

St Francis of Assisi Catholic College

URN: 104255

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Birmingham

19–20 September 2024

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

1

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

1

Collective worship (p.7)

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

1

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

Compliance statement

- This school fully complies with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishop's Conference.
- This school is fully compliant with the additional requirements of the diocesan archbishop.
- This school has fully addressed all previous areas for improvement.

What the school does well

- The school has an inspiring vision and commitment to its mission which is fully lived out in all aspects of its work.
- Governors, leaders, and all staff have high expectations of themselves and their students which are rooted in the virtues and gospel values.
- Leaders and teachers have secured high outcomes in religious education for their students and secured strong foundations for their futures.
- Rigorous and robust systems create a peaceful and focussed atmosphere which leads to exemplary behaviour and strong pastoral care.
- Every gathering, action, policy and decision is made with the students and the Gospel at their heart.

What the school needs to improve

- Establish consistency in how students respond to teachers' feedback in religious education.
- Seek regular opportunities for involving parents and local parishes in its prayer life.
- Develop a range of opportunities for student 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

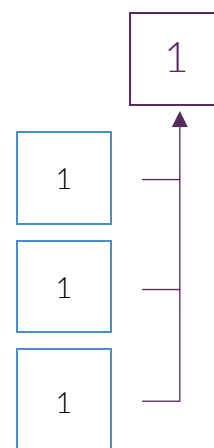
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



Students understand and embrace the distinctive Catholic identity of this school, rooted in the Gospel and the values of St Francis of Assisi. This is expressed by the development of the virtues curriculum to incorporate the distinctive Franciscan virtues of integrity, compassion, and service. Students' witness to these virtues enhances the school's mission. Students know and understand that they are valued, individually and collectively, as unique persons made in God's image; consequently, they are happy and confident and feel secure. This is seen in lessons, in the corridors and in the liturgies in which they participate. At lunch time, a Year 7 student happily told inspectors, 'I love it here'. The behaviour of pupils is exemplary throughout the school. Pupils in all key stages highly value the school's chaplaincy provision and are active participants in it. There are thirty formal chaplaincy representatives and an equal number who engage regularly in chaplaincy activities. There is a dynamic and well-planned chaplaincy programme which includes external provision including Alton Castle, Soli House, Flame, and the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes.

The mission statement is a clear and inspiring expression of the educational mission of the Church and of the school's Franciscan charism. It is known and lived out through outreach work for food banks and St Chad's Sanctuary. As a result, it has a significant impact and ensures that this is a community based on Catholic tradition and practice. Staff wholeheartedly embrace it. This is evidenced by the fact that 11 of the current staff members are former students themselves and that staff say they enjoy working in this school. They are inspired by the faith and commitment of senior leaders and are ably supported to contribute to the school's faith life by the lay chaplain. Recently qualified teachers speak enthusiastically of the care offered by leaders. Everybody in the community of St Francis of Assisi understands and recognises the

importance of following Jesus' teachings. This results in a culture of warm welcome which is evident to all who visit the school. Staff are exemplary role models for students, demonstrated in every interaction both in and outside of lessons. The provision for relationship, sex, and health education (RSHE) is adapted from a diocesan-approved programme of study. Students confidently articulate what they have learned in these lessons.

Senior leaders are energised, joyful and determined in the pursuit of the mission of this school. As a consequence, all policies and procedures clearly reflect the priority given to the school's Catholic identity. However, the school's partnerships with local parishes are not yet central to its Catholic life and mission and are yet to be fully developed. Leaders are inspirational role models in their respect for the dignity of their staff who openly acknowledge that leaders go the extra mile to show care and compassion in daily interactions and in their policy development. There is an explicit commitment to both the physical and mental well-being of staff. For example, the headteacher operates a strict daily deadline for sending emails to promote a healthy work-life balance. The school's fabric and physical environment reflect the investment made by leaders and attest to the dignity and respect held for each member of the community. There is a range of rigorous systems in place for monitoring and evaluation which are compassionately applied and effective in holding staff to account. Consequently, there are well informed and creative plans for improvement in place. Leaders are working with the wider staff and key partners to ensure that these plans are more cohesive and further enhance the school's Catholic life and mission.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

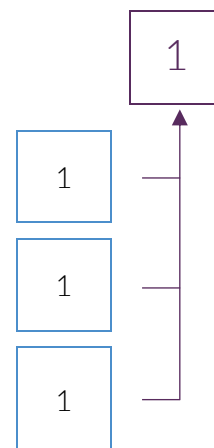
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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



Students demonstrate secure knowledge, skills and understanding in religious education. This is because a well-resourced and relevant curriculum has been meticulously planned and is constantly reviewed. This bespoke curriculum ensures that all pupils make good progress whilst knowing and remembering more. Consequently, students achieve above-average outcomes. This success has resulted in increasing numbers of students choosing A level religious studies in the sixth form. When questioned in lessons, students demonstrate high levels of developed religious literacy and give thoughtful responses. For example, a Year 8 student responded to a question about conscience describing it as 'The gift of God's voice that helps us decide what is the right thing to do'. In response to pupil feedback, opportunities for reflection are regularly built into lessons which allow for discussion and personal response. At times, this is used by students to question teachers about their own beliefs and these personal and positive exchanges are valued, helping students to increase their capacity to question incisively and become more independent. Work in books is extremely well-presented as a result of the effective use of visualisers and smart boards by teachers when modelling texts. Students are actively engaged in all lessons, with teachers employing a range of techniques to check understanding in which no student can opt out. Behaviour in all lessons is exemplary.

