



St Mary's Catholic Primary School

URN: 401416

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Cardiff-Menevia

13–14 November 2025

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

2

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

2

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

Compliance statement

- The school is compliant in relation to the general norms for religious education laid down by the bishop's conference.
- The school has complied in relation to any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- The school has complied in relation to the previous areas for improvement.

What the school does well

- St Mary's is an attractive welcoming, inclusive, and distinctively Catholic school that celebrates the dignity of all.
- Pupils have positive attitudes and settle well to apply themselves to tasks in religious education (RE) lessons, and behaviour is excellent.
- Leaders, governors, and staff are committed to the mission of the Church; they work for its success and are fully dedicated.
- The school and pupil groups are determined in accepting their responsibility to pursue the common good and successfully contribute to the parish and wider community.
- Pupil-led collective worship is in its early stages but developing well. Pupils are gaining confidence in leading and planning class and phase worship.

What the school needs to improve

- Further develop self- evaluation with all stakeholders, which would allow a more accurate and shared understanding of where the school is and a clearer way forward to implement improvement.
- Leaders to develop planning, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of the *Religious Education Directory*, with a focus on a creative, independent approach.

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

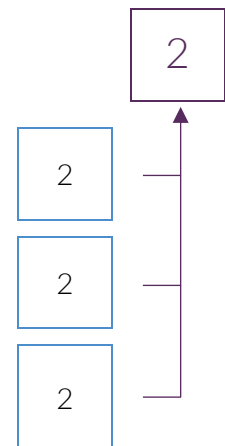
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



The school's mission statement, 'Working, Praying, Sharing and Learning Together', is central to all aspects of school life. Pupils feel safe, happy, and looked after. Pupils understand and value the distinctive Catholic identity of their school through initiatives such as the Autumn Term Mission and Vision Week, allowing pupils to develop their awareness and understanding of how the mission statement is embraced by all, shaping the school and their lives. The school is a happy, inclusive community; pupils show respect for each other, behave well, and know that they are loved and precious to God. Pupils are proud to be members of the Mini Vinnies, achieving the Cafod Live Simply award. They are passionate and determined in the pursuit of the greater good, helping to select actions to work towards such as participating in World Food Day, raising funds for Cafod, collecting foodstuffs and taking them to Mass to be blessed by the parish priest, and donating to the local foodbank. Members of the Planet Protectors group quoted the *Laudato Si'* encyclical from Pope Francis as the inspiration for their work shaping the school grounds and local area. The school has identified the need to continue developing chaplaincy provision, and Mini Vinnies gave ideas such as composing a school prayer and song to strengthen the school's sense of identity. Pupils value the work of the parish priest who supports the school.

A shared vision is promoted by all staff, governors, parents, and pupils. The school has clear policies in place, which ensure that pupils receive good pastoral care through nurture provision and links with outside agencies. There is a strong commitment to pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable and those with additional needs, with additional support and resources in place. There is a culture of welcome at St Mary's that is evident in the quality of relationships. The school goes the extra mile, for example, in supporting multilingual families from different countries and cultures. The school has termly parents' meetings for these families, to provide

support and information about school life and the local community. The culture of welcome is illustrated by the pupil friendship and diversity group delivering assemblies and the school kitchen changing the menu to traditional Indian food. The school environment is welcoming, reflecting its Catholic mission and identity through good quality displays, artefacts, and classroom prayer spaces. The school has made excellent use of the space it has to design the chaplaincy room, giving care and attention to the quality of this space. The provision for relationships and sex education meets both statutory and diocesan requirements, and pupils benefit from a curriculum that equips them to articulate their learning effectively.

