

# St Michael's Catholic School

URN: 149612

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Northampton

21–22 November 2024

## 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

2

#### Collective worship (p.7)

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

2

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

2

## Compliance statement

- The school is fully compliant in relation to the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' conference.
- The school is fully compliant in relation to any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- The school has responded to the areas of improvement from the last inspection and therefore is fully compliant in relation to previous areas for improvement.

## What the school does well

- The school's mission is known and lived out in this inclusive community.
- Relationships between pupils, staff and leaders are strong; staff provide good role models for pupils.
- Pupils make good progress in religious education throughout the school.
- Pupil behaviour in class and throughout the school is exemplary.
- This is a school that takes prayer seriously and as such pupils experience a good range of opportunities to develop spiritually.

## What the school needs to improve

- Further embed Catholic social teaching across the curriculum and the life of the school.
- In religious education lessons further develop strategies to challenge more able pupils.
- Further develop opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their leadership of prayer and liturgy.

## 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**

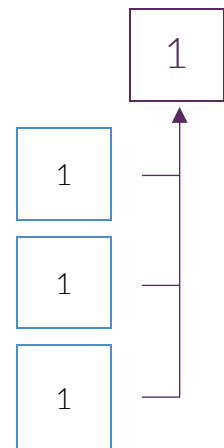
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

**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 have a very good understanding of the mission of the school, 'achieving in faith, with love, as a community', and how this is lived out on a daily basis. The awards given to pupils and staff, based around behaviours that reflect the mission of the school, are used to good effect. Pupils are rightly very proud of their school and feel happy, confident and secure. St Michael's nine virtues provide a clear weekly focus, helping pupils to demonstrate these virtues in daily life. Pupils take a leading role in responding to the demands of Catholic social teaching and they are able to articulate the theological justification for the extensive charity programme. A strength of the school is that those from other faiths are welcomed and respected. Pupils enjoy and engage in cultural experiences to celebrate diversity, for example the Wycombe campus organises a highly successful community Iftah meal at the end of Ramadan which families can attend. Inclusivity is a strength across all phases and campuses. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and throughout the school is exemplary. Pupils value the dynamic chaplaincy provision and appreciate the efforts made by staff to develop the school into a community that is based on love, one pupil affirming 'this is our second home'.

The school has a well-developed programme of charity work that engages pupils in modelling faith in action at a local, national and international level. The school supports a wide range of charities such as the local hospice and Cafod. Catholic social teaching is embedded in RE lessons however this is not yet consistent across the whole of the taught curriculum. This community excels at being a community based on Catholic practice. Pupil mission leaders advocate for change and lead by example. Staff comment that the culture of welcome and overwhelming support from school leaders enables them to flourish. This is an exceptionally joyful and supportive community that is focused on Christ as its centre. The school environment effectively

witnesses to its identity, mission, and charism through explicit and effective signs of the school's Catholic character. The care and attention given to the quality of the space reflects the dignity of each person and contributes positively to their formation. A member of staff from the Aylesbury campus stated 'not just a beautiful building, it's a beautiful community'. Relationships and sex education is led very well within the context of personal development lessons; as result pupils experience a provision that is grounded in the teaching of the Church and celebrates a holistic vision of the human person.

Leaders and governors have a clear vision of the school as a Catholic community and they are ambitious to make this an outstanding Catholic school. They are active in not just safeguarding the identity of the school but also continuing to strengthen it. There are clear plans, based on monitoring, to develop the Catholic life and mission of the school. Governors and the Trust have given critical support to the school leadership; as a result, leaders excel at promoting the Catholic life and mission of the school. Given the difficult circumstances in which the primary campus finds itself, leaders have ensured that the temporary environment reflects that Christ is at the heart of the school. The school enjoys high levels of parental support and parents welcome the renewed focus on the Catholic life of the school. There is strong provision for staff professional development, so that staff are aware of the expectations placed upon them; consequently they are enthused and committed to participate in activities that reflect the mission of the school. A member of staff stated 'faith and love are at the heart of all we do, I work in a wonderful school.'

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

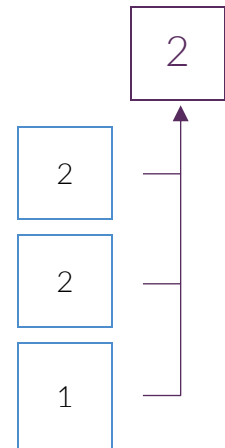
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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



Pupils make good progress in religious education and are developing secure knowledge, understanding and skills. Results at the end of Key Stage 4 are good and compare well to other subjects. Pupils can confidently contribute to class discussion, as seen in a Year 4 lesson on Advent, where pupils considered the ways in which Christians can prepare for Christmas. Good levels of religious literacy were evident in pupil books, showing that they can use their knowledge, understanding and skills effectively to reflect spiritually and think ethically and theologically. For example, pupils' extended writing in Key Stage 4 clearly showed well developed argumentative skills. Pupils' books are consistently well presented; they take a pride in their work indicating the positive regard pupils have for this subject. Pupils are engaged in reviewing their own learning and can make links to previous learning. In a Year 10 lesson on the liturgical worship at the Aylesbury campus, pupils made good progress in the lesson building on prior knowledge to support new learning. Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons and are confident and articulate when speaking about their learning. Behaviour in lessons is very good. Pupils are respectful of their teachers and value their lessons.

