



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE INSPECTION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND ACADEMIES



St Stephen's RC Primary School, a Voluntary Academy

URN: 150188

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Salford

04 March 2026 – 05 March 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

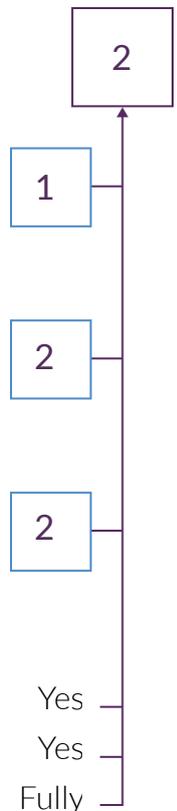
Collective worship (p.7)

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

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher, and religious education lead are passionate and focused in their commitment in driving school improvement.
- This school is highly inclusive, providing outstanding care for pupils and vulnerable families, including those with special educational needs and disabilities; this care is central to the strong sense of family and community.
- Pupils demonstrate exceptional behaviour, showing care and respect for one another at all times.
- Strong relationships exist throughout the entire school community, where every individual is valued and supported.
- The school community actively lives out its Catholic life, bearing witness to its mission statement in all aspects of school life.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop provision so that pupils collaboratively plan and lead creative, well-constructed prayer and liturgy, including, meditation, traditional prayer and spontaneous prayer, demonstrating an understanding of how these experiences shape their understanding of themselves and the world.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to develop their ability to confidently articulate their faith, engage in spiritual reflection, think ethically, and reason theologically at a level appropriate to their age and capacity.

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

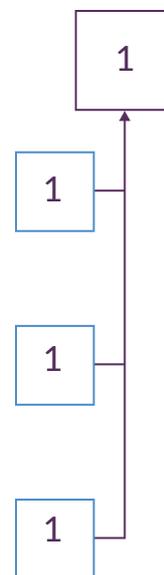
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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 at St Stephen's demonstrate a secure understanding of the mission of the school. The school is very strong in its pastoral care for its community. Pupils clearly express that they are valued and loved as unique persons made in the image of God. This is reflected in their happiness, confidence, and security, nurtured by the school's exceptional pastoral care. The forest school curriculum enriches pupils' understanding of their responsibility to care for our common home. Pupils enthusiastically engage with activities such as gardening and environmental conservation. Through their charity work, they embrace their personal responsibility to serve those in need. Pupils are proud of their leadership roles and actively look for ways to respond to local, national, and global issues. During the inspection, they were happy to talk about the rosary challenge that they led and how they distributed Bibles and rosary beads to all pupils. The Laudato Si' team are proud of the work they are doing to care for our common home. Behaviour for learning is exemplary across the school, with pupils able to articulate and uphold the school rules with confidence. They show a deep respect for the dignity of all.

Christ is at the centre of St Stephen's, creating a strong, lived sense of community evident in relationships and a culture of welcome and support. The school demonstrates a clear and committed Catholic mission. The mission statement was recently reviewed through engagement with pupils, staff, parents, and governors, ensuring it remains relevant and inspiring. Staff consistently live out the Gospel message, exemplifying the mission to 'Love one another as I have loved you.' The forest school lead passionately connects outdoor learning with Catholic social teaching, enriching pupils' understanding of care for creation. The school's

inclusive culture is a particular strength, especially in special educational needs provision. Parents consistently praise the school's commitment to ensuring all children can access Catholic education. The new 'TLC provision' offers a dedicated space for pupils with special educational needs to flourish, supported by a compassionate pastoral team providing practical and emotional care to families. The school environment powerfully reflects its Catholic identity. Prayer focus areas in every classroom are regularly updated to reflect the liturgical calendar. Prayer stations encourage spontaneous prayer, and the recently created prayer garden offers a beautiful outdoor space for worship and reflection.