The Catholic ethos is at the heart of all that motivates the school leadership team and governing body. The head teacher is ably supported by the deputy head teacher and the RE coordinator, and they are deeply committed to the Church's mission in education, working hard to inspire and motivate the whole community. However, the school's self-evaluation needs more involvement of all stakeholders and would benefit from the expertise, challenge, and support of the governing body and pupils. The governing body and the chair of governors know their school well. The school now needs to increase governor and pupil involvement in evaluating the Catholic life of the school to ensure that the school's performance and progress is shared with all stakeholders throughout the year. There are strong home-school-parish links. Parent/carer questionnaires were overwhelmingly supportive of the school. The school works with the local parish and the parish priest. Leaders and governors demonstrate respect for the dignity of workers. Staff are good role models and fully participate in activities that reflect the school's mission and ethos. New staff receive professional development and take part in the New to Catholic Education training, and non-Catholic staff follow the CAREC course. Both the deputy head teacher and chair of governors are Catholic Schools Inspectors and attend all diocesan meetings and RE coordinators' courses.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

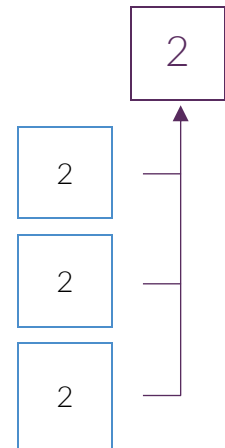
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 have positive attitudes and settle well to apply themselves to tasks in religious education (RE) lessons. Learners make good progress over time and develop secure age-appropriate knowledge, understanding, and skills that reflect Directory expectations. For example, learning that Jesus is God’s special gift to us and discussing the role of women in salvation history. Standards in RE books are good and are comparable with literacy. Pupils think spiritually, ethically, and understand the demands of religious commitment in theirs’ and others’ daily lives. They can confidently speak about their learning, using good levels of subject-specific vocabulary. This is enhanced using key vocabulary, for example, Reception children reflected on The Visitation through role play, Year 3 identified the four main parts of the Mass through reading and matching statements, and Year 4 pupils used an ‘Oracy Bullseye’ strategy to check their use of topic words when recounting the story of Elijah. In many of the lessons observed, pupils behaved well and all pupils were fully integrated within, and contributing to, lessons; with some pupils with additional learning needs using scaffolds such as SOAP (Scripture, Observation, Analysis, Prayer) books to support their written work.

The best teaching observed during the inspection included particularly high-quality teacher-pupil relationships and a strong pace to lessons. All teachers demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm and commitment, with well-planned lessons and good subject knowledge. Whole school training on ‘Effective Questioning’ has supported the consistent implementation of this strategy across all lessons, and Voice 21 oracy techniques are successfully and creatively used for discussion opportunities to deepen pupil understanding, for example, when discussing David as a worthy soldier. High expectations of the pupils are obvious. These are encouraged using success criteria and ‘challenge by choice’ tasks that allow for independence, supporting differentiation while promoting ownership of learning within the class. Other adults are used very effectively to

support pupil confidence in undertaking and completing tasks. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to present their learning in a variety of forms and there is good use of information technology. A creative curriculum is encouraged and there was a wide variety of tasks and active learning strategies across all classes, including role-play, art, debate, ICT, and dance. The quality of feedback to pupils is developing and there are some good examples of teachers' suggestions for further explanation. However, opportunities for reflection of learning should be incorporated more into lessons, and assessment systems need to be further developed to reflect the Directory outcomes and clearly track pupils' progress.

Governors, senior leadership team members, and the RE coordinator are committed to Catholic values and principles and these lie at the heart of their curriculum. They have ensured that the programme provided for RE satisfies all diocesan requirements. Their high level of commitment to the subject is clear. RE also clearly benefits from investments in the school environment, for example, the investment in lighting and prayer areas both inside and outside. Leaders ensure professional development is available for staff through diocesan training and cluster working. RE is timetabled into every staff meeting. Teachers regularly share best practice and undertake collaborative moderation of RE work, which is developing consistency across classes. However, self-evaluation tends to be descriptive in nature and lacks strong analysis, which would allow for accurate measures of progress to be made, and for clear, evidence-based targets to be identified for future improvement. A more rigorous monitoring system is needed to allow for all stakeholders, especially governors, to engage in a thorough self-evaluation process.

