



Birchley St Mary's Catholic Primary School

URN: 104813

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Liverpool

23 September 2026 – 24 September 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 diocesan directives

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

2

1

2

2

Yes

Yes

Fully

What the school does well

- The mission statement is lived out by all in the school community and the core values are integral to the ethos of St Mary's.
- Pastoral support systems ensure that Christ is at the centre of all their work.
- Effective teamwork ensures purposeful professional development and supports all staff well-being.
- The recap of previous learning and vocabulary development is highly effective in religious education.
- Prayer and Liturgy is being skillfully developed to enhance the prayer life of St Mary's.

What the school needs to improve

- In religious education, provide stronger strategies for questioning and challenge to support the accelerated progress of all pupils, especially the more able.
- In religious education governors should support and challenge senior leaders and teachers to establish consistent practice in matching content to outcomes for pupils. Their written work should include feedback that enables progress.
- Monitor and share good practice in 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

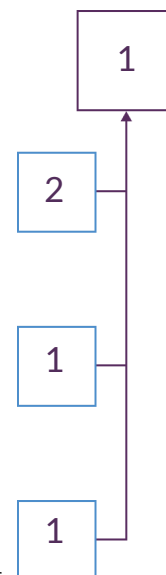
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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 are deeply valued and cared for at St Mary's and flourish within a community where the mission statement is lived authentically each day. Pupils know that they are unique and precious to God and confidently articulate how their core values of respect, celebration, nurture, integrity and creativity are supported as members of the school and parish family. From the earliest years, pupils are encouraged to become active participants in their faith journey and respond enthusiastically to opportunities to live out their core values in practical ways. Consequently, pupils make a significant contribution to the life of the school, parish and wider community. They understand clearly that they are called to serve others and speak passionately about their responsibility to care for God's creation. Pupils embrace leadership roles, including 'Mini Vinnies' and 'Worship Warriors' with pride, maturity and a sense of responsibility. They are role models for one another and demonstrate excellent behaviour in and around school. Relationships are characterised by kindness, respect and compassion. The pupils in these groups confidently explain how faith influences their actions, decisions and relationships with others. Through gaining the Live Simply award pupils are developing a good understanding of their role in caring for our common home. They provide examples of living sustainably and how to support the world's developing communities.

The school has recently reviewed and updated its mission statement and core values which are more in line with the school's current context. The school's commitment to its Catholic identity is visible through the ongoing care and attention given to creating its learning environment indoors and out. The curriculum has been carefully planned to provide opportunities for the pupils to actively participate and think deeply about their place in the

world. There is a growing culture of welcome and a planned curriculum to ensure pupils are aware and respect other faiths, cultures and traditions. They care for their common home and the work on Fair Trade, CAFOD and other charities chosen by the pupils deepens their knowledge of them in the world and how they can live out their individual missions. The relationships, sex and health education programme of study is well planned and timetabled across the school. The programme of study meets diocesan and statutory requirements. All staff are positive role models to each other and the pupils. The positive relationships in the school is a strength and as a result parents are confident to approach school for any pastoral support and feel welcomed during visits both formal and informal.

The headteacher is steadfast in exercising her duty to be the guardian of this school family. She is supported well by the governors, assistant headteacher, subject leader, and the parish priest who share a deep commitment to ensuring that the Catholic faith permeates every facet of school life. The mission statement review days give members of the school community the opportunity to contribute to and share the work they do and to show how they put their faith and values into action. Staff feel valued at St Mary's. They are given support in all aspects of school life and beyond as they contribute to the Catholic life and mission. This is undertaken through strong induction and professional development. The Governors say, 'The Catholic curriculum at St Mary's is not just a subject but who we are.' The skilled and committed subject leader supported by the governors, engages with the archdiocese and neighbouring schools to ensure there are plenty of opportunities for collaborative working and cascades information on a regular basis. The staff respects the leadership team as valued role models and feel fully supported by them in all aspects of their school life both professionally and personally.

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

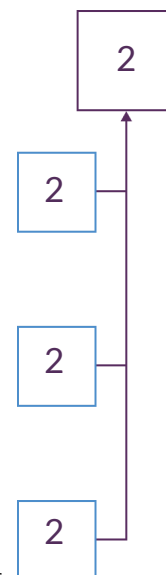
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 which reflect the requirements of the Religious Education Directory. They enjoy their lessons, show interest and enthusiasm and are keen to share their ideas. Pupils of all ages can recall many Bible stories and key learning from their religious education, due to the recap and recall strategies consistently used at the start of lessons. As a result the pupils are becoming more religiously literate and a real focus on vocabulary development was seen in many classes throughout the inspection. Pupils can talk about the liturgical year and key prayers and events associated with its seasons. Pupils from an early age work confidently both together and independently. Those with special needs are well supported with high-quality resources and adaptations and make progress in line with their peers. Because of the good behaviour in lessons, teachers are able to use creative styles to enhance the learning opportunities. Art and drama are used well and supported children to remember and embed their learning. Work is well presented in books but there is an over reliance on work sheets which inhibit their writing opportunities; especially the more able.

Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and have a good understanding of pupils' individual needs and how they learn. All staff create a positive climate for learning with pupils being encouraged to support and help each other. The systems for the recall of previous learning and prior knowledge is consistent across the school and questioning is used effectively in most classes. The key vocabulary for each unit is revisited, reinforced and used throughout teaching across all key stages. References to scripture and passages from the

Bible are evident in lessons as teachers strive to ensure that pupils are religiously literate. There are displays of religious education work around the school. Provision that allows for a mixture of creative tasks and extended written answers is needed in religious education lessons. Further work is needed to ensure levels of work in books is consistent with the demands of the content. It needs to show appropriate levels of challenge for the more able pupils. Developing further strategies for feedback will assist pupils understanding of how well they are doing in religious education and what they need to do to improve. Assessment of work takes place after each unit taught and is regularly moderated by the subject leader. Moderation of religious education work has taken place with other leaders across local Catholic schools to help with consistency of standards.

Leaders and governors ensure the religious education curriculum meets the standards for the learning required by the *Religious Education Directory*. The new curriculum has been thoughtfully introduced in the Early Years to Year 6. Leaders have prioritised training for staff which has been facilitated mainly by the expertise of the religious education leader and the archdiocese. School leadership has provided time and support to ensure rising standards across the school are becoming more consistent. Regular staff meetings, professional development opportunities, including team teaching and peer coaching, ensure staff are gaining confidence in their delivery. The high quality of support from the subject leader is recognised across the school. There is a regular timetable of monitoring which has informed a change in practice and as a result improvements are starting to become evident. Governors are ambitious for the school, and they are well informed about religious education through the headteacher's and subject leader's reports and outcomes from monitoring. They are keen to celebrate the achievement of their pupils and staff but need to provide more challenges for leaders.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

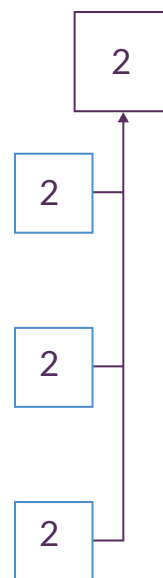
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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



Class prayer and liturgy is an established part of St Mary's school's daily timetable. Pupils know a variety of traditional prayers and respond well to the experiences provided by the school and the class teachers. A variety of celebrations of the word and guided spiritual meditations were observed. Pupils can describe the Church's liturgical year and how it influences the prayer life of their school. They enjoy their experiences of class prayer and liturgy and particularly the opportunity for quiet reflective moments that these sessions can provide. They are given opportunities to participate through the reading of scripture, bidding prayers and hymn singing, which they demonstrated from the Early Years to Year 6. They know a variety of traditional and modern hymns, which also included the welcoming of the Gospel and gathering songs. Pupils demonstrate respect and reverence at all times. The Worship Warriors are proud of their role and are keen to contribute further to the prayer life of the school. The headteacher is keen to develop this team so it can work with all classes more frequently to ensure that evaluations of prayer and liturgy have an impact.

Leaders, including governors, recognise the importance of prayer and liturgy for the school community and are striving to ensure it is of the highest quality. Prayer life is embedded in the school within a daily programme of delivery. Prayer areas are established in every classroom. The partnership of the school and parish is helping pupils to participate more fully in all forms of prayer and liturgy. Families highly value their invitations to the Stay and Pray sessions. Teachers model prayer and liturgy in its different forms with reverence and respect. The headteacher's celebrations of the word on Mondays are attended by all staff and pupils. These provide examples of good practice and valued spiritual experiences. The parish priest is

a regular visitor to the school and offers Mass for the pupils throughout the liturgical seasons. Regular singing practice takes place and this ensures pupils have an increased awareness of traditional and modern hymns. Music is used to enhance class prayer and liturgical services. The pupils are looking forward to developing the new outside prayer area and so establish a further space for planned and spontaneous prayer for the whole community.

At St Mary's there is a clear and precise policy for prayer and liturgy which is understood and put into action. There is a clear direction for prayer and its development as the pupils' progress through the year groups. The school's *Annual Plan of Provision* has been developed in line with the new *Prayer and Liturgy Directory*. There is a carefully planned calendar which reflects the liturgical year's seasons and feasts and provides flexibility to support school specific occasions and celebrations. Continued professional development and mission statement review weeks at the beginning of every year, ensure the highest priority is given to spiritual development at St Mary's. Quality focus tables support prayer and liturgy. The school would benefit from purposeful indoor prayer spaces to further promote its ethos and reflect the Catholic vision of the community. Leaders have prioritised quality resources to support prayer and liturgy as well as the time to ensure teachers have the training required. This is appreciated by staff. Monitoring and sharing of good practice in prayer and liturgy across the school should now be prioritised to ensure consistency in continued improvement.

Information about the school

Full name of school	Birchley St Mary's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	104813
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3423450
Full postal address of the school	Birchley St Mary's Catholic School, Birchley Road, Wigan, WN5 7QJ
School phone number	01744 678610
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Ruth Martin
Chair of Governors	Mr Wayne Leatherbarrow
School Website	www.bstm.co.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	
Age-range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	05 November 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The Inspection Team

Janice Taberner

Lead

Louise Vose

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