

St Alban's RC High School

URN: 401859

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Cardiff

28–29 February 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

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

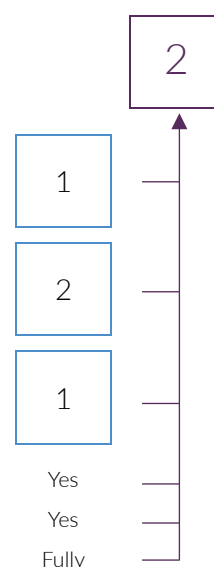
Collective worship (p.7)

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

The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

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



What the school does well

- St Alban's RC High School offers an inclusive welcome to all which respects the dignity of every member of the community.
- The level of pastoral care provided for all members of the community is excellent and is a strength of the school.
- The religious education department is well led, and all members of the department contribute effectively to students' spiritual and moral development.
- Relationships between staff and students are strong, which creates an environment where students can learn in a purposeful way.
- The chaplain is a visible presence in the school, is an excellent role model and makes a significant contribution to the Catholic life of the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop strategies to ensure a range of creative tasks is available in teaching and learning in religious education in key stage 3.
- Embed the feedback policy in religious education so that all students are confident in knowing precisely what they need to do to improve their work and all students achieve the best possible outcomes, particularly boys at key stage 4.
- Develop further opportunities to involve parents in the prayer life of the school.

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

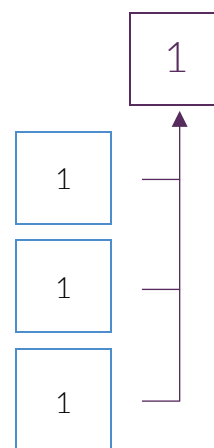
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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 benefit greatly from the many opportunities to contribute to the Catholic life of the school. They understand that relationships are successfully built on the desire to 'Be the best you can be'. Students know they belong to a community that cares and empowers them to live life to the full and articulate this eloquently. Pastoral care for all members of the community is a significant strength of the school and is based on the belief in the unique dignity of each person. Students acknowledge and appreciate the level of support they receive from all teachers and are appropriately encouraged to ensure full participation in all aspects of school life. One student explained that 'teachers know us as people'. The 'Sanctuary' which supports more vulnerable students exemplifies the Christian purpose of the school. Students are proud of their school and nearly all articulate the school's distinctive Catholic character effectively. They follow the school's promotion of the three R's 'Resilience, Respect, Responsibility'. As a result, behaviour is exemplary in lessons and around the school and demonstrates a commitment to creating a school that loves and prays.

The school prayer is the foundation of the school's mission to serve and support its students. The St Alban's Pupil Profile inspires students to live their faith. The Youth Ethos Team (YET), Youth Outreach Team (YOT), Diversity Group and Student Council enable students to put their faith into action in very practical ways and the number of students involved in these activities is very high. Students are aware of their responsibility to those less fortunate and an extensive range of planned charitable events provide support for Cafod, HCPT, Teenage Cancer Trust, Sight Cymru and First Give. As a result, students express a commitment to serving people in the local community and beyond regardless of race or religious belief. The school's distinctly Catholic ethos and identity is visible through effective signs and religious images. However, the condition

of the general school buildings is a major concern which needs to be addressed, so that all students experience a high-quality learning environment. Opportunities for students to express their faith and to respect the faith traditions of others create a strong sense of family for all connected to the school. Student well-being is promoted effectively in a variety of activities and students are encouraged to be healthy and safe, they articulate this well, for example, the need to eat healthily through the 'healthy eating plate'. Chaplaincy provision is exemplary and offers valued support for the school's Catholic life. Parents regard the school extremely highly as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive responses to the parental questionnaire. They speak enthusiastically about the school's caring and supportive ethos.

Leaders and governors are deeply committed to the Catholic life of the school and understand fully their responsibility in leading a community of faith. The vision for leadership is a clear expression of their belief that they are here to serve and give students the opportunity to take their faith beyond the school. Through their words and actions, leaders ensure the community is inclusive of everyone. There is a genuine concern for each other and the environment. Students are aware of the need for justice and forgiveness and the responsibility they have for their own actions. Self-evaluation is very honest and reflects a deep understanding of their vocation in Catholic education. Leaders and governors have effectively fulfilled their responsibility in ensuring the relationships and sex education policy is reviewed regularly by governors and follows diocesan guidelines. The headteacher is an excellent role model and is passionate about the Catholic life of the school. He has successfully created a sense of unity and is given strong support by a dedicated leadership team who share his commitment for providing the best for all staff, students, and their families.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

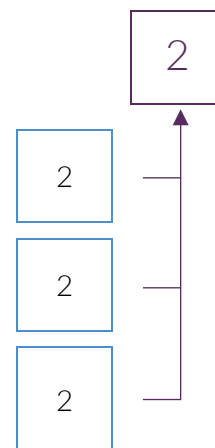
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 perform well in religious education and engage enthusiastically in a variety of activities. Most students enjoy their learning, and behaviour in lessons is consistently very good. 'Do now' exercises are used consistently to review prior learning. However, in a very few lessons too much time is spent on recall before the main focus of the learning begins. Students of all abilities are challenged appropriately, and progress is evident in books. Key vocabulary is revisited which supports the students in becoming religiously literate. Students treat each other with respect and nearly all listen attentively when discussing religious concepts and alternative views. Foundations for extended writing are built at key stage 3 and explicit links are made to examination content and skills. Work is appropriately scaffolded for less able learners and most students can explain their responses coherently. Most students make good progress and results in religious education are broadly in line with those achieved in other core subjects. GCSE attainment is slightly above results achieved nationally. However, a significant gap remains in the attainment of boys compared to the results achieved by girls. The department is fully aware of this, and strategies have already been put in place to reduce the gap.

