knowledge drive excellent standards in religious education, with pupils taking great pride in their work and developing as highly religiously literate learners.
- Pupils joyfully participate and lead in all prayer and liturgy, with their harmonious and jubilant singing greatly enriching the school's worshipping life.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure all staff have the skills, knowledge and training required to fully implement the new Religious Education Directory in September 2026.

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

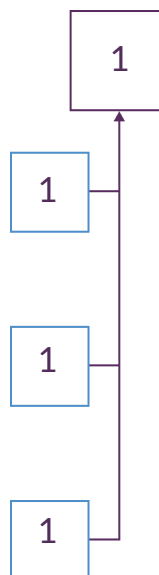
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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 are extremely happy, safe and deeply proud to be part of St Joseph's Catholic Junior School, frequently expressing their enjoyment of school life; as one parent shared, 'My child is happy at school and talks enthusiastically about what he has done.' Pupils can articulate the school's mission and vision with exceptional clarity and have many meaningful opportunities to live this out, particularly through the wide range of leadership roles available to them. Pupils demonstrate a strong understanding of Catholic social teaching and show a strong sense of purpose in putting these principles into action. The Mini Vinnies exemplify this commitment to service, from growing and sharing vegetables in the God's creation garden to singing carols at the local care home, which contributed to the school's recent achievement of the Live Simply Award. Pupils show deep respect for all members of the school community, irrespective of faith or background, with one pupil stating, 'No matter the race, the country they are from or any disability they have, everyone is welcome.' Behaviour, both in class and around school, is consistently exemplary, with pupils expecting the very best from one another.

The mission statement underpins all relationships across the school and ensures that St Joseph's is clearly recognised as a supportive and vibrant Catholic community. Staff create a faith-filled, caring and nurturing environment and are a visible presence both within school and in the wider community. They are excellent role models, demonstrating deep care for pupils and modelling strong, respectful relationships with one another. Parents recognise this, with one commenting that, 'Staff help children grow in confidence, kindness, and faith, and our children are very happy here.' A clear sense of community permeates the school, with a

culture of welcome for all, irrespective of faith or background. Families are encouraged to share their beliefs and traditions, such as a parent preparing Eid bags for pupils in her child's class, enriching the school's inclusive ethos. St Joseph's is unmistakably a Catholic school, with a high-quality environment that bears witness to the Catholic tradition. Opportunities to enhance pupils' faith journeys are thoughtfully planned, including pilgrimages to Holy Island, Durham Cathedral and the Youth Village. The provision for relationships, sex and health education is of extremely high quality and is carefully personalised to meet the needs of the school and its community.

Inspirational leaders ensure that Christ is firmly at the heart of the school, with all decisions clearly bearing witness to this central mission. Links with the parish are exceptionally strong, and leaders actively seek opportunities to deepen these relationships, such as through the creation of prayer cards for parishioners. Parents speak extremely positively about the school and greatly value the many opportunities to participate in its mission, holding leaders in very high regard. Staff similarly view leaders as inspirational and appreciate the high levels of pastoral care provided for them. One staff member noted, 'Our executive head teacher is extremely supportive and knowledgeable, and this has a strong impact on Catholic life across our school. She leads by example in promoting the school's mission and values, ensuring that faith is not only taught but lived daily within our school.' Professional development is carefully personalised to individual needs, including strong support for newly appointed staff. Leaders ensure that the Catholic curriculum remains at the heart of the school and work intentionally to create meaningful connections between subjects to enhance the Catholic life and mission of the school. Governors are unwavering in their commitment to St Joseph's, demonstrating high levels of expertise, knowledge and passion. Evaluation of Catholic life is of a very high standard, with pupils' viewpoints actively sought and used to shape future planning and development.

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

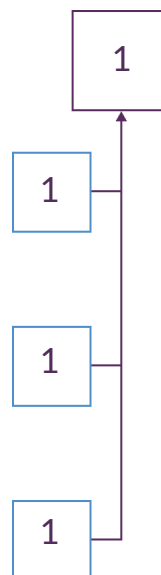
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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



Pupils are religiously literate, demonstrating an outstanding understanding and confident use of scripture across all year groups, with their fluent use of religious language clearly reflecting this depth of knowledge. They readily question, discuss and deepen their thinking with peers; Year 5 pupils confidently explore the difference between the fruits and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As one pupil explained, 'Religious education lessons let me show what I understand about the Bible and how to live my life just like Jesus,' capturing the strong sense of purpose pupils bring to their learning. Pupils' books show excellent progress and high-quality work, with the majority of pupils in every year group working at expected levels; this strong achievement is evident for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs. They take great pride in their learning, reflected in consistently high standards of presentation across the school. Engagement in lessons is exceptionally strong, with pupils working purposefully with talk partners and in small groups. They can articulate their successes and identify how to improve their work further, supported by regular opportunities to do so.

Teachers have a high level of subject knowledge in religious education and hold consistently high expectations for all pupils. They ensure that individualised provision is in place for those who find aspects of the curriculum more difficult to access, including the effective use of Widgit and personalised scaffolds. Lessons are well-paced, maximising learning while still allowing pupils purposeful time to reflect on their understanding. Staff questioning is of a very high quality and significantly deepens pupils' thinking. Feedback, both during and after

lessons, clearly challenges pupils and moves their learning forward, with pupils' responses demonstrating the strong impact of this practice. Teachers provide a wide range of opportunities for pupils to learn such as through role play, debating and through varied forms of presentation. This ensures that learning is engaging and meaningful. For example, in Year 6 pupils are given purposeful opportunities to reflect on their previous learning, enabling them to make informed choices about the language and scripture they use in their work. The consistent use of religious imagery as a stimulus greatly enhances the quality of lessons and supports pupils in making rich connections in their work.

