



St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

URN: 108391

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Hexham & Newcastle

11 March 2026 – 11 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

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Yes

Yes

Fully

What the school does well

- Staff provide high levels of pastoral care, particularly the commitment to the most vulnerable.
- There is a strong sense of community, evident in the quality of relationships between all stakeholders. Parents are supportive of the school community.
- The religious education leader is passionate and knowledgeable. Working alongside the other leaders, there is a clear vision for moving all areas of the distinctive nature forward.
- Implementation of retrieval and recall and 'never heard the word' initiatives in religious education lessons have positively impacted pupils' religious literacy and ability to remember more.
- Pupils respond well to the experiences of prayer and liturgy provided by the school.

What the school needs to improve

- Develop pupil leadership opportunities in relation to Catholic social teaching.
- Provide opportunities to support cross-moderation with peers to strengthen rigour of self-evaluation.
- Increase the range of creative prayer experiences offered.

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

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Pupils at St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School understand and can talk about the Catholic character of their school. They can explain what makes their school special and how it is different to other local schools. Pupils refer to being loved by God and the staff and feel happy, confident and safe in school. They talk about their school as, 'A caring school, where all are welcomed.' Pupils are keen to accept responsibility when offered and talk about their Cafod club, school council, and the recently established litter-picking group, as ways that they take responsibility for our Common Home and care for those in need. They were able to cite examples such as donating food to the People's Kitchen and partaking in the Big Lent Walk for Cafod as opportunities for them to put their faith in action. Pupils show respect for their own dignity and for that of others, recognising that everyone is made in the image and likeness of God. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is good with no examples of poor behaviour. Pupils value the school's chaplaincy provision and embrace the opportunities which are offered to them. They understand why it is important to help and care for others.

St Joseph's mission statement is a clear expression of the Church's mission in education and the school's Catholic character. The school motto, 'Work hard, love and learn' is displayed in the dedicated prayer space and is known by the pupils and staff. Together these statements guide the life of the school, helping it to grow as a strong community. Christ is at the centre of this school, which creates a strong sense of community. Furthermore staff are positive role models, working together to create a joyful and supportive environment where everyone is valued and welcomed. Through their love, care and relationships with pupils, staff show the

school's values in action. Staff provide supportive pastoral care, with a clear commitment to the most vulnerable pupils, and interactions show a genuine love and care for one another. The school celebrates different cultures and beliefs; this is specifically evident through the Africa Day event where pupils shared their own cultures and through the European languages display. The school environment reflects its Catholic identity through visible signs and a respectful atmosphere that reflects the dignity of each person. The relationship, sex and health education programme is planned to meet statutory and diocesan requirements and reflects Church teaching. It promotes a full understanding of the human person, and pupils can explain what they have learned.

Leaders and governors understand and are able to articulate the Church's mission in education and take their responsibility to protect the Catholic identity of the school seriously – seeing it as a core leadership responsibility. They ensure that Christ remains at the centre of school life and are ambitious in their efforts to inspire the whole community in this mission. Leaders support the bishop's vision for the diocese and respond positively to diocesan policies and initiatives. Leaders work in partnership with the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust (BWCET) and the diocese. They work alongside the local parishes, recognising the changing demographics of the community and that school is the Church for many of their families. Leaders have developed many ways to engage with and support parents, helping them understand and support the school's mission. Parents value the work of the school, 'St. Joseph's is an amazing Catholic community that focus on the whole child...They work to support children uncover their God given gifts and talents and celebrate the uniqueness of each individual.' Self-evaluation systems include the views of all stakeholders supporting further improvements.

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

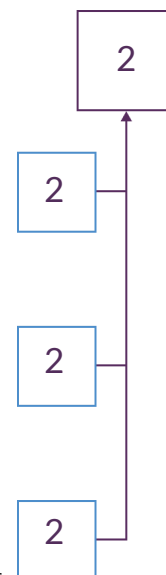
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 in religious education. They make good progress in learning, remembering and applying new knowledge through the planned curriculum. As a result, most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and disabilities, achieve well across different year groups. Most pupils develop good religious literacy for their age due to the introduction of the retrieve and recall element of the lessons, and the 'never heard the word' vocabulary element where new vocabulary is explicitly taught. Pupils talk confidently about their learning in religious education; they understand key ideas and use some subject-specific vocabulary. When given the opportunity, pupils can work independently and take initiative in their learning. Pupils enjoy religious education and approach lessons with interest and enthusiasm, which supports good behaviour in class. Most pupils understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. They respond well to the feedback related to green pen questions to up-level their written work. Pupils produce good quality work that is well presented and shows signs of creativity and personal effort. Pupil attainment in religious education is in line with other core subjects.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and understand how pupils learn, adapting the religious knowledge to the stage in which they are teaching, they manage this well in the mixed-age classes. Teachers value religious education and effectively communicate its importance to pupils through their lesson delivery. Lessons are sequential and carefully planned, based on assessment, so that pupils can learn effectively. Teachers use questioning

during lessons to check pupils' understanding and extend knowledge. They use responses to adjust explanations and activities when needed to help pupils learn. Teachers celebrate pupils' effort, which help to motivate them in their learning. Appropriate to the pupil's age and stage of development, teachers also provide written feedback, so pupils understand how to improve their work moving forward. Within some classes, particularly in upper Key Stage 2, teachers use deeper thinking questions within their feedback and build in time at the start of the next lesson for the pupils to respond. A further aspect of effective feedback, which the school are embedding, is acknowledging, and celebrating, when a pupil includes the taught subject specific vocabulary within their written work. Teachers recognise that religious education supports pupils' moral and spiritual development, so they include time for reflection within lessons.