Some teachers have strong subject knowledge and ask good questions of pupils. In a Wycombe campus Year 9 lesson on how Christians interpret the Old Testament to see signs of the New Testament, the teacher demonstrated a good command of biblical theology, and pupils were able to identify and correct any misconceptions. Teacher planning is good; this was seen in a Year 5 lesson that focused on the prophecy from Isaiah about the messiah, where the teacher constructed a clear sequence of activities that supported the pupils' learning. At times, however, tasks are not always adapted to meet the needs of more able pupils. Teacher questioning can be strong; on the Wycombe campus, in a Year 10 lesson on the Mass, the teacher demonstrated effective questioning to illicit good answers from pupils. In a Year 6 lesson on women in the Old

Testament, the teacher's questioning facilitated high quality peer discussion. Teachers have created well-ordered learning environments with good quality classroom displays. Marking is not yet fully consistent, however there is some excellent practice in which pupils are engaged in acting upon feedback. Although high quality teaching is a feature of some lessons, there is a need for this to be shared across all classes.

The leadership of religious education is outstanding. Religious education leaders across the different campuses all have a clear and inspiring vision for the curriculum subject and are committed to raising standards. They are supported well by senior leaders and consequently religious education is seen as a core subject within the curriculum. The *Religious Education Directory* is being implemented, and plans are in place for it to be fully applied to all the relevant key stages. Planning is strong as prior learning is constantly referenced and lessons are creative and engaging for pupils. There are good opportunities for extra-curricular enrichment visits. There is a strong commitment to staff development; religious education teachers in need of subject knowledge development are supported through a range of programmes. Monitoring is regular and student voice is used well to capture the pupil experience. Where needed, subject leaders are able to identify and support staff to develop their professional expertise as religious education teachers. There are excellent whole school systems in place to support subject leaders in strategically developing the experience of pupil 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

2

#### Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

2

#### Leadership

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

2

2

Pupils respond well to the experiences of prayer and liturgy offered by the school; they are respectful of prayer and their engagement is good. For example, on the Wycombe campus, Year 7 pupils responded very well to being led in reflective prayer based on the Ignatian Examen. Pupils have a good awareness of the variety of ways of praying; they know many traditional Catholic prayers and are given opportunities to write their own prayers. Pupils have opportunities to undertake liturgical ministries, such as being an altar server, reader or taking up the offertory. They speak highly of their experience of Mass and value the retreat programme that is offered to them. There is, however, further scope for pupils to actively lead prayer and liturgy. Pupils can speak about the ways in which their experience of prayer and liturgy can lead to social action. The school's virtues are used well in assembly time to promote Christian responsibility. On the Aylesbury campus, in a Year 10 assembly focused on the virtue of stewardship, links were clearly made to the care of God's creation and how this can be put into practice. The liturgical year is marked well in the school's calendar; as a result, pupils have a good awareness of the Church's seasons.

The prayer life of the school is an embedded feature across all campuses and all phases; pupils have regular opportunities to pray. Prayer and liturgy in the school offer pupils a range of ways of praying that exemplifies the richness of the Catholic tradition. Scripture is at the heart of prayer and liturgy, and pupils are used to regular opportunities to reflect on scripture in prayerful silence. In a Year 10 assembly on stewardship at the Wycombe campus, staff confidently led prayer and made links to the Gospel reading. There is a good retreat programme that provides pupils with opportunities for spiritual development. A range of staff model exemplary practice in leading prayer and liturgy and chaplains work well to develop pupil responsibility for prayer and liturgy. Prayer corners or prayer displays are a consistent feature

of classrooms. There has been good work on fostering links between families and parishes through shared liturgical events; links with parishes in Aylesbury are particularly strong. Parents are invited to participate in liturgies and Masses. In the primary campus, a prayer bag goes home with pupils weekly for families to further engage with prayer. A parent commented, 'Whenever I attend school Masses or events, staff are strongly represented, their witness is encouraging for pupils.'

Leaders, including governors, have ensured that prayer and liturgy have a high profile in the school. Leaders have formulated a progressive policy for prayer that has helped to create a unified focus across all the campuses and phases. Leaders have a strategy to develop pupils' liturgical formation, appropriate to their age and capacity. They have planned a comprehensive calendar and timetable for prayer and liturgy in which there are regular opportunities for Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The arrangements for the celebration of the school feast day are prioritised in the school calendar. There are regular opportunities for the professional development of staff to develop their expertise in leading and facilitating prayer for pupils. Leaders and governors have resourced this area of the school very well. There is monitoring of prayer and liturgy which supports the process of self-evaluation by leaders and governors, leading to helpful improvement planning for this aspect of school life.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Michael's Catholic School
School unique reference number (URN)	149612
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8254701
Full postal address of the school	St Michael's Catholic School, Daws Hill Lane, High Wycombe, HP11 1PW
School phone number	01494535196
Headteacher	Louise Baker
Chair of local governing body	Ken Kavanagh
School Website	<a href="http://www.stmichaels.bucks.sch.uk">www.stmichaels.bucks.sch.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	St Thomas Catholic Academies Trust
Phase	All Through
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	3-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	March 2016
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

## The inspection team

Matthew Dell	Lead
Amanda Crowley	Team
Carol Ransom	Team
Daniel Keane	Team
Evelyn Ward	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