



# St Francis Xavier Catholic Primary School

URN: 141922

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Birmingham

04–05 December 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

1

#### 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

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

2

## Compliance statement

- The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- The school complies with all additional requirements of His Grace.
- The school has fully addressed all previous areas for improvement.

## What the school does well

- St Francis Xavier Catholic Primary School is an inclusive, welcoming community deeply rooted in following Christ's teachings in day-to-day life.
- Leaders have driven rapid improvement in a relatively short period, leading to consistent expectations surrounding Catholic life and mission, religious education, and prayer and liturgy.
- In religious education lessons, all staff follow clear expectations, resulting in good progress for all pupils.
- Pupils routinely plan and lead prayer and are given opportunities to reflect on how they could make it even better in the future.
- Staff are excellent role models when leading and participating in prayer, which has ensured that all prayer and liturgy is of high quality.

## What the school needs to improve

- Plan religious education lessons that meet the needs of all pupil groups, including a focus on challenging pupils with higher prior attainment.
- Give pupils a wide range of creative resources to regularly enhance their experiences of spontaneous prayer.
- Support senior leaders in developing a robust system for the continued development of Catholic life and mission which empowers more staff to embrace this core leadership responsibility.

## 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**

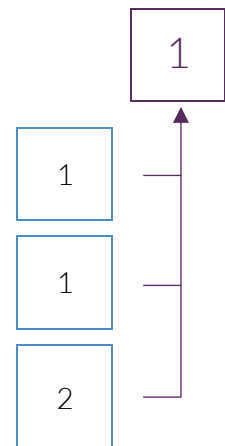
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

**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, 'Jesus holds us in the palm of his hand', is embraced by all. Pupils say they understand it because leaders have made it easy for them to follow. One pupil explained, 'It means we are safe in God's hands.' Each pupil leadership group has its own motto, which gives purpose to its role, and pupils are proud of the responsibilities it enthusiastically undertakes. All pupils know they are valued and they talk about examples of how they know they are cared for. Catholic social teaching is starting to thread through all aspects of school life by introducing focus weeks, which delve into a particular strand. This allows pupils to understand each principle in a purposeful way. Pupils raise money for many charities. While they don't decide which charities to support, they do choose which activities they are undertaking to raise money, such as buying a Cafod world gift during Advent. Pupils are incredibly welcoming and talk confidently about following Jesus' example of welcome. This extends to pupils of other faiths within the school, who say they feel valued. Pupil leaders know they make a difference and are enthusiastic about the opportunities they are given.

Staff want the best for all pupils and their families and talk about how they are driven by love in their vocation. Parents are invited into school and welcome the chance to join in aspects of the school's Catholic life and mission, such as during Year 6's photography project, *From Inclusion to Belonging*, which was linked to understanding issues faced by refugees. Staff are exemplary role models; the pupils are known and loved as individuals, and staff go the extra mile to build their confidence. The environment is explicitly Catholic, and each classroom has a well-thought-out space dedicated to the Catholic faith. Pupils have opportunities for moral development, which are provided mainly by staff in school, though there are plans to invite visitors to the school to

lead retreats, though these have not yet been realised. Relationship and health education (RHE) is taught in line with diocesan requirements.

The principal and vice principal are energised, joyful, and determined in their work to bring Christ into all aspects of school life. They work tirelessly to impact all areas of school life, and the evidence of improvement over a relatively short period is clear to see and acknowledged by all stakeholders. Leaders and governors embrace diocesan initiatives. Parents value the support the school gives them and their children, and parish links are strengthening. Leaders are making connections across the wider curriculum so that pupils have a deeper understanding of Catholic social teaching, for example, texts in English are carefully chosen to reflect social issues. However, because current strategic structures mean that the principal and her vice principal lead on all aspects of Catholic life and mission, other staff are not being developed to lead in this vital area of school work, which the governing board must give due regard to, so it remains secure. Governors are actively involved in the school and ensure monitoring takes place and is informed by parents' views, as well as those of staff and pupils. Monitoring is regular and focused. Pupil leaders are starting to contribute to school improvement by creating strategic plans linked to their area of responsibility. Staff training impacts their understanding of the school's mission, but senior leaders still predominantly drive the direction for improvement. There is a comprehensive induction for new staff driven by the multi-academy company (MAC).

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

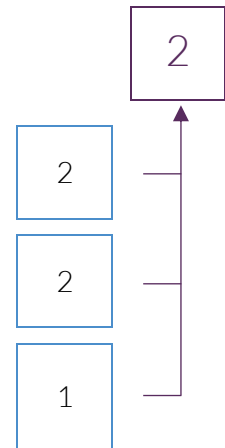
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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



The curriculum is taught well across all year groups, so pupils make good progress. Pupils with lower prior attainment are particularly well supported and receive opportunities to meet expected standards, and subsequently, they achieve well. The school's 'reflect and respond' strategy, which has recently been introduced, means that pupils are used to being asked what they think. As a result, they are becoming more confident in sharing their views and using religious vocabulary. In lessons and in exercise books, it is clear that pupils respond well to the tasks staff set. Work is well-presented, and pupils appreciate the subject's inherent value. One pupil said, 'Religious education is more special than other subjects.' Pupils work well and use time productively in their lessons. They behave exceptionally well and clearly enjoy their work. Staff know that pupils sometimes struggle to articulate how well they are doing; there are plans to address this, but they are yet to be implemented. Outcomes in religious education are at least in line with other core subjects.

