

St Ambrose Catholic Preparatory School

URN: 106381

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Shrewsbury

20 May 2026 – 21 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

N/A

What the school does well

- The charism of Edmund Rice permeates all aspects of the school's life and work. This has a profound effect on the pupils' moral and spiritual development.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have a clear vision for the school and provide authentic and inspirational leadership.
- Pupils have a very keen sense of social justice and know that they have a responsibility to be advocates for change.
- Pupils show great enthusiasm for religious education and their behaviour is excellent. Along with consistently high quality teaching, this results in very strong standards and outcomes in the subject.
- The school provides rich and imaginative opportunities for prayer and liturgy. Pupils can confidently articulate how these shape and influence their everyday lives.

What the school needs to improve

- Devise a rigorous programme of self-evaluation in Catholic life and mission, religious education, and prayer and liturgy, which involves all stakeholders including governors.

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

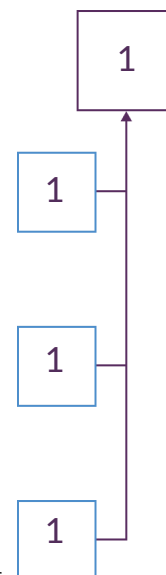
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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 embrace the charism of Edmund Rice and can clearly describe ways in which it impacts on their lives and makes them advocates for change for the better. Pupils benefit greatly from the school's engagement with the Edmund Rice Network, for example, through a zoom call with a school in Africa to develop global solidarity, and a visit from Asylum Link Liverpool as part of an advocacy project. Pupils are articulate and confident and have a keen sense of justice and social responsibility. The work of the justice society is particularly impressive, and pupils involved in this group are involved in a wide range of advocacy activities within the school and the local community, for example making sandwiches for 'Don't Walk Past', a volunteer outreach group supporting rough sleepers in Manchester. Pupils are proud to belong to this school, and they flourish in the care of committed staff. They show great respect for each other and value their differences as children of God. One pupil comments, 'Diversity is exceptional - all are welcome here.' Pupils of other faiths embrace the school's Catholic ethos wholeheartedly and feel included and celebrated. Pupils relish the range of leadership opportunities on offer, such as librarians, prefects, members of the school council, the eco council, the orchestra and the steel pans. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary at all times.

The school's mission statement is known and understood by all stakeholders, and staff are exemplary role models for their pupils. Staff consistently bear witness to the 'Eight Essentials of Edmund Rice' and this means that they permeate every aspect of school life. As one pupil says, 'The teachers want us to change the world, just like Edmund Rice did.' Staff describe the school as a 'close-knit family'. They know their pupils very well and intervene quickly where needed. Relationships at all levels are a strength of the school. There is a tangible culture of

welcome in the school and pupils know that they are loved and that their voice is heard. As one pupil comments, 'Teachers allow you to express an opinion' and this is evidenced by the work of the school council in its 'you said, we did' display. Staff have made explicit links across the curriculum to the principles of Catholic social teaching, and this means that pupils are beginning to link these to the values of Edmund Rice. The school's physical environment beautifully reflects the school's Catholic ethos and the charism of Edmund Rice. The provision for relationships, sex and health education fully meets diocesan requirements.

Leaders and governors are ambitious for and passionate about promoting the school's Catholic ethos and the charism of Edmund Rice. The headteacher, most ably supported by senior leaders, has a clear vision for the school and has succeeded in communicating this vision to all stakeholders. As one member of staff comments, 'We're all working to the same goal and the same values.' The school is building effective links with the diocese and with the local Catholic cluster. Links with the parish are strong. Leaders are mindful of staff well-being, and staff say they are supported both personally and professionally. Leaders have ensured that staff have access to high quality continuous professional development provided in house, by the diocese, and by the Edmund Rice Network. Staff induction is particularly strong as leaders invest a great deal of time and effort in the mentoring and formation of staff new to the school. Although there is a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programme of the school's Catholic life and mission, this does not yet formally involve governors.

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

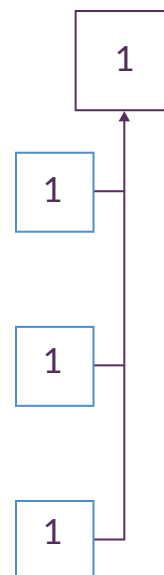
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 say they love their religious education lessons, and they know that these lessons are the most special of the week. This means that they take great pride in their work. Pupils are building excellent knowledge, understanding and skills as required by the *Religious Education Directory*. Recall of the previous learning is built into all lessons. Pupils are actively engaged in their lessons, enthusiastically answering questions and relishing being asked to 'go deeper' or 'take it further.' Pupils can work independently for extended periods, and they collaborate well with each other, remaining on task throughout. Work is always completed fully, and it is consistently of a high standard. The presentation of work in books is excellent. Pupils are confident in talking about what they have learned in lessons and are building an extensive range of religious vocabulary. For example, in Year 2 (Infant 2) pupils successfully explain the meaning of 'injustice' and 'courage' when exploring the fruits of the Spirit. They can describe how their learning in lessons impacts their lives. For instance, a pupil reflects that 'through discipleship, Jesus makes a bridge to heaven, and so our actions bring us closer to Jesus.' They know how to improve their work, and always respond to the live marking and questions posed by their teachers. Older pupils understand and can explain the school's assessment procedure. The attainment of pupils in religious education is at least in line with attainment in other core subjects.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and expectations of pupils are extremely high. Staff give religious education a very high status in the school, including starting the lesson by lighting a candle, saying the Edmund Rice prayer, and relating it to the lesson, if appropriate.