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

Prayer and liturgy at St Mary's are a central part of school life, and pupils respond positively. This was illustrated in the Ten Ten assembly, 'Temple of the Holy Spirit'. The Mini Vinnies group helped lead the assembly confidently. Behaviour was very good during all observed times of collective worship. As observed, Christian meditation and examen are well established. Pupils at St Mary's are provided with a range of opportunities and resources for prayer and worship, such as the Wednesday Word, Ten Ten, Catholic Pupil Profile, and class worship. Children are confident and engaged, developing creative responses through dance and song as well as re-enactments of parables through use of IT and a digital camera. They use scripture, symbols, silence, music, dance, and meditation effectively. All classes have a similar prayer corner and are encouraged to explore their prayer through physical resources, such as stones and shells. The prayer group engage in activities, such as reciting the Rosary during October, and celebrating the Saint of the day, such as St Francis Xavier Cabrini, using creative resources. As a result, these lunchtime activities are well attended. Classes plan aspects of their daily worship, and the Mini Vinnies prepare for the school collective worship. A way forward would be for more pupils to be involved and for reflection and feedback to be encouraged. This would further develop worship and encourage their creative ideas.

Plans are made for major festivals of the Church's liturgical year, and there are a wide range of experiences for pupils and staff to engage in. The school makes good use of the space provided, such as a dedicated chaplaincy room with artefacts, lectionary, and candles. The school environment is well used, with prayer tables and prayer trees in all classrooms and corridors, together with low-level lighting and music. The hall has resources for worship with easy access for pupils to prepare for worship. All classrooms have uniform use of space; they are calm and orderly and updated in line with the liturgical year. The RE coordinator carries out learning walks

to monitor and support where needed, and to share best practice. All classrooms have displays for the Directory topic. Weekly Friday Masses in the church are attended by two classes on rotation. Pupils prepare for and take part in these liturgies, supporting their understanding of the Eucharist and strengthening links with the parish community. The school actively fosters home-school-parish links, supporting and enriching pupils' spiritual development. Families are regularly invited to attend Parents and Children Together sessions, which begin with a shared act of worship and provide opportunities for spiritual reflection and engagement with their child's faith journey. Parents and carers are invited to attend class Masses and feast day celebrations at the parish church. The school enjoys a collaborative partnership with the parish priest. This is further strengthened by the active involvement of the chair of governors, who plays a key role in preparing liturgies, supporting pupils in understanding and preparing for their participation in Mass.

The school has developed a policy on prayer and liturgy and has recently attended prayer and liturgy training. School leaders actively collaborate with members of the governing body in planning the school calendar and timetable, ensuring strategic oversight and alignment with the school's Catholic mission. Leaders plan and lead experiences of prayer and worship. Pupils and staff can provide high quality prayer and worship opportunities that are engaging, accessible, and relevant to pupils. This was illustrated by the assembly led by the head teacher and Mini Vinnies, which was based on the virtue of being learned and wise. Art by Heinrich Hofmann was used to reflect on the reading 'The Boy Jesus in the Temple', and there were opportunities to go forth and take a pebble, placing it by someone who has reminded you of Jesus. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, particularly during key liturgical seasons such as Lent and Advent, is made available.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	401416
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	6773308
Full postal address of the school	Catholic Road, Brynmawr, Blaenau Gwent, NP23 4EF
School phone number	01495 369249
Executive headteacher	N/A
Headteacher	Martin Buckley
Chair of governors	Karen Lewis
School Website	www.stmarysrcp.co.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Not applicable
Date of last denominational inspection	3 – 5 July 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	GG

The inspection team

Juliet Stack	Lead
Mary Mort	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