Leaders and governors ensure that the religious education curriculum follows the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*. Leaders ensure that religious education is treated with full parity to other core subjects. This includes providing appropriate training, resources, timetable time, staffing and learning spaces. Leaders and governors provide professional development opportunities to improve both subject knowledge and teaching skills, working alongside the diocese and BWCET. The religious education subject leader is passionate, has a clear vision for teaching and learning, and strong expertise in the subject. This leadership helps ensure that teaching in religious education is consistently good. Leaders plan the curriculum so pupils can build their knowledge step by step, ensuring that religious education meets the needs of different groups of pupils and supports smooth progression between year groups and key stages – planning carefully for the mixed age classes. Additionally, leaders and governors carefully evaluate the quality of religious education through monitoring and review. The religious education leader engages in diocesan moderation and staff are involved in in-school moderation. Leaders have plans to widen this to involve cluster moderation which will ensure more rigour within the process.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

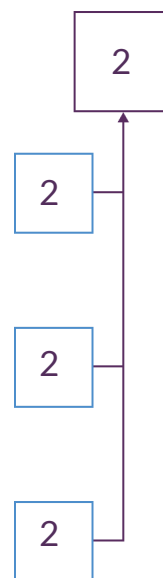
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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



Pupils respond well to the prayerful experiences provided by the school. They show this through respectful silence, attentive listening, active responses and participation in singing. Relative to their age and ability, pupils understand some different ways of praying, they talk confidently about their day being punctuated by the school prayers said four times each day. They understand that prayer can involve scripture, symbols, silence, meditation, reflection, and music. Pupils can talk about the liturgical year, for example they are aware of seasons such as Lent, Advent, Christmas, Easter and were aware of different colours linked to the seasons. Pupils work with teachers and other pupils to plan and lead prayer and liturgy, following the four-part structure of gather, word, respond and mission. Furthermore, pupils are keen to respond when given opportunities to lead during class prayerful gatherings and whole school celebrations of the word. They are also developing their ability to reflect on the prayerful experiences, describing what they have enjoyed and how the prayer time made them feel.

Prayer is an important part of the life of the school and forms part of the routine gatherings. The regular daily pattern of prayer reflects the prayer life of the Church. The school incorporates elements of creative prayer, whole school gatherings led by senior leaders, pupil-led celebrations of the word and more informal opportunities like the voluntary Friday lunchtime prayer club. Significant times in the liturgical calendar are celebrated through celebration of the word, where invitations are extended to parents and carers to create opportunities for them to pray alongside their children. Scripture passages, linked to the liturgical season, are at the centre of prayer and liturgy. Senior leaders are good role models

for staff in leading prayer and liturgy. Staff are skilled in helping pupils plan and lead well-constructed prayer times following the four-part model. These show progression from more adult-led to greater pupil leadership as the children progress through school. Music is used to enrich these experiences through the creative talents of staff members, and this is extending to also involve pupils. The school uses its spaces well to support prayer; classrooms and other areas have prayer spaces and the school has developed a dedicated prayer room which is used regularly.

The school's policy on prayer and liturgy is clear and follows the diocesan format, work is ongoing to generate an annual plan of provision. Leaders understand that pupils develop different levels of participation as they grow older. They are developing a more formalised strategy to help pupils build these skills over time to enable them to become more confident in prayer and liturgy as they progress through the school. The school year includes significant times within the Church's calendar such as Ash Wednesday and St Joseph's feast day, when prayer forms part of the celebrations. The school has good links with the local parish, and the parish priest is a regular visitor to school. Leaders and governors give priority to staff training in liturgical formation and planning prayer and liturgy. The religious education leader attends diocesan and BWCET professional development opportunities and disseminates information to staff. Leaders are effective in supporting and guiding pupils, and staff, to prepare and lead prayer and liturgy that is meaningful, engaging and accessible. Leaders and governors ensure that time, staff and resources are provided to support the development of prayer and liturgy and give full parity with other core subjects. Leaders, including governors, review the quality and impact of prayer and liturgy as part of the monitoring and evaluation cycle and the views of pupils and parents are also sought.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	108391
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3903327
Full postal address of the school	Whinfield Way, Highfield, Rowlands Gill, NE39 2JE
School phone number	01207 545972
Headteacher or Head of School	Ms Joanna Bircham
Chair of Governors	Mr Paul Bradley
School Website	www.stjosephshighfield.org
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	4 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	29 November 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The Inspection Team

Leigh-Anne Young

Lead

Kirsty Evans

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