All leaders, including governors, wholeheartedly embrace their responsibility to ensure Christ is at the heart of this warm, welcoming, and inclusive school. They confidently articulate the pride they have in their role, describing St Stephen's as a true home away from home. Leaders actively engage with the diocese by welcoming diocesan representatives to collaborate with staff and pupils, fostering a dynamic partnership. The strong relationship with the parish is evident, with the parish priest celebrating whole-school Masses each half term and leading weekly year group Masses. Leadership recognises parents as the primary educators and promotes strong home-school partnerships through an open-door policy. Senior leaders personally greet pupils and families each morning, reinforcing the school's culture of welcome and community. They have a clear vision of inclusivity and consistently witness to the Gospel and Catholic social teaching, especially the preferential option for the poor. They prioritise resources to support families in need through uniform provision, food and toy collections, and pastoral care. Staff express positive views about the school. They praise leaders and governors for their compassion, respect, and genuine care for the well-being of all staff members. This exemplary leadership fosters a cohesive, supportive community rooted in faith and service.

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

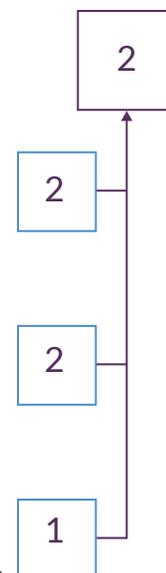
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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



Through adopting the *Lighting the Path* scheme of work, pupils are developing their knowledge and understanding of religious education as outlined in the *Religious Education Directory*. The introduction of retrieval practice at the start of lessons helps pupils know more and remember more, as seen in lesson observations and pupil achievement, including those with special educational needs. The use of *Widgits* further supports the progress of all children, particularly those with special educational needs. Pupils take pride in sharing and discussing their religious education work, confidently using subject-specific vocabulary. However, their ability to reflect spiritually and to think ethically and theologically is still developing. Pupils said they enjoy religious education lessons and appreciate teacher feedback, which helps them understand how well they are doing. In observed lessons, pupils demonstrate good independence, and engage well with the challenges presented to them. To further enhance their learning, pupils would benefit from more opportunities to express their understanding creatively. Overall, pupils achieve well in religious education, with attainment in line with or above other core subjects. The curriculum and teaching strategies effectively support good progress and engagement among all pupils.

Most teachers demonstrate confidence and strong subject knowledge in religious education, benefiting from a well-planned continuing professional development structure that supports their ongoing development. Teachers set high expectations for pupils' learning. The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum provides a solid foundation for children's religious education journey. The school follows the diocesan-approved scheme of work, with teachers

adapting lessons to meet the diverse needs and abilities of pupils in their classes. Effective questioning is used during lessons to assess pupils' understanding of key knowledge and skills, enabling teachers to tailor support appropriately. Pupils are motivated and engaged, with their effort celebrated regularly. Feedback is constructive and helps pupils understand how to improve and progress in their learning. Work in books is generally neat and well-presented, reflecting pupils' commitment. However, activities often lack variety and originality, limiting opportunities for pupils to express individuality and develop creative thinking. To enhance teaching and learning further, the school should focus on incorporating a wider range of strategies and innovative approaches that foster pupils' individuality and deepen their engagement with religious education.

The headteacher, deputy headteacher, and religious education lead provide a clear, inspiring, and shared vision for religious education across the school. They ensure that religious education has full parity with other core subjects in professional development, resourcing, timetabling, staffing, and accommodation. Their unwavering commitment to empowering staff is evident through a comprehensive and ongoing programme of high-quality professional development that enhances both subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise. The religious education lead is passionate and relentless in driving continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Working closely with the deputy headteacher, she ensures the curriculum is imaginatively and thoughtfully planned. It is accessible and challenging, meeting the diverse needs of all pupils and securing coherent progression across all key stages. School leaders and governors undertake rigorous and robust monitoring and evaluation of religious education, underpinned by rigorous analysis and self-challenge. This enables them to identify strengths and areas for development with precision and to implement well-targeted, strategic actions that lead to strong outcomes. Governors actively engage with the school community by participating in governor days, which include pupil book scrutiny, liturgical celebrations, and meetings with the lead, deepening their understanding and advocacy for religious education. Strong partnerships with other schools and the diocese further enrich continuing professional development, ensuring staff are highly skilled and confident in delivering a dynamic and impactful religious education curriculum.