Leaders ensure that religious education is fully aligned with the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* and is delivered in a creative and engaging manner. A particular strength is the use of art to enhance learning; pupils take great enjoyment in interpreting religious imagery, deepening their understanding of scripture and theology through visual expression. Religious education holds equal status with other core subjects, receiving appropriate time, resources and high expectations for pupil achievement. Ongoing, high-quality professional development ensures that teaching is confident, secure and well-informed; although initial training has been provided for staff on the new *Religious Education Directory*, leaders recognise that its implementation and further training must be carefully planned to ensure consistency and depth across all year groups. Leadership is both inspirational and outward-facing, offering support and influence beyond the immediate school community. The religious education curriculum is thoughtfully sequenced, inclusive and carefully designed to build on pupils' prior knowledge, fostering progression in both academic understanding and spiritual development. Evaluation of religious education by both leaders and governors is robust, clearly identifying actions for improvement while also celebrating successes, with governors having regular opportunities to work alongside leaders, including reviewing pupils' books, exploring the school environment and scrutinising assessment information.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

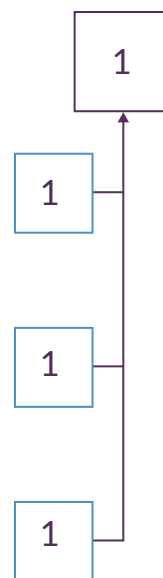
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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



Pupils engage in high quality prayer and liturgy opportunities with a profound sense of reverence, joy and participation, embracing music and song as integral elements of worship. Their joyful singing is a distinctive feature of worship across the school, enriching both whole-school celebrations and class-based liturgies, and contributing powerfully to the prayerful atmosphere. Their engagement is further enhanced by opportunities that affirm their identity and dignity; for example, pupils read bidding prayers in their home language, which powerfully reinforces their sense of worth and belonging within the school's Catholic community. Parents speak highly of the impact of worship on their children, 'It is lovely to see the children so engaged in prayer and reflection, and these experiences have really helped to grow our children's confidence when speaking, participating and expressing themselves within the school community.' Pupils plan and lead liturgy with assurance, drawing meaningfully on scripture, and speak with maturity about how prayer shapes their choices, actions and the wider life of the school. They are adept at evaluating their prayer and identifying opportunities to further enhance the experience, demonstrating a reflective and thoughtful approach to prayer. Their ability to recite prayer is exemplary, showing a deep commitment to the spiritual life of the school.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of St Joseph's. The rhythm of prayer throughout the day is familiar to all. Pupils are also provided with meaningful opportunities to pray in their own personal time, such as through the use of rosary bags at playtime and the dedicated prayer station within school. Staff are extremely skilful in leading prayer and modelling high-quality practice to others, recognising the importance of prayer in shaping the school's

identity and ensuring that all pupils and adults experience it as a meaningful and inclusive part of daily life. One member of staff reflected, 'Prayer and worship are integral to daily school life, providing regular opportunities for spiritual growth, reverence and a sense of shared purpose.' Worship is enhanced by a creative approach to prayer, incorporating a range of high-quality music and visual resources. Outdoor areas are used effectively for prayer and liturgy, providing pupils with opportunities to celebrate God's world. Families and the parish are regularly invited into school and church to celebrate and worship together. This is highly valued by all, with one parent commenting, 'We are regularly invited to liturgies and church events, which creates a strong sense of community and allows us to share these special moments with our children.'

Through a clear programme of progression in prayer and liturgy, leaders build pupils' confidence and competence in participating in worship throughout their time at the school, ensuring a strong foundation that develops year on year. Prayer and liturgy are regularly reviewed, with contributions from pupils, staff and families helping to shape its continued development and staff feel that: 'It is very much a collaborative team effort.' Governors are fully involved in the school's monitoring of prayer and liturgy. Through structured observations and informed discussions with leaders, staff, and pupils, they gain an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for development. A well-planned liturgical calendar ensures that all major religious feasts, seasons and celebrations, as well as significant school events, are marked with reverence and joy. Leaders and staff work closely with the parish, supporting the priest in preparing and delivering reconciliation services and other sacramental opportunities. An extremely warm and secure relationship with the parish priest ensures his presence in school is strong. He visits regularly, offering blessings to pupils and staff and contributing meaningfully to the spiritual life of the community. Staff benefit from inspiring professional development, equipping them to lead with confidence, creativity and reverence. Time and resources are well prioritised, ensuring that prayer and liturgy remain a vibrant and central part of school life. Thanks to the clear vision of school leaders, prayer and liturgy are joyful, inclusive and deeply meaningful.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Joseph's Catholic Junior School
School unique reference number (URN)	148844
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3903324
Full postal address of the school	School Street, Birtley, Chester-le-Street, DH3 2PN
School phone number	0191 410 2231
Executive Headteacher	Mrs Kate Swaddle
Chair of Governors	Tim Spain
School Website	stjosephcatholicschoolsbirtley.org
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	7 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	21 June 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The Inspection Team

Paul Craig Lead

Stephanie Mary Brown

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