

Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for
St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School, Alsager

URN: 111339

Carried out on behalf of the Right Rev. Mark Davies, Bishop of Shrewsbury on:

Date: 16-17 November 2023

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The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection	N/A

Summary of key findings

What the school does well

- The school's mission statement is known, understood, and lived out by the whole school community. Relationships at all levels, are outstanding.
- Behaviour is exemplary at all times, and as a result, a calm atmosphere permeates this caring and joyful school.
- The partnership with the parish is excellent and a strength of the school.
- In religious education lessons, pupils are articulate, making insightful comments and asking searching questions.
- Pupils engage extremely well in the prayer and liturgy experiences provided by the school.

What the school needs to improve:

- Implement a rigorous system for evaluating Catholic life and mission, religious education and prayer and liturgy, which leads to strategic improvements and accurate judgements.
- Ensure that Catholic social teaching is embedded throughout the curriculum.
- Ensure marking in religious education lessons consistently follows the school's agreed policy and is responded to by pupils in order to enhance their learning.

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:.....

1

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



Pupils fully embrace the school's Catholic identity and ethos, can clearly articulate the 'Be Values' and can articulate this year's target of 'Be kind anyway'. They are rightly proud of their school and can clearly explain what makes this school different from other schools. For instance, older pupils commented that being surrounded by other people who believe in God helps you in your life, and that praying helps you to be kind to others. It is evident from discussions with pupils that they have a deep understanding of the school's mission statement of 'Nurturing Hearts and Minds' and they can confidently give examples of how it influences their lives in school and beyond. As one pupil said, 'it means that we develop and grow, and the teachers give us the tools to learn, act and react'. Pupils are keen to serve those in need, as evidenced by the fundraising work undertaken by the school and by individual pupils for a range of charities. Pupils recognise and celebrate their differences and show a deep respect for others. Their behaviour is exemplary, and they say that they rarely fall out with each other. Older pupils thrive in the leadership roles they are given, for instance being safeguarding ambassadors, Mini Vinnies, play leaders and admin helpers. Discussions with inspectors show that pupils have a keen sense of fairness and justice, as evidenced by their explanation of the chances they are given to put things right, because 'when people sinned, God gave them chances and forgave them.'

Staff are fully committed to the school's mission statement and are exemplary role models, as they consistently bear witness to the school's Catholic life and mission. As evidenced by the staff discussions, staff are very proud to work in this school. As one staff member wrote, 'Christ is at the centre of all we do here at St Gabriel's'. The school is a loving and welcoming environment where staff support each other, and children's lives are enriched socially, emotionally, academically, and spiritually. Staff genuinely care about the pupils, and one example of this is the high priority given

to the pastoral care of pupils, which is recognised and valued by parents and pupils alike. As one parent wrote, 'My children feel safe, secure and loved at St Gabriel's.' The school environment and displays around the school explicitly reflect the school's Catholic identity.

Leaders and governors show true commitment to the educational mission of the Church, ensuring that Christ is at the very heart of the school. They are ambitious for and passionate about the school. The school is known widely as a joyful and loving community. Parents recognise this, and as one parent wrote, 'We are truly blessed to be part of the family and its mission.' Governors visit the school regularly and therefore know it well. They consciously ensure that resources are targeted at the school's most vulnerable pupils, enabling them to participate fully in all the opportunities the school offers. The wellbeing of staff is a priority for leaders, and as a result, staffing is stable and morale is high. Leaders are establishing ways of promoting Catholic social teaching. Although this work is in its early stages, pupils and staff are embracing the principles. The parish priest offers a high level of support for families, which reinforces the principle that parents are the first educators of their children. The school's provision for relationships and health education meets diocesan and statutory requirements. Although leaders and governors do have a monitoring and evaluation plan in place, it is not yet robust enough to inform accurate strategic developments.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....

2

Pupil outcomes

How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education.....

2

Provision

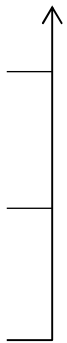
The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education.....

2

Leadership

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

2



Pupils say they enjoy their religious education lessons, and in a focus group of older pupils, all agreed that it is their favourite lesson! Pupils particularly appreciate the time and space for reflection during their lessons, as it gives them a sense of calm and peace, and as one pupil said, 'the quiet helps you feel closer to God'. During all lessons observed, the behaviour of pupils was exemplary, and as a result, learning was never disrupted. Older pupils concentrate well and can remain on task working both independently and collaboratively with other pupils without support from an adult. However, pupils are not always given enough opportunities to take the initiative in their learning in more challenging tasks. In lessons, pupils speak with confidence about what they are learning, are motivated and take pride in their work. They listen to each other respectfully, and value the opinions of others. Presentation of work in books is good. Pupils are developing a secure knowledge and an appropriate subject specific vocabulary. As evidenced in lessons and in pupil books, pupils ask perceptive questions and make discerning comments, which enhance learning. As one parent of a Reception pupil wrote, 'at home, my son asks relevant and insightful questions as a result of religious education which opens up the opportunity for discussion.' Pupils make good progress from their starting points, and their attainment is good.

