



St Mary's School, Hampstead

URN: 100067

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster

14–15 May 2026

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

1

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

1

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

Compliance statement

- 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 fully to the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

What the school does well

- Pupils are happy, confident and love attending St Mary's and living out the 'St Mary's Way' through their everyday actions of kindness, respect and forgiveness.
- There is an exceptionally strong sense of an inclusive community, which is deeply valued and appreciated by pupils, parents and staff.
- The religious education knowledge of pupils is excellent, and they readily link their learning with putting their faith into action.
- Pupils have a real joy and enthusiasm for religious education lessons - they are highly engaged and their behaviour is exemplary.
- Chaplaincy provision encompassing the Year 6 chaplains and staff leaders is highly regarded by the school community and greatly enhanced by the excellent school chaplain.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure pupils can clearly articulate the theology underpinning Catholic social teaching.
- Ensure imaginative and creative resources are consistently used in the delivery of the *Religious Education Directory*.
- Develop a clear and comprehensive strategy for building up pupils' skills in planning, leading and evaluating prayer and liturgy as they progress through 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

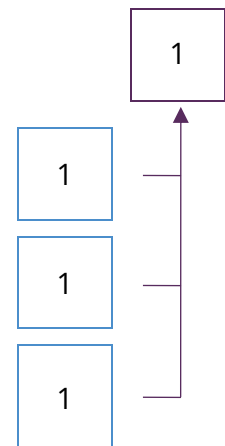
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



Pupils fully understand and embrace the distinctive Catholic identity of their school and talk confidently about 'St Mary's Way'. They speak enthusiastically, and with great pride, about their welcoming school community where everyone is valued, cared for and respected regardless of their faith. Happiness and confidence are evident in the pupils' smiles, politeness and kindness towards all they encounter and their behaviour is exemplary at all times. One parent expressed that 'the emphasis on kindness, service, and spiritual growth has been a meaningful part of my child's development'. Pupils have a deep understanding that their school community is committed to following the teaching of Jesus and they put their faith into action, keenly embracing their responsibilities to care for our Common Home. They fulfil a range of service leadership roles through participation as Wardians in the school council, the food committee, the eco council and as Arrupe Charity Champions. Pupils are able to give examples of how they have been able to influence decisions and take actions that have a positive impact on members of their own school community and beyond. They are proud of their support for a range of charities, including the homeless locally and making collections to support the building of a school in Uganda. Pupils now need to articulate how these actions relate to Catholic social teaching. Pupils were able to explain how they had contributed to the design of the school's own wellbeing resources to support their peers. Pupils highly value the chaplaincy provision with Year 6 willingly taking leadership roles.

The mission statement is regularly reviewed by senior leaders and governors. Staff are excellent role models, showing exceptional care for all the pupils. One parent explained 'St Mary's has created a nurturing environment where Catholic values are not only taught but genuinely lived out through kindness, respect, inclusion and care for the children.' All families from a range of

cultures and traditions feel extremely welcome in the school, particularly with events such as International Food Day and Friends of St Mary's quiz nights. Pastoral care is strong with additional support being offered to families during times of difficulty. Counselling is available for pupils who need additional support. The school environment effectively witnesses the Catholic nature of the school, particularly in the communal areas. Chaplaincy provision is particularly strong with regard being paid to the education of the whole person and the nurturing of pupils' gifts and talents. The provision for relationship, sex and health education is excellent and highly valued by the pupils who are keen to discuss the 'growth' programme. The policy is regularly reviewed, and the leadership of this subject area is very robust.

Leaders and governors clearly articulate the school's mission and ensure it remains central to the school's core leadership responsibilities. Liaison with the diocese to foster school improvements is strong, as is the relationship with the local parishes. The partnership with parents is exceptionally strong. One parent explained that the 'school is very good at engaging with parents and has many events where we are welcome'. The school's commitment to Catholic social teaching is exceptionally strong, not only in terms of the curriculum offered to pupils, but in the strategic direction of the school. Sustainability and care for the planet is a priority. Staff feel extremely well supported and cared for with an open-door policy from school leaders. They appreciate the celebration of staff achievement and the enthusiasm with which their ideas and initiatives are welcomed. One member of staff highlighted that, 'There is a very special atmosphere the second you walk into this school, and we refer to this as the St Mary's spirit'. Governors are highly ambitious for the Catholic life and mission of the school which is evident in their involvement in school life. Pupils make a significant contribution to planning improvements with suggestions from the various pupil groups being acted upon by leadership. Through induction, staff quickly assimilate the school culture and feel welcomed and valued.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

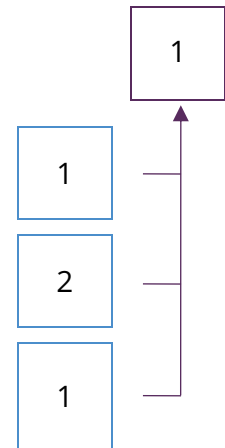
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 demonstrate excellent knowledge and make consistently good progress relative to their age. They are religiously literate and use their knowledge, understanding and experiences to think and talk theologically. In Early Years, a pupil was able to share the features in her church such as the lectern, and they describe listening to hymns as ‘the music that God plays’. Reception pupils can share a range of different celebrations that take place during the liturgical year and the celebration of different sacraments. In Year 5, pupils are able to recall and explain the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are able to explain what it means to be an advocate and how this would apply to their daily life. In Year 6, pupils are able to draw on their prior knowledge about the life of Jesus to be able to explain the risks that St Peter was taking when he spoke about Jesus after the crucifixion. In Key Stage 2, pupils can retell parables and stories from the Bible, can accurately interpret scripture, and explain the meaning and significance in their lives today. Pupils speak with confidence about their learning and would now benefit from more opportunities to ask more incisive questions to deepen their learning. Work in books is of a high standard, with some good examples of creative work. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to further their knowledge and understanding, talking enthusiastically about their learning, and they understand how well they are doing. Parents describe religious education as ‘a part of everything they do at St Mary’s’ and express that it is ‘a contributory factor in choosing to send their children here.’

Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and have high expectations for religious education. They use questioning skilfully during lessons, and there is very good engagement in learning. Feedback is provided by teachers so that pupils understand what they need to do to improve and make progress in their learning. Teachers encourage deeper thinking in their questioning in books, and pupils are provided with time to respond. Religious education has a

positive impact on the spiritual and moral development of pupils. In Years 3 and 5, pupils make links between the school's key habits of learning (the 4R's of respect, reflect, resilience and risk-taking), and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the lives of holy men and women and their own personal experiences in school and beyond. Pupils are often provided with opportunities to present their learning in a variety of ways, accessing good quality resources to optimise learning for most pupils, although these opportunities are not yet consistently applied across all classes. Providing a greater range of opportunities would ensure dynamic teaching is available to all pupils, as seen in a Year 1 class where Pentecost was taught through a carousel of activities that included drama, iPads, art and extended writing.

Leaders and governors ensure that the curriculum is a faithful expression of the *Directory*. They ensure it has full and strong parity with other core subjects in relation to whole school policies, including homework, feedback to pupils and reporting to parents. Leaders and governors ensure there is regular and high-quality professional development in religious education for all practitioners. Recently, leaders have focused on developing teachers' understanding of questioning to deepen pupils' understanding of key knowledge. The subject leaders for religious education have an inspiring vision of outstanding teaching. They have a passion for the subject with high expectations regarding pupil outcomes. Leaders ensure that religious education is thoughtfully planned to build on and enhance prior learning. Excellent links have been forged with other appropriate community and faith organisations to provide a wide range of enrichment activities which promote learning and engagement. Leaders and governors' self-evaluation is informed by thorough monitoring, analysis and reflection. This has been supported by the school's diocesan advisor and by the religious education link governor. This leads to strategic actions taken by the school which result in improving outcomes.

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

Pupils are highly engaged in all the prayer and liturgy opportunities provided by the school. They sing joyfully during services with exceptional singing from the Year 6 choir. Pupils are able to reflect on scripture, offer spontaneous prayer, know a range of traditional prayers and have an excellent understanding of the shape of the liturgical year. Year 6 chaplains work well with leaders to plan, lead and evaluate celebration of the word across the school on a weekly basis. The chaplains make decisions which encourage younger pupils to think deeply. During a liturgy in the school's prayer garden, pupils observed clouds while considering the meaning of the Ascension and Pentecost. Pupils can eloquently articulate how the curriculum influences their prayer life. A Year 3 pupil explained that she learnt about homelessness and war in school and now prays for peace in the world. Pupils are able to explain that prayer gives them time to reflect. A Year 6 pupil explained that 'if I am lonely, I pray and feel someone is with me'. Another explained that 'prayer helps me to act differently...to act in a more selfless way'.

Prayer is central to life at St Mary's. Key times of the year are celebrated, such as the carol service at Christmas, the rosary in October and May, and Reconciliation services during Lent. There is a rhythm of daily prayer, including adoration and simple Benediction, once a month. The school now needs to ensure all the traditional prayers, as outlined in the *Prayer and Liturgy Directory* are fully embedded in the rhythm of the school's prayer life. Scripture is always at the heart of prayer and liturgy and is carefully and skilfully matched to the Church's liturgical year. Senior leaders are excellent role models in encouraging engagement in prayer and liturgy, as demonstrated in the Year 1 praying together service with parents. The prayer life of the school is greatly enhanced by the beautiful and inspiring chapel and reflective prayer garden. Families are fully included in the prayer life of the school. The weekly prayer together services are enthusiastically attended by large numbers of parents. The recently introduced prayer bags further encourage families to

pray at home, although their regular use across the school could be further encouraged. The school seeks to work well with local parishes through invitations to key events.

The school's prayer and liturgy policy is available on the school website and has recently been reviewed. This would be enhanced through the incorporation of further explanation on prayer progression expectations and a clear skills strategy to ensure it becomes a document that staff use as a reference point when planning prayer and liturgy. The school's calendar of provision for holy days of obligation and significant feast days, including Mary Ward Day, is excellent. This is clearly linked to liturgically relevant Gospels and themes for each week and incorporates reflection on Catholic social teaching. Leaders and governors place a high priority on professional development with opportunities for staff formation during a termly Mass for staff led by the chaplain and an end of term reflection in the chapel led by the headteacher. The school's chaplain is described by many as 'absolutely exceptional - he has a wonderful gift for connecting with children and families, and his dedication to the spiritual life of the school is something we feel truly blessed to be part of.' Leaders and the chaplain are highly skilled in supporting Year 6 pupils to plan and lead prayer, and the highest priority is given to resources for prayer and liturgy. Governors have an excellent knowledge of the prayer and liturgy opportunities offered by the school through regular visits, attending events and discussions with leaders. Governors fully understand their strategic priorities and the emphasis on prayer and reflection, and the way the school supports the pupils' personal and spiritual growth alongside their academic development.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary's School, Hampstead
School unique reference number (URN)	100067
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	2026084
Full postal address of the school	47 Fitzjohn's Avenue, London, NW3 6PG
School phone number	02074351868
Headteacher	Charlotte Owen
Chair of governors	Sean Murphy
School Website	http://www.stmh.co.uk/
Trusteeship	Congregation of Jesus
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Catholic Independent School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	2-11
Gender of pupils	Girls
Date of last denominational inspection	7 June 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Gael Hicks

Lead

Michael Ross

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