

St James' Catholic High School

URN: 106142

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Shrewsbury

13–14 November 2024

Summary of key findings

Overall effectiveness

The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school

2

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

2

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 in relation to the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' conference.
- The school is fully compliant in relation to any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- All areas for improvement outlined in the previous diocesan inspection have been addressed.

What the school does well

- Faith, family and excellence lie at the heart of this school and connect all aspects of the St James' Catholic family.
- The belief that 'With God all things are possible' is lived out on a daily basis and in many ways.
- Subject knowledge is strong across the religious education department.
- Colleagues communicate their passion and care in a way that means most students value religious education.
- There is a daily pattern of prayer, that reflects the rhythm of the prayer life of the Church. Experiences of prayer and liturgy offer participants a range of ways of praying that are part of the Catholic tradition.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure that there are regular and consistent opportunities for formative assessment in the religious education classroom.
- Ensure there are greater opportunities for student engagement in leading and participating in prayer and liturgy to build upon the excellent work of the Faith Prefects.

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

1

Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1

1

Faith, family and excellence lie at the heart of this school and connect all aspects of the St James' Catholic family. The belief that 'With God all things are possible' is lived out daily and in many ways. Students, staff and parents speak of a palpable sense of a family and are proud to feel part of it. Students appreciate the opportunities they are given. They feel valued and have a clear sense of belonging. Catholic social teaching underpins every aspect of the mission of the school and is clearly embraced and articulated by the St James' community. There are many generous acts of charity and a recent school visit to Borneo has now led to school wide charity work to support a village there. Students talk confidently about how Gospel values are threaded through their school and can give countless examples of this. They appreciate the opportunities they have to participate in the mission of the school and take this responsibility very seriously. They feel protective of each other and seek to treat each other with compassion and understanding rather than judgement and sanctions. They are well-behaved, extremely polite and well-mannered, and have an excellent understanding of what makes Catholic education important and special. They understand their role as global Catholic citizens. One parent remarks that 'St James' gives my child the sense of belonging and the confidence to apply her beliefs daily'.

The Mission statement and school prayer are visible and embedded in the fabric of school life. The chapel which lies central to the community is used regularly and is well kept. Located in a prominent position, it powerfully sets the tone for the whole school. There are weekly opportunities to gather in prayer, time offered for silent meditation and other opportunities for the St. James' family to gather and worship. St. James' is a very welcoming environment and there are many signs and symbols that witness to the fact that this is a Catholic school. The iconography acts as witness to its Catholic nature and is wholly embraced and cherished. Staff act as positive role models for the students and bear witness to the school spirit and mission. They are proud to be part of the St James' family. Pastoral care and concern for the individual is at the heart of their work.

The school welcomes parish and parent communities. Recent initiatives include the Rosary and an invitation for parents to attend whole school Masses. Governors and leaders are fully and proudly immersed in the work of the Church and her educational mission. They have a clear vision for the school and understand fully their role as guardians. They know and understand the community and as a result hold senior leaders to account in respect of the Catholic nature of the school in all dimensions. For example, a thorough review of policies has now ensured that they reflect and embrace the distinctive nature and mission of the school. Senior leaders have renewed the mission statement since the last inspection and have embedded faith, family and excellence; these values shine out across the school. All acknowledge the commitment and hard work of the head teacher. The head teacher has made a difference and staff value the support they receive from him and senior colleagues in respect of well-being. Parish links are encouraged, and the school also ensures rich engagement with diocesan opportunities including mini-DASH. The school has a profound commitment to all aspects of Catholic social teaching and parents welcome the weekly communication from school regarding prayer and the Catholic life 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

2

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education

2

2

Leaders recognise that student outcomes can be improved and have strategies in place to support teachers of religious education. As a result, they are confident in their monitoring of student progress and there is a confidence that outcomes are improving. There is strong evidence of effective teaching at Key Stage 3 in many instances. In the best examples students can think independently through effective and challenging questioning which provokes often articulate and well-informed responses which show pupil understanding. In these instances, there is often impressive use of specialist vocabulary. At Key Stage 4 there is variation in the student experience. In the best examples teaching and questioning are challenging resulting in perceptive and independent responses. In some lessons, progress is restricted by an over-emphasis upon repetition of tasks and a narrow focus on the examination specification sometimes leading to a lack of challenge and creativity.