The religious education department is a strong team and is well led by a committed subject leader. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and foster excellent relationships with students which enables them to feel confident when answering a range of questions. In one year 10 lesson observed, questioning provided excellent challenge and promoted higher level thinking. Lessons are generally well planned, however, opportunities for creative work at key stage 3 are limited. There has been a literacy focus in the department which has led to an over-reliance on comprehension style exercises. Pair and group work is used effectively to develop students' understanding. Work in books is generally well presented, however, boys writing skills are less well developed when compared to the written work of girls. Evidence of self and peer

assessment is clear in books with 'what went well' (www) and 'even better if' (ebi) used as the main focus for written feedback. 'Purple pen progress' (ppp) marking is used to extend students' knowledge and understanding. However, not all students respond to this and there were a very few examples of inaccurate marking in books. Teachers provide useful comments for students to improve their work, however, not all comments are detailed enough to enable students to fully understand what they need to do to improve their work effectively and make progress.

Leaders and governors have ensured that provision for religious education meets the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The budget allocation for religious education is in line with other core subjects. In addition, a further budget is provided appropriately for chaplaincy development. Learning walks, lesson observations and 'book looks' occur as part of the school's regular monitoring, evaluation and review (MER) processes. There is a clear focus for development and the impact of strategies introduced has already demonstrated improvement. However, further development is needed, and the fact that teaching and learning remains the focus for development and accurately reflects the needs of the school. Department evaluation is detailed, and improvement planning is reviewed annually. However, milestones are not always identified well enough to ensure the department achieves the intended outcome. Progress against targets is reported at full governors' meetings through the headteacher's report. Schemes of work are being reviewed to meet the requirements of the *Religious Education Directory* (RED) and this has already been introduced in year 7. The introduction of 'Source to Summit' has been received well and will support the development of a consistent approach to pedagogy across the department.

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

Students participate in collective worship with genuine interest and enthusiasm. Prayerful silence was observed prior to the start of year 9 and 10 assemblies. Students led these assemblies strongly which reflects the confidence they have in leading acts of worship. Students' active participation in the planning and preparation of prayer is excellent. Students are empowered to contribute to form period prayer, assemblies and Mass. The year 10 Mass observed was a truly joyous occasion with students taking responsibility as readers, offering prayers, altar servers and providing inspirational music. The leading role students take in preparing and delivering acts of worship has given them an understanding of the value of prayer in the wider community. Students articulate pride in this work and the importance of offering prayer with and to others. All lessons across the curriculum begin with prayer and this reflects the importance prayer plays in the life of the community. Teachers are at ease with students and support them as they prepare acts of worship. The Youth Ethos Team (YET) take the lead in ensuring students can participate fully and students speak highly of the school's celebrations and are keen to play their part.

Praying together is embedded into the daily routine of the school and the use of 'gather, listen, reflect, go forth' is understood and applied consistently across the school. The wide range of opportunities for prayer and worship reflect the liturgical year and most students articulate that they are aware of different forms of praying including traditional prayers, meditation, and reflection. Students are very familiar with 'Lectio Divina' and explain coherently the opportunities they have for reflection during prayer time. Formal Catholic prayers are used regularly, and a prayer box is provided by each tutor group with prayers written by students and selected for use in form time. Year 7 welcome Mass and year 11 leavers' Mass are celebrated, and students express how these enhance the sense of family where lasting friendships are created. Retreats

to Kintbury are available for students across the school. The school benefits from the support of the local clergy who visit the school each week to provide voluntary Mass for students. They also enable the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be provided for students and staff. Chaplaincy has a significant impact on the life of the school and is highly effective in providing liturgy that is accessible to all students and inspires thoughtful spiritual responses.

Leaders and governors have a deep understanding of their role as Christian leaders and have ensured that collective worship is provided consistently across the school. The experience of living and working in a faithful, praying community has a profound effect on the spiritual and moral development of students, irrespective of faith background. Staff confirm that prayer is modelled to ensure they are all aware of what is expected of them to enable all students to have the same high-quality experience of prayer. The chaplain is a visible presence in the school, is an excellent role model and makes a significant contribution to prayer and worship. Students contribute to the evaluation of prayer, and this continues to be developed. Governors are kept fully informed about prayer and worship through the headteacher's report, regular meetings with the chaplaincy team and attending important celebrations during the year. However, systems need to be formalised to allow outcomes to be shared more widely and inform future development planning. The chapel is an exceptional and integral part of the school. It is physically and spiritually central to the life of the community.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Alban's RC High School
School unique reference number (URN)	401859
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	6784603
Full postal address of the school	St Alban's RC High School, The Park, Pontypool, Torfaen, NP4 6XG
School phone number	01495 765800
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Lord
Chair of Governors	Mr Christopher Evans
School Website	www.stalbans-pontypool.org.uk
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 - 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	30 November – 2 December 2015
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The inspection team

Mr Garry Maher
Mrs Adele Thomas

Lead
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