Teachers' subject knowledge is good, and there is a deep commitment to establishing high expectations, as evidenced by the rapid improvements over the last 12 months. The majority of pupils are meeting the expected standard for their year group. Pupils are given lots of opportunities to express their learning in different ways through a variety of tasks, and this allows opportunities for most to succeed in making progress, but pupils with higher prior attainment are not provided with targeted challenges as a matter of routine, meaning they struggle to meet the more challenging greater depth outcomes identified in the scheme of work. In lessons, teachers often focus on pupils whose hands are up, which leads to some pupils not actively engaging in learning because they can opt out of taking part, should they choose. In books, teachers are starting to ask challenging questions of pupils, but they do not always insist on high-level responses, which has also limited the achievement of some pupils. Other feedback

to pupils is appropriate, and, as a result, progress is being facilitated. Much work has been done to embed spiritual and moral reflection strategies, which is now seen in all year groups. For example, during work on Advent, each class reflected on actions they could take to show the impact of their learning on their lives.

The curriculum for religious education is imaginative and well-sequenced, and leaders ensure that standards match those of other core subjects. The rapid improvement in provision is the result of targeted training and high-quality support for staff. The religious education subject leader has shared their inspiring vision with all stakeholders, resulting in teaching that is never less than good throughout the school and continues to improve. Staff have received individual training and support, enabling them to provide lessons that meet most pupils' needs, but this must now focus on appropriately challenging all pupil groups. High expectations have led to consistency in teachers' practice, and the impact of training is evident in all lessons. The curriculum is planned alongside additional opportunities for enrichment linking to social action. Pupils are starting to use what they've learnt in their religious education lessons in other aspects of the curriculum; for example, all classes used a maths lesson to plan the budget for their Advent charitable giving, an excellent example of the high-status leaders have ensured the subject enjoys at St Francis Xavier's.

## 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

Prayer and liturgy opportunities are expertly planned, and as a result, all pupils behave reverently and participate exceptionally well. They have a detailed understanding of the Catholic tradition and express it with confidence, explaining the significance of the Church's liturgical year. They have an excellent knowledge of why feast days are celebrated and why certain months are dedicated to honouring Our Lady, for example. Pupil leadership of prayer and liturgy is purposeful and fully embedded; as a result, pupils are confident in working collaboratively to plan, deliver, and evaluate it. Consequently, they can identify how to improve the prayer services they lead the next time they have the opportunity to do so. Pupils know that they can talk to God anywhere and at any time. One pupil said, 'We can pray in the playground if we want to speak to God.' Space is available for prayer, in class, in the nest, and in the prayer garden, though some of these spaces are currently under-utilised. The liturgy leaders have their own motto, 'Let prayer shape your life', and pupils can confidently talk about what this means in for them. They know that prayer leads to action and are starting to think about what this really means at St Francis Xavier. The prayer life of the school influences the way pupils behave. Spontaneous prayer is an area the school is improving, and evidence of its impact is starting to be seen.

Prayer is central to all aspects of school life for staff and pupils. All school community members highly value the naturally embedded moments of prayer. The many traditions of the Church are evident in the cycle of prayer and liturgy. Pupils are regularly exposed to Scripture, which means they have an excellent understanding of the liturgical year. Leaders and staff are excellent role models when leading and participating in prayer and liturgy. Since the arrival of the new principal and religious education subject leader, staff have received various training which has ensured they are highly skilled at helping pupils to plan and lead prayer and liturgy. Due to the newness of the leadership team, pupils' knowledge of traditional prayer is still developing; however, pupils

are confident about the prayers they have been learning thus far. Music is used very well in liturgies. However, there are still limited prayer opportunities that use a range of other art forms. Whilst beautiful spaces are allocated to prayer, the opportunities to fully utilise them are underdeveloped. Prayer bags are well used, and pupils say they look forward to taking them home to pray with their families.

The school's policy on prayer is clear and ensures consistency of expectations across the school. There is a clear strategy for developing pupils' skills, and many opportunities arise for pupils to engage in ministries such as altar serving, reading, and singing joyfully. Some pupils have joined the parish choir, and others have taken solo roles in concerts. Sacramental preparation is well-planned and is celebrated in the parish community through displays which show parishioners who they can pray for, affirming the role of the school within the parish. School Mass is regularly celebrated in the parish church, and pupils can access the Sacrament of Reconciliation at key times throughout the year. Leaders frequently work with new teachers to ensure they can confidently lead liturgy, and teachers appreciate this. High-quality training is planned strategically and utilises diocesan resources. Staff value their training and say they now feel more confident. Resources for prayer and liturgy, though limited, are well-used. Monitoring of prayer is embedded and leads to rapid improvements. Pupils are used to being asked their views, and, as a result, not only are their views systematically collected for school improvement purposes, but prayer is also meaningful and relevant to them because of its elevated status.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Francis Xavier Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	141922
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	333 3401
Full postal address of the school	McKean Road, Oldbury, B69 4BA
School phone number	0121 274 5975
Headteacher	Laura Marshall
Chair of governing board	Joanna Griffin
School Website	<a href="http://www.st-francisxavier.sandwell.sch.uk">www.st-francisxavier.sandwell.sch.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Emmaus Catholic MAC
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	July 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

## The inspection team

Karyn Oakley  
Maggie Gourlay

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