Teacher subject knowledge is strong across the department. Colleagues communicate their passion and care in a way that means most students value religious education lessons. Relationships are strong, staff know their classes well and students appreciate their teachers. There is a clear quality assessment framework in place which was introduced this academic year. It has established a structured and systematic approach which also takes account of teacher workload. The Key Stage 3 approach is to provide feedback to the whole class and assessed work is held on an online platform the school has introduced. Students are expected to improve their work based on this feedback. There is evidence of some good practice at Key Stage 4 with variation in the quality of teaching and learning and therefore in the student experience. At both key stages, opportunities for formative assessment in the classroom are not always taken which result in misconceptions not always being addressed. Teaching in religious education provides widespread opportunities for spiritual and moral development, with reflection time on personal beliefs in the best examples observed.

The religious education lead has a clear vision for the subject and is very aware of the strengths and areas for development in the department. She is passionate not only about the subject but also about the school itself, meaning she is prepared to invest much in ensuring that the provision is the best it can possibly be. In the short time she has been in post, she has ensured that monitoring and moderation are prioritised. She recognises that the data outcomes for students are not where they should be and has taken proactive action to identify where there are gaps in students' knowledge and has begun to address these. She has a strong subject knowledge and a clear understanding of the *Religious Education Directory* and how this needs to be implemented across the school. Her recent appointment is making an impact on her newly formed team. Leaders have ensured that religious education enjoys core parity with other curriculum subjects. Governors and senior leaders have been proactive in identifying areas for improvement and are addressing these swiftly.

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

1

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship

2

2

The regularity, typicality and centrality of prayer and liturgy at St James' ensure that students are very familiar with school expectations for both; most value these opportunities and approach them with reverence. Prayer and liturgy is rooted in the Church's liturgical year and the Sunday Gospel forms the basis of the weekly reflections in form and assembly time. Opportunities to reflect upon Catholic social teaching are embedded and this is evident in assemblies and form time. Prayer also takes place before lunch time and at the end of the day across the whole school community. Each year group has a retreat day at Savio House or other local venues and the Shrewsbury Youth Mission Team are invited to support these opportunities. Mass is celebrated at key points in the year including the Mass of Welcome for Year 7. There are other voluntary opportunities for staff and students to engage in different forms of prayer including silent meditation, weekly morning prayer and praying the Rosary with local parishioners. Staff teams take a lead in weekly prayer reflections to the benefit of the whole community. The work of the Year 11 Faith Prefects is widely appreciated. They are active leaders in prayer and faith in action across the school. Whilst there is evidence of students writing their own prayers there is room for more student involvement and opportunities for creativity in leading and participating in prayer and liturgy.

There is a daily pattern of prayer, that reflects the rhythm of the prayer life of the Church. Experiences of prayer and liturgy offer participants a range of ways of praying that are part of the Catholic tradition. The school makes a concerted effort to engage with local parishes and clergy. Parents are invited to participate on occasions and are sent weekly prayers to support prayer life at home. The liturgical year is followed, and a calendar is in place to ensure that key celebrations including celebration of the Sacraments are taken. The importance of being able to come together as a whole school family and having a space for worship is evident in the adaptations to the school buildings since the appointment of the head teacher. The senior lead for the Catholic life of the school provides regular and timely resources for staff to use. Her leadership and contributions are valued and appreciated by a range of staff who support her

vision for further developing the wider experience of and opportunities for prayer and liturgy. Training on prayer and liturgy is prioritised every half term to enable staff to fulfil their vital role as formators.

Governors and leaders are deeply committed to the prayer and Sacramental life of St James. The school calendar celebrates significant liturgical events and ensures regular opportunities for the Sacraments to be received. Priests who celebrate Masses for the school describe whole school Masses as deeply reverent and are impressed with the response of the St. James' community to these moments. There is now a self-evaluation process in place which is ongoing and dynamic. Senior leaders are now involved in both promoting & reviewing prayer and liturgy through the quality assurance processes that have been introduced recently. Governors too are engaged in this process. New staff are appreciative of the induction process which enables them to fulfil their role with confidence. There are continued efforts to appoint a lay chaplain, and this is planned for within the school budget.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St James' Catholic High School
School unique reference number (URN)	106142
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3564600
Full postal address of the school	St James' Catholic High School, St James' Way, Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle, SK8 6PZ
School phone number	01614826900
Headteacher	Anthony Pontifex
Chair of governors	Julie Johnson
School Website	http://www.stjamescheadle.co.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	3 May 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Jane Beever	Lead
Simon Duggan	Team
Claire Marrin	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