Teachers display high levels of confidence and authentic subject knowledge demonstrated by skilled questioning, clear explanations, and consistent pace and challenge. Using well-prepared booklets to create a firm foundation, teachers utilise adaptive strategies to deepen students' knowledge and address their misconceptions effectively. This results in increased engagement from students. Deployment of a well-sequenced four-phased learning strategy, 'knowledge, consolidation, application and testing', further supports. Feedback for students is always immediate and helpful. However, it is not always clear how teachers expect students to respond

to this feedback, which confuses some. The department uses a software package to record and celebrate success with a new 'rewards shop' being well received and enjoyed by all. Students have a genuine appreciation of all that is done by the department for them. Teachers pay attention to, and have a clear understanding of, students' spiritual and moral development and build opportunities for this into their lessons. For example, students are asked to reflect on a moral issue and examine their own consciences. Students engage and respond well to such opportunities.

The curriculum is a faithful expression of the *Religious Education Directory* and is reviewed regularly by leaders and governors through learning walks, book looks, student voice, and departmental reviews. There is an open-door policy within the school with leaders regularly visiting lessons and discussing learning with students. A collaborative approach supports less experienced teachers with high-quality opportunities for training offered in-house and through collaborations with other Catholic schools. Leaders at all levels ensure parity of resources with other core subjects. A strong department has been established by securing the appointment of experienced specialists as well as growing talent internally. An innovative structure for the department's leadership has ensured stability and supported the professional development of an excellent subject leader. There is a clear vision for the subject establishing aspirational standards. The school's approach to monitoring religious education extends the same high standards as in other core subjects, and it also includes elements of spiritual and moral development, assessing outcomes in a more holistic way. This leads to strategic subject improvement planning, which has contributed to outstanding outcomes as well as nurturing the personal growth of students. The curriculum is enriched by a variety of resources, including the input of visiting priests, seminarians and the lay chaplain.

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

1

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

Leadership

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

1

1

This is an authentic school of faith with a well-established rhythm of prayer at its heart. Full and conscious student reverence and participation enriches the prayer and liturgy experiences offered. For example, in a Year 10 Form Mass, students waited in prayerful silence during a delayed start and they readily volunteered to step into a ministry to cover for an absent proclaimer of God's Word. Clear planning gives pupils time to fully understand the themes relevant to the liturgical year and they develop their spirituality in a variety of ways, through scripture, communal prayer, silent reflection, meditation, and fasting. Students collaborate effectively with the lay chaplain in preparing liturgies for one another, such as older students modelling form time liturgies to younger students. Recent appointments have fed into plans to increase the role of music in further enhancing the prayer life of the school. Students are confident in articulating how prayer can impact on their lives with one stating, 'Prayer gives you peace of mind', and another that 'Prayer gives you clarity and control'. Students speak eloquently about how they enjoy prayer in various curriculum subjects, including science, in which they pray for the care of the planet recognising their role as custodians of God's creation.

Prayer's centrality in the school is clear, as it is naturally embedded into the pattern of each day and is much appreciated by both staff and students. Well-chosen scripture passages are integral to each moment of worship and staff are supported in doing this through training and resources, which also ensure prayer is always delivered in a meaningful and reverent way. The resources used and saints chosen as stimuli reflect the rich and diverse heritage of the Catholic Church. There are many routine opportunities for prayer, and leaders are now focussed on enabling more spontaneity and fluidity through increased student leadership of prayer and liturgy. The school Mission of 2023, facilitated by Kenelm Youth Trust, is fondly remembered by all, who can talk about the impact it has had on them. For example, students appreciate the tradition of the

blessing of hands before sitting examinations. The school site has many beautiful prayer spaces and a wonderful chapel which is at the heart of the religious education teaching area. The wider fabric of the school is fabulously maintained and promotes dignity of community members as well as care for our environment. The school is working hard to strengthen partnerships with local parishes and parents and, whilst recognising there is still more to be done in these areas, the vast majority of parents wholeheartedly support the ethos and vision for the school.

Leaders have ensured that the school calendar prioritises holy days of obligation and significant feasts, including that of St Francis of Assisi. They ensure that there are opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and make no apology for using curriculum time to facilitate this when necessary, demonstrating the priority governors give to prayer. There is a clearly formulated policy for prayer and liturgy which is supported by a comprehensive action plan. The desire and drive of leaders for continued improvement inspires an uplifting sense of purpose and compassion throughout the school. This is rigorously supported by governors who make many regular and purposeful visits to school, with one telling inspectors 'To come here is energising'. Governors have invested in appointing a full-time chaplain who supports and enhances prayer and liturgy for both students and staff very effectively. The chaplain is instrumental in creating a warm and welcoming community in the school and many staff openly appreciate both the personal and professional support that is offered to them.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Francis of Assisi Catholic College
School unique reference number (URN)	104255
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	335 4606
Full postal address of the school	Erdington Road, Aldridge, Walsall, WS9 0RN
School phone number	01922 740300
Headteacher	Luke Salkeld
Chair of governing board	Michael Wilkinson
School Website	www.stfrancis.cc
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	July 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

The inspection team

Clare Madden	Lead
Michael Burrowes	Team
Peter Foley	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