

St Mary Magdalen Catholic Primary School

URN: 114541

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Diocesan Administrator of Arundel & Brighton

02 July 2026 – 03 July 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

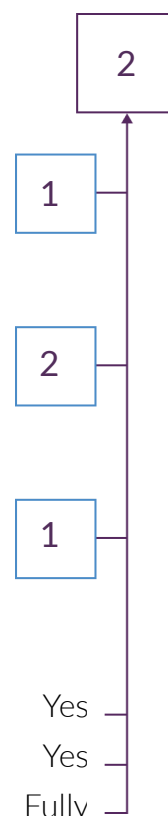
Collective worship (p.7)

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

- Pupils are exceptionally happy and feel safe: they know that they are valued and cared for.
- Staff provide the highest levels of pastoral care for all pupils.
- Leaders model Gospel values with integrity and conviction, providing inspirational leadership that is reflected in all aspects of the school's vision, strategic direction, and daily life.
- Leaders ensure that religious education is effectively planned to meet the needs of all groups of pupils.
- Leaders and governors are highly committed to ensuring the professional development of all staff.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that pupils know how well they're doing in religious education and what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure that teachers use questioning to assess where pupils are in their learning and therefore adapt tasks and explanations in response.
- Provide further opportunities for pupils to experience and confidently articulate a range of prayer forms and their significance.

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

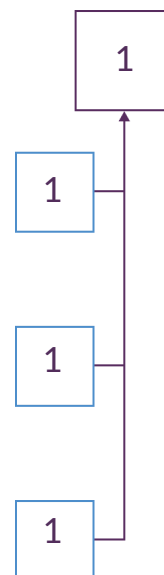
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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 exceptionally happy and feel safe and secure at St Mary Magdalen's. They know they are loved and valued as unique individuals in this inclusive school. Each day begins with the mission statement song, and pupils explain confidently how it shapes their actions, telling inspectors, for example, that they must 'help people because God tells us to love your neighbour as yourself.' This is evident in their relationships with each other and with adults. They articulate confidently why they try to treat each other with kindness and can relate this to scripture, with one pupil explaining that 'if you want to be the greatest, you must put others before you.' From the youngest to the oldest, pupils understand that they can make a positive difference and enthusiastically embrace opportunities to serve others, including raising money for Cafod and the local foodbank and making Easter cards for residents in a nearby care home. They explain how their actions reflect the principles of Catholic social teaching, telling inspectors for example that they show stewardship by 'looking after God's creation.' Pupils are proud of their diverse community, and they appreciate the opportunities to learn about the faith and culture of others in their school.

The staff team at St Mary Magdalen's consistently witness to Gospel values in their daily work, ensuring that the school's Catholic life and mission remains at the heart of the community. All staff are committed to supporting pupils, their families and each other and their caring relationships make them excellent role models for pupils. Staff explain that 'children are the highlight of our school and at the centre is our children.' Their dedicated service, effective training, and targeted support, particularly for the most vulnerable, result in high-quality pastoral care. Initiatives such as Wellbeing Wednesdays, the Outstandingly Happy Schools

Award and the Swap and Share Shed, alongside staff knowing their families exceptionally well, exemplify this provision. One parent explained, 'I can walk up to any staff member and share my worries and concerns and they will act immediately.' Much care and attention are given to providing a calm and welcoming environment that meets pupils' differing needs and reflects the Catholic nature of the school. The Penguin Classroom supports pupils with complex special educational needs and disabilities, while OPAL play provision at lunchtime is carefully adapted to meet the needs of pupils across the school.

Senior leaders are inspirational witnesses to the Gospel and promote the principles of Catholic social teaching in their direction of the school. They are passionate about ensuring that every member of the school community is cared for and supported to be the best they can be and they are determined to ensure Christ is at the heart of all their decisions and policies. Staff feel exceptionally well cared for, saying that 'leaders really care and want every single staff member to do well.' Teachers new to the school speak about the high level of genuine support from everyone. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and describe it as a welcoming and inclusive community, valuing the range of opportunities to participate in school life, from Friday morning reading sessions to workshops and community events. One parent described the 'magic bond' between staff, pupils and parents. Parish links are strong and the parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor, describing the partnership as a 'welcoming and outward-looking Catholic community that serves not only our pupils but the wider parish.' Governors are actively involved in the life of the school, and their commitment to the Church's mission in education consistently informs their decisions.

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

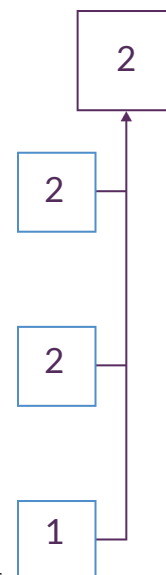
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 developing secure knowledge, understanding and skills and are making good progress in religious education. They enjoy their lessons saying, 'it helps us to get closer to Jesus', and particularly value the opportunities for role play, creative activities and analysing religious artwork. Through the school's effective use of retrieval practice and recap, pupils make links to prior learning and connect this learning to their own lives. One pupil told inspectors, 'The story of Noah teaches us that when we are far away from God, he will always be with us.' Pupils work independently and concentrate well. This was evident in a Key Stage 2 lesson where pupils reflected on how they could live out Catholic social teaching and in a Key Stage 1 lesson where teachers used a range of short activities to sustain motivation and interest while learning about Judaism. Pupils generally know when they have done well through the consistent use of success criteria; however, they are less clear about what they need to do to improve. Written work demonstrates a variety of creative recording and extended writing. While pupil books show a range of presentation quality, the class big books provide an attractive and comprehensive record of pupils' learning throughout the year.

Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge in religious education, supported by relevant professional development within the school and through the diocese. They have a good understanding of how pupils learn at different ages, and school's '6 Steps' pedagogy is well embedded. For example, regular recap of key vocabulary is evident across all classes. The 'I Say, You Say' strategy enables pupils to recall prior learning and develop confidence using subject-specific language. Teaching is adapted to meet the needs of all pupils, making

learning accessible to all. Inspectors observed the use of symbols, Widgeits and scaffolds to support learning. The skilled deployment of teaching assistants ensures that pupils are well supported and able to access learning successfully. Consequently, pupils are fully included and make good progress. Teachers use questioning to assess pupils' understanding, however, questioning does not consistently provide sufficient challenge for pupils to explain and justify their thinking, limiting opportunities to deepen learning. Teachers provide a range of activities and tasks, including role play, art and craft and video creation, which motivate, engage and enthuse pupils. As a result, behaviour for learning is good, and relationships between pupils and adults are warm, affirming and respectful.

Leaders of religious education have a clear and inspiring vision of outstanding teaching and learning and have effectively implemented the *Religious Education Directory*. They provide a range of professional development opportunities for all teachers, including team teaching, collaborative planning and sharing effective practice working with their partnership school. Leaders explain their ambition is for staff to 'improve not prove.' Consequently, teaching is consistently good, and learning is adapted to meet the needs of all pupils. Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that all pupils are fully included and can access learning in religious education. Inspectors observed highly inclusive practice across classes, including the Penguin Class, demonstrating leaders' commitment to ensuring that religious education is valued as a core subject for all pupils. Leaders have implemented an assessment system based on regular discussions with pupils alongside scrutiny of their work and support teachers to use formative assessment during lessons to provide regular and instant feedback. This enables leaders to evaluate provision accurately and identify strengths and priorities for improvement that inform the religious education action plan. Governors undertake regular visits, participate in lesson observations and speak with pupils and staff, ensuring that religious education remains central to the life and work of the school.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

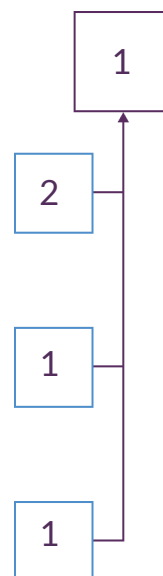
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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 enjoy and respond well to the opportunities for prayer and liturgy offered by the school. They show this by their reverence and respect, by their joyful singing and by their participation in sacred silence and communal responses. This was evident in a whole school celebration of the Word based on the theme of 'Fear Not.' Some pupils make meaningful links between prayer and liturgy and its impact in their own lives. For example, one pupil explains that Saul's conversion teaches him to show forgiveness to others. Pupils understand different ways of praying and begin to explain how these relate to the liturgical year, recognising, for example, that Lent is a season of prayer and fasting. The Shine Your Light Chaplains work with their teachers to prepare weekly experiences of prayer and liturgy. Clear guidance from subject leaders provides a consistent framework that develops pupils' confidence and responsibility. They also evaluate the weekly class prayer sessions; however, their evaluation remains at a basic level. Younger pupils contribute by choosing items for the prayer focus, while older pupils confidently proclaim scripture and lead short prayers.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school. Leaders provide a rich and varied range of prayer experiences, including weekly celebrations of the Word, lectio divina, visio divina and meditation. Key staff model exemplary practice in leading celebrations of the Word, providing frequent and meaningful opportunities that reflect the richness and breadth of the Catholic tradition. Some staff are less confident in leading prayer and liturgy, although leaders provide effective support to strengthen their practice. Scripture is carefully selected and presented in ways that enable pupils to engage thoughtfully with the Word of God, even when passages are appropriately challenging for their age. Prayer spaces in classrooms are

extremely well resourced, of high quality, and reflect the liturgical year. They are well cared for, showing their high status. Despite the limitations of the school site, school leaders have demonstrated creativity and vision in developing prayer spaces. These include carefully designed focal points celebrating the lives of the saints and Our Lady, a creative 'Footsteps to St Carlo Acutis' display, and a prayer garden designed and used by pupils. The school actively involves families in its prayer life, providing liturgy information with invitations to Masses and other celebrations. Prayer bags are sent home, and one parent comments, that, 'he had to get involved in religion because of everything his child kept bringing home.'

Leaders and governors have established clear and detailed policies on prayer and liturgy, including progression in pupils' leadership of prayer, which clearly outlines the school's expectations and the roles of staff. They have prepared a comprehensive calendar which includes monthly Masses in church, celebrations for saints' days, opportunities to pray the Rosary in May and October and Stations of the Cross during Lent. Leaders are committed to the ongoing formation of staff so that they can help pupils develop their prayer life in a variety of ways; designing a programme of half-termly prayer focuses enabling pupils to experience different forms of prayer, for example, meditation and prayer in nature. They ensure that teachers collaborate regularly with the Shine Your Light Chaplains to prepare and evaluate weekly class prayers sessions. This supports pupils with taking increasing ownership of class prayer experiences. The parish priest visits every Wednesday for class prayer sessions and provides feedback and guidance to staff and pupils, strengthening the quality and consistency of provision. Governors actively support and evaluate prayer and liturgy through visits and discussions with pupils. Their findings are reported at governing board meetings and informs the school's self-evaluation.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary Magdalen Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	114541
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8463313
Full postal address of the school	Spring Street, Brighton, BN1 3EF
School phone number	01273 327533
Executive Headteacher	Sarah Clayton
Headteacher or Head of School	Gemma Nunes
Chair of Governors	Christina Bamin
School Website	www.stmarymags.brighton-hove.dbprimary.com
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	07 June 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The Inspection Team

Michael Lobo Lead

Rufina Ebenebe

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