This prayer is recited by heart and from the heart by pupils as young as the Reception class. Effective questioning is a strength and draws the pupils to give deeper answers. For instance, Nursery children are asked to consider, 'What is a community?' Often, teachers pose 'I wonder questions' which spark further discussion. Staff give pupils a wide range of creative tasks such as making podcasts, role-play, freeze frames, using puppets, and responding to religious artwork. Staff regularly build in time and space for reflection in lessons, and this means that pupils consider how their learning in religious education impacts on their daily lives and how they can make changes. Furthermore, teachers also regularly invite pupils to make their own spontaneous prayers during lessons, and this they do with confidence. Marking, verbal feedback, and live marking, clearly move the learning forward. High quality resources, including film and information technology, enhance learning and make it memorable. Moderation of work takes place regularly, within school, the local Catholic cluster and the Edmund Rice Network.

The curriculum is a faithful expression of the *Religious Education Directory* and the subject leaders work tirelessly to ensure that outcomes are as high as they can be. They are a source of inspiration and support for other staff. They have a clear vision for the subject which results in teaching that is at least consistently good. Religious education has at least full parity with other core curriculum subjects, through timetabling, remuneration, professional development and resourcing. Self-evaluation through lesson observations and pupil voice by leaders gives clear next steps and these are welcomed and followed faithfully by staff. Pupils are regularly asked to evaluate their lessons, and this evaluation is insightful and mature. Self-evaluation now needs to be extended to include governors. Self-evaluation is generally understated and does not always reflect the high standards in the school.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

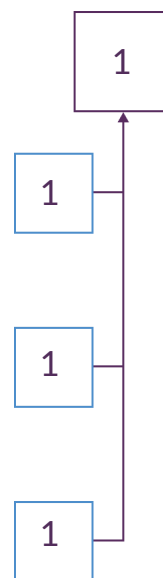
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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 are extremely reverent and engage very well in the opportunities for prayer and liturgy offered by the school. This enables full, conscious and active participation. A recurring scripture quote from pupils from the Early Years Foundation Stage upwards is, 'Where two or more are gathered in my name...' Pupils also know that they may have different responses to scripture, because as one pupil comments, 'God speaks to our hearts in different ways.' Pupils sing joyfully, read scripture confidently and animatedly, and have a clear understanding of the Church's liturgical year. They work very well collaboratively to prepare engaging and meaningful experiences of prayer, often using scripture they know well from their lessons. They can articulate clearly how their experiences of prayer shape their lives. For instance, after listening to the Gospel about the Visitation in a Year 5 (Prep 3) celebration of the word, a pupil explains that Mary was responding to someone who needed her help, and 'This showed that I need to look out for people on the margins of society and sometimes we will have things that are hard to do, but we still have to do them.' Pupils are routinely invited to share spontaneous prayer, and they do this with maturity and empathy. They also know a wide range of traditional Catholic prayers by heart, sometimes using sign language too. Older pupils are learning the Our Father in French. There are also many opportunities to write their own prayers, and these are heartfelt and meaningful.

Prayer and liturgy are clearly central to the life of the school. One member of staff comments, 'Staff work tirelessly to enable the children to encounter God in a variety of ways,' and this is evidenced through the school's own documentation. There is a rich pattern of daily prayer and many opportunities to attend Mass throughout the year. Imaginative and innovative

approaches to celebrations of the word lead pupils to a deeper understanding of scripture and enables them to make connections with the values of Edmund Rice. Parents are appreciative of the increasingly popular weekly 'stay and pray', which is planned and led by the prayer and liturgy coordinator and a pupil and his family. These times of prayer are deeply meaningful and help pupils to prepare to hear Sunday's Gospel whether at Mass or during the Gospel assembly in school. Prayer bags sent home at Advent and Lent are valued by families. Music and other art forms are used regularly to enhance experiences of prayer and liturgy. Prayer spaces are beautifully presented in classrooms and in communal areas. The chapel is cherished by all and is used daily, reflecting its centrality in the school.

The school's policy for prayer and liturgy is up to date, fit for purpose and supports and guides staff in leading whole school prayer and Gospel assemblies confidently. Leaders have prepared a progression document for learning traditional prayers and for developing the pupils' experience of writing prayers. Leaders are exemplary role models in leading prayer and celebrations of the word, and this means that pupils and staff are very skilled in preparing meaningful opportunities for prayer. It also means that by the Upper Key Stage 2 (Prep 3 and 4), pupils make insightful and mature evaluations of the prayer experiences provided by the school. Leaders have prepared a comprehensive annual plan of provision with key dates and particular reference to Edmund Rice. The school leads the sacramental preparation for the pupils in school and for those in the parish who are not in Catholic schools. Leaders regularly review the school's provision for prayer and liturgy, and this now needs to be extended to include governors.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Ambrose Catholic Preparatory School
School unique reference number (URN)	106381
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3586004
Full postal address of the school	Wicker Lane, Hale Barns, Altrincham, WA15 0HF
School phone number	0161 903 9193
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Sara Heron
Chair of Governors	Mr Mark Butler
School Website	www.stambroseprep.co.uk
Trusteeship	Religious Order Congregation of Christian Brothers
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Catholic Independent School
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed

The Inspection Team

Julie Johnson

Lead

Michael Glynn

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