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

1

2

Class prayer and celebration of the word is a regular and valued part of the school timetable. Pupils respond positively to the prayer and liturgy experiences provided, coming together respectfully and fully engaging in prayer and hymn singing. They know the school's prayers and traditional prayers well and can confidently describe key parts of the liturgical year. Pupils demonstrate growing independence in planning and evaluating class celebrations of the word. However, they would benefit from further guidance to develop more creative and well-structured worship experiences. In the strongest celebrations observed, pupils showed confidence in planning elements of the experience. They also led their peers effectively in prayer. At significant points in the liturgical year, the 'CARES' team takes responsibility for planning and leading prayer across the school, providing meaningful opportunities for pupil leadership in worship. Through the diocesan-led singing programme, pupils in Years 3 and 4 develop their liturgical music skills, which they enthusiastically share with the wider community. Overall, pupils engage well in prayer and liturgy, showing respect and enthusiasm. The school provides good opportunities for spiritual growth and pupil involvement, with clear potential for further development in pupil-led worship and creative expression.

At St Stephen's, prayer and liturgy is central to daily life, and a consistent pattern of daily prayer is well established. During significant liturgical periods, October and Lent, prayer includes the rosary and Cafod reflections. Retreat days provide additional opportunities for reflection and meditation, deepening pupils' spiritual awareness and fostering a culture of quiet contemplation. Seasonally appropriate scripture passages are central to prayer and

liturgy and are revisited across the week. Staff and pupils collaborate to select scripture for weekly Masses. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of supporting pupils in planning and leading prayer and liturgy that is reflective of Catholic tradition. All staff are growing in confidence in their role of supporting children in planning celebrations of the word. The school would benefit from those staff who are more confident in guiding pupils, sharing that best practice with those less confident, and showing how to provide more opportunities for spontaneous prayer. The inspection took place during Lent. Seasonally appropriate scripture passages were central to prayer and liturgy. The school works hard to secure strong partnerships with the local parish and parents. They invite families to join their stay and pray sessions, class assemblies, and class Masses.

The commitment of leaders at St Stephen's demonstrates a strong and clear dedication to ensuring that prayer and liturgy is purposeful, progressive, and deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition. The recently introduced whole-school prayer progression document provides an excellent framework for developing pupils' participation from the early years through to Year 6, ensuring children grow confidently in knowledge, reverence, and spiritual maturity as they progress through the school. Pupils benefit from rich and varied opportunities to encounter Christ, including whole-school Masses celebrated with the parish priest. Weekly parish Masses are held on a rotating basis. The celebration of holy days of obligation and key feast days, including the school's patron saint, is given appropriate prominence, significantly strengthening pupils' understanding of the liturgical year. The CARES Team is developing well. Pupils are increasingly confident in planning and leading celebrations of the word, actively contributing to the school's Catholic life. Staff are well supported through high-quality professional development, including recent training from Mark 10 Mission and ongoing diocesan engagement under the leadership of the proactive religious education subject leader. Prayer and liturgy are effectively resourced, supported by a dedicated annual budget, reflecting the school's commitment to sustaining a vibrant and dynamic prayer and liturgy programme.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Stephen's RC Primary School, a Voluntary Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	150188
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3573323
Full postal address of the school	Chappell Rd, Droylsden, Manchester, M43 7NA
School phone number	0161 370 2071
Headteacher or Head of School	Mr Connor Lavin
Chair of Governors	Ms Catherine Lloyd
School Website	www.stsrcp.school
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Emmaus Catholic Academy Trust
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	03 July 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The Inspection Team

Marie Kwiatkowski Lead

Emma Graves

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