Teaching staff show commitment to the value of religious education, and as a result, teaching is consistently good. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils, and thanks to the outstanding relationships that exist between staff and pupils, pupils are confident that their opinions and contributions to lessons are valued by adults. Teachers have good subject knowledge in religious education and are skilled in asking open questions which help pupils to give reasons and make them think at a deeper level. Teachers' planning is effective, and makes clear links to previous learning, and as a result, pupils know more and remember more. In some lessons seen, teachers provided adapted tasks so that all pupils could achieve the learning objectives for the lesson. Good

use is made of resources, including IT, to enhance learning. Staff make clear links with other subjects, particularly English, and extended writing is now a feature in religious education lessons. One example of this was in Year 4, where pupils were writing an informal letter as Zechariah to his mother following the visit of the angel. Well-briefed teaching assistants provide good support to pupils in lessons. In all lessons observed, achievement was celebrated, and verbal feedback was given to move the learning forward. Marking in pupils' books generally follows the school's policy, but some 'pink for think' questions from staff have not been responded to by pupils.

Leaders and governors ensure that the curriculum is faithful to the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*, and it meets all diocesan requirements. Leaders and governors also ensure that religious education has parity with other core subjects. Leaders and governors ensure that teachers have access to quality professional development opportunities, and these are valued by staff. Staff also appreciate the support of senior leaders, whose door is always open if staff need advice or clarification on matters relating to religious education. The induction of new staff is effective. The recently appointed religious education coordinators have a clear vision for their subject and are ambitious for it. The recently adapted assessment procedures, which have been well received by staff, are evidence of this. Although leaders' and governors' monitoring and self-evaluation plan is established, it is not yet well informed enough by rigorous analysis and self-challenge.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....

2

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

2

Leadership

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

2

Pupils are deeply engaged in and responsive to the full prayer life of the school. They are proud to share with others their understanding of the ways of praying that are part of the Catholic tradition. As one Year 4 pupil said, 'when we are reading prayers, we feel really close to God'. Pupils are reverent and respectful and sing joyfully in both small and large groups. Pupils know a wide range of traditional prayers by heart, such as the Angelus and the Eternal Rest, plus the prayer for the month, as this is said daily. There are many opportunities for pupils to write their own prayers, so pupils are very skilful at this. They have a very good understanding of the liturgical year, thanks to regular references made to it by staff, and to having the liturgical calendar in their religious education books. They undertake liturgical ministries such as preparing the prayer focus and reading scripture with reverence and confidence. They work particularly well together, under the guidance of staff, to plan, prepare and deliver meaningful times of prayer, which link response and mission with the theme of the scripture. As one parent wrote, 'The children love to take on the responsibility of leading class liturgy which in turn spurs other children on to volunteer and take part.' This means that by the middle of Key Stage 2, pupils can confidently explain the recognised format of liturgical prayer.

Staff are committed to the centrality of prayer and liturgy. As one staff member said, 'There is something very special here. God has a strong presence'. There is a daily pattern of prayer, which is enhanced by the wealth of additional opportunities on offer, such as Mission days and the residential retreat to Savio House. The recent introduction of class and house saints is beginning to help pupils gain an understanding of how the saints are role models who inspire us to lead prayerful lives. Each class has a dedicated prayer space area which is prominent, relevant to the Church's liturgical season, and cared for. Although Bibles are available in classes, these are not routinely used by pupils. The school's strong relationship with the parish means that parents are very well

supported with resources at key points in the Church's calendar. Pupils love to take the class prayer bag home, and parents support this initiative by sharing photos and prayers written at home. Providing further creative approaches to prayer and liturgy would enable pupils to have a deeper connection with God.

Leaders and governors have ensured that staff have accessed high quality staff training in prayer and liturgy, but staff would welcome more, as evidenced by the staff questionnaires. Written guides have been produced by leaders to support pupils in preparing their own prayers, resulting in pupils' confident knowledge, and understanding of meaningful opportunities for prayer. Leaders and governors have created a full calendar of regular Masses and opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, thanks to the school's close relationship with the parish. The school works very well with the parish to provide a full sacramental programme, and this is very much appreciated by parents. The religious education coordinators have produced a very attractive newsletter for parents and members of the wider community, which is published on the website and gives information about the opportunities for prayer and liturgy in the school. Pupils are building up confidence in evaluating pupil led prayer, and this could now be developed further. Leaders' and governors' plans for monitoring and evaluating prayer and liturgy are not yet robust enough to have an accurate and detailed understanding of the school's provision.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Gabriel's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	111339
Full postal address of the school	Well Lane, Alsager, ST7 2PG
School phone number	01270 875770
Name of head teacher or principal	Mr Edward Byrne
Chair of governing board	Mr Michael Mitchell
School Website	http://www.stgabriels.cheshire.sch.uk/
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age-range of pupils	4-11
Trustees	Diocese of Shrewsbury
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	21 st June 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The inspection team

Julie Johnson	Lead inspector
Sue Lyonette	Team inspector

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