



# St Alban and St Stephen Catholic Primary School

URN: 117491

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster

13–14 June 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

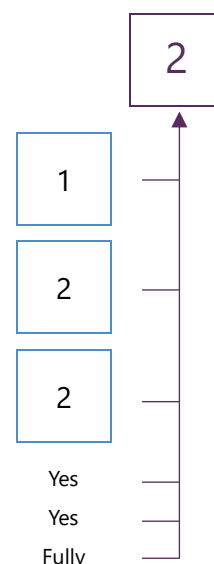
#### Collective worship (p.7)

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

- Pupils have a clear understanding of the principles of Catholic social teaching and how they relate to the school values.
- Staff provide the highest levels of pastoral care for pupils, and there is an explicit and concrete commitment to the most vulnerable.
- The chaplaincy team and prayer leaders are excellent ambassadors for the school and wonderful role models for younger pupils.
- The support of the local clergy with weekly visits and the regular celebration of the sacraments enhances the spiritual life of the school.
- The high standard of displays in classrooms, communal areas and corridors on both sites effectively witness to the school's Catholic identity, mission and charism.

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## What the school needs to improve

- Ensure feedback in religious education is consistent throughout the school so that pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Empower pupils to formally evaluate the quality of their prayer and liturgy.
- Implement a range of ways of praying across the school such as spontaneous prayer requests, meditation and silence.

## 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

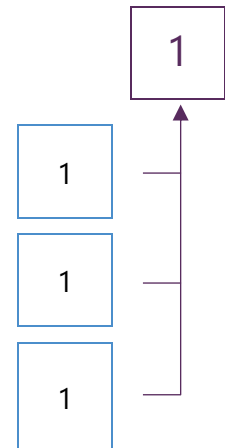
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

#### 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 Catholic life and mission at St Alban and St Stephen Catholic Primary School is outstanding. The charisma of the Sisters of Mercy, the school's founders ninety years ago, 'Helping those in need', is alive and thriving; the pupils of today follow in their footsteps with their kindness towards each other and their charitable deeds for people less fortunate than themselves. The school responds to the needs of others locally, nationally and globally by donating food to a local food bank as part of a harvest appeal, raising money for a local homeless charity, organising cake sales for Cafod and fundraising for the Catholic Children's Society. Pupils can articulate the theology that underpins their actions. Groups such as the chaplaincy team, prayer leaders, 'squabble squashers' and eco warriors have a strong understanding of why they lead initiatives across the school. One child commented, 'We are all peacemakers, not peace breakers'. Another said, 'We must do what Pope Francis tells us - to take care of the planet and creation'. Catholic social teaching is taught very effectively, and pupils are able to speak confidently about the principles and how they put them into action. All members of the community embrace and live out the school mission, 'Learning and growing with God at our side'. A young pupil explained it succinctly when he said, 'God is guiding me on every step of my school life'. The mission statement was produced by the pupils, staff and parents following the amalgamation of the infant and junior schools. Parents and staff both commented that the joining of the two schools has enabled the new school to go from strength to strength. The Catholic ethos of the school is obvious from the moment you enter both buildings. Displays about the Sisters of Mercy, Catholic social teaching, the house saints, the school values, inspiring scripture quotes and creatively designed prayer areas are everywhere, embracing everyone with the spirit and word of God.

From their earliest years pupils know that they are special and unique in the eyes of God. They show a deep respect for one another, and this is particularly evident in the many spontaneous acts of kindness witnessed in the interactions that took place in lessons and around the school. The school

promotes inclusivity, providing a warm and welcoming, caring environment for pupils, staff and visitors where everyone feels valued and respected. The school has diversified the curriculum so that pupils can learn about and build respect for those of different faiths and cultures, including a termly focus on other world faiths. This was reinforced by a parent who commented, 'My son has learned a lot in religious education about other faiths, not just Catholic life, which I am pleased to see'. The pastoral care offered by the school is exceptional. The new pastoral mentor has made a dramatic impact in a short space of time. The impact of the sessions has led to improved attendance and stronger friendships. This is a real strength of the school and the explicit commitment to the most vulnerable reinforces the school's Catholic ethos.

The school leaders are very clear that Christ is central to the purpose and the mission of the school. This shapes their vision in taking the school forward. They are energised, joyful and determined in their pursuit of this mission and are a source of inspiration for the whole community. The governors recognise the challenges faced and work proactively with the school leaders to overcome these so that pupils can flourish in their faith. They are actively involved in the evaluation of the Catholic life of St Alban and St Stephen and have systems in place for receiving the views of parents/carers, staff and pupils. As a result, governors offer challenge as well as support when necessary and make a highly significant contribution to the Catholic life and the mission of the school.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

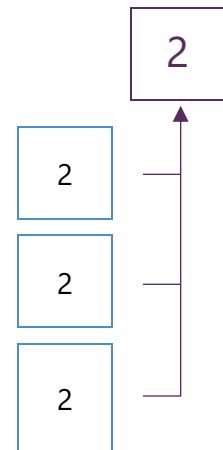
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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 make good progress in religious education as they move through the school. They clearly enjoy learning and talk about their lessons with enthusiasm. Pupils in the younger classes are given a firm foundation in the faith and can explain how Jesus helps them to be good friends by saying, 'I am sorry' and 'I forgive you'. The pupils are religiously literate and can speak confidently about key concepts using specific vocabulary. For example, a Year 6 class were able to use scripture as part of a role play of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick to draw out the key elements and emotions involved. Pupils use their knowledge to reflect spiritually, ethically and theologically. One parent commented, 'Our children are very happy and often ask my wife and I theological questions about topics learned at school'. Pupils have some understanding of how well they are doing but often struggle to articulate what they need to do to improve. The good feedback witnessed in some lessons now needs to be evident consistently in all religious education lessons. Pupils achieve well in religious education in comparison to the other core subjects. When asked about pieces of work that they were proud of doing, a Year 5 pupil said that he enjoyed an extended task about where to find comfort in times of loss because, 'It made me step out of my comfort zone'. Another Year 5 pupil referred to an extended writing task on the Eucharist and stated, 'I was able to write how we get close to Jesus at the Mass just like the disciples did at the Last Supper'.

Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and demonstrate enthusiasm for their teaching of religious education. All teachers ensure that pupils with additional needs are fully included in every aspect of the lesson. They are ably supported by teaching assistants whose professionalism enhances learning for all the class. An example of very good practice was observed in a Reception class where the teacher and assistant modelled a role play activity for the children involving an apology and forgiveness. Skilful questioning in a Year 5 lesson enabled pupils to make comparisons between the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. Later in the same lesson, the teacher changed her teaching

approach after asking the class if anyone found the task too difficult? This was a perfect example of adapting the teaching to improve the learning. The impact of the teaching is not lost on the parents and one commented, 'Our child comes home talking about his lessons and what the Bible stories mean to him and how they relate to our lives today'. Live marking is regularly used to extend and challenge pupils' understanding of learning. However, in some cases, pupils' responses could be much longer.

Leaders ensure that the school curriculum for religious education is a faithful expression of the *Religious Education Directory*. The leadership team are to be commended for ensuring that the religious education curriculum is the core of the core in the school. This is confirmed by the generous funding for religious education in recent years. The subject is also comparable to the other core subjects in terms of professional development, resourcing, timetabling and staffing. Professional development in religious education is given priority and valued by all. The school induction programme, diocesan training and the in-house religious education programme for teachers and support staff are vital to the success of the school. The religious education leads, well supported by the leadership team, are totally committed to their role and have a clear vision for religious education. They have also liaised closely with other schools to further develop their expertise and deepen their understanding of what outstanding religious education looks like. Leaders and governors ensure that the religious education curriculum meets the requirements of the Bishops Conference with 10% of the timetable dedicated to the subject across all years.

## 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

1

2



All pupils, including the youngest, are very reverent and engage in prayer with sincerity and respect. The leadership team have fully embedded the prayer and liturgy policy and all staff follow it consistently. Each classroom has an age appropriate designated prayer space. These are focal points for the pupils with many displaying their handwritten prayers. Pupils work well with others, such as teachers and other pupils, to prepare engaging experiences of prayer and liturgy. A good example of this was evidenced in a Year 3 collective worship on the story of creation which also made links to Catholic social teaching. All the pupils had a role to play in the presentation which included scripture, music, prayers and the use of light and darkness to create a sense of wonder and awe. Appropriate to their age and capacity, pupils understand different ways of praying including the use of scripture, music, drama and art. The school now needs to promote a greater range of approaches including spontaneous prayer requests, silence and meditation. Pupils are able to articulate how they use prayer in their lives. They know there are times of the year when specific prayers and services are appropriate, such as Stations of the cross during Lent, the Rosary in May and the Angelus during Advent.

The prayer and liturgy policy puts prayer at the heart of school life and contributes towards a spiritually enriching school community. Praying together is clearly part of the daily experience for all pupils and staff, which has a very positive impact on the school's sense of community. The chaplaincy team and prayer leaders are a tremendous asset to the school. One young leader summed up his role when he said, 'To make a long story short, we make this school more religious'. The chaplaincy team have led assemblies incorporating 'Laudato Si' and Catholic social teaching using the theme of 'Care for Creation' while another recent assembly linked the dignity of workers with scripture references about Jesus treating everyone equally. The next step is for the pupils to review and evaluate the quality of their presentations and to think of how they can improve on them going forward. The enthusiasm and joy which pupils display during communal singing significantly enhances the experience of prayer and

liturgy provided by the school. The school has made imaginative use of space to create a prayer garden on each site. Time and attention are given to ensure they are well cared for and used appropriately. The school has a flourishing partnership with the local parish. The parish priest visits the school weekly making valuable contributions to the religious education lessons. Pupils celebrate Mass regularly in school and at the church. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered to older pupils in school during Lent. This shows the school's commitment to providing pupils with transformative encounters with the sacraments.

School leaders have secure knowledge of how to plan and deliver high quality liturgy and worship. Priority is given to professional development and as a result staff understand the centrality of prayer and liturgy to the life of the school. Leaders, including governors, have planned the school calendar carefully to ensure opportunities are provided to regularly celebrate the liturgical life of the Church. There are Masses on feast days and holy days of obligation as well as a special thanksgiving Mass to acknowledge and congratulate the pupils who have made their First Holy Communion. Leaders, including governors, understand the increasing role and responsibility they have to enable pupils and families to experience the full life of being part of a Catholic community. Consequently, the links between home and school are strong. This was confirmed by a parent who said, 'The effort and support the school gives to our children to understand our faith and how we can live our lives as Catholics in the modern world is what we love about the school'.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Alban and St Stephen Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	117491
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	9193421
Full postal address of the school	St Alban and St Stephen Catholic Primary School, Cecil Road, St Albans, AL1 5EG
School phone number	01727866668
Head of School	Tess Hackett
Executive Head	Marina Coleman
Chair of Governors	Gerry Dolan
School Website	<a href="http://www.ssas.herts.sch.uk/">http://www.ssas.herts.sch.uk/</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	N/A
Age-range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	January 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

## The inspection team

Dermot O'Neill	Lead
Daniel Keane	Team
Jennifer O'Prey	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