

St John's Catholic Primary School

URN: 126039

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Diocesan Administrator of Arundel & Brighton

04 March 2026 – 05 March 2026

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 RE

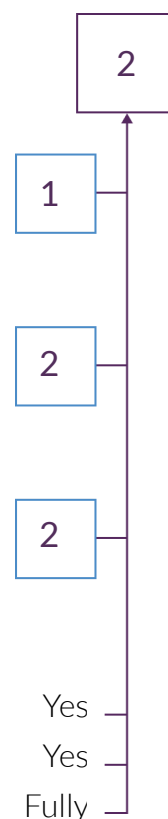
Collective worship (p.7)

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

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 to the areas for improvement from the last inspection



What the school does well

- Pupils thrive at St John's, knowing that they are valued and cared for: as a result, their behaviour is exemplary at all times.
- Staff wholeheartedly embrace the mission statement and embed it in every aspect of school life, providing exceptional pastoral care so that every pupil feels supported and flourishes.
- The headteacher is an inspirational ambassador for the Church's mission in education, empowering leaders and staff to place Christ and pupils firmly at the heart of the school.
- Pupils enjoy religious education, engage enthusiastically in lessons and demonstrate a genuine desire to deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- Leaders place great importance on collective worship, ensuring it is central to the spiritual life and formation of the whole school community.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure pupils can speak fluently and confidently about their learning in religious education and are able to make clear links to prior learning.
- Enable teachers to use skilful questioning in religious education lessons to check pupils' understanding and deepen thinking so that engagement and learning are maximised for all pupils.
- Provide all relevant staff with professional development opportunities for collective worship so that liturgy and prayer are consistently engaging and of a high standard across 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 at St John's are joyful ambassadors of Christ who fully understand what it means to be part of a Catholic community rich in its diversity. They confidently articulate the school's mission statement and clearly recognise how this shapes their daily life, explaining for example, that being 'confident in being me' means being brave and trusting in God. Pupils consistently show respect, compassion and care for one another, commenting that 'everyone helps each other here' and describing their school as 'beloved and precious.' They also expressed a deep appreciation for the care shown by staff, with one pupil commenting that 'our headteacher loves us all.' Pupils take a proactive leadership role in living out the principles of Catholic social teaching, with some of them serving on, for example, the faith council, the eco-council or the gardening club. They confidently explain these principles and how they are put into action through initiatives such as supporting the local soup kitchen or fundraising for Cafod and WaterAid. Building on these strengths, leaders are developing more systematic opportunities for pupils to contribute to self-evaluation, ensuring their voice continues to shape and strengthen the Catholic life and mission of the school.

The school's mission statement is a living expression of the community's shared vision, having been developed collaboratively and with pupils placed at the heart of the process. As one staff member put it, 'the children shaped the changes that have happened.' With Christ clearly at the centre of school life, there is a tangible sense of community throughout the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are characterised by warmth, respect and genuine care and staff describe the school as a family where they know one another well. One staff member explained that the school is a place 'where I feel I belong and where I want to be.'

This shared ownership is evident in the many opportunities provided for pupils to live out the mission, including the sustained partnership with St Benedict's School in Kenya and the Young Interpreters scheme. Pastoral care for pupils is exceptionally strong and all staff demonstrate an explicit commitment to supporting the most vulnerable. This is evident through the carefully designed Respect curriculum, the use of strategies such as worry monsters, and the consistent message that any adult is available to help. As a result, every pupil, however great their need, is supported with sensitivity and dignity to participate fully in all aspects of school life.

Leaders and governors clearly articulate the Church's mission and ensure Christ is at the heart of the school. Staff speak passionately about the example set by the headteacher, describing her as someone who 'lives and breathes the Catholic faith' and consistently places Christ and pupils at the heart of every decision. This permeates to other senior leaders, resulting in a culture of encouragement and support, with one member of staff commenting, for example, that 'senior leaders believed in me even when I didn't.' Governors play a vital role in sustaining this vision. They are deeply committed to the mission of the school, offering both strong support and appropriate challenge through regular monitoring visits and learning walks, while also prioritising the wellbeing of leaders. Leaders have cultivated a flourishing partnership with the local parish and the parish priest is a visible and valued presence in school life, regularly visiting and greeting families at the gate. Staff and pupils actively contribute to parish life through events such as running coffee mornings at the church. Leaders have also developed highly effective strategies for engaging parents and carers and parents are overwhelmingly supportive, with one commenting that 'care, love and Gospel values run like a golden thread through the fabric of the school.'

Religious education

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 key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

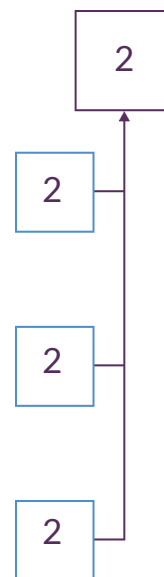
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 across the school are developing secure knowledge, understanding and skills in religious education. They are able to talk about their learning and reflect on their work: for example, children in Early Years Foundation Stage were able to enthusiastically explain the learning recorded in their floor book while lower Key Stage 2 pupils discussed with inspectors how they work towards the success criteria in their lessons. They are less confident at making links to prior learning and recalling knowledge from previous terms and the school should consider how best to facilitate this. Pupils enjoy their learning, listen attentively, and readily engage with the tasks provided for them; calm and purposeful learning was observed, for example in upper Key Stage 2 where pupils were completing independent tasks based on the washing of the feet with focus and concentration. Pupils of all ages can work effectively without the direction of an adult, as seen in a lesson where pupils independently designed an examination of conscience. Pupils take pride in the presentation of their work and books are well organised and neat, reflecting the care pupils take in recording their learning.

Teachers value religious education highly and are secure in their subject knowledge. As a result, lessons are well-structured, with clear routines and modelling. In the best lessons, teachers use a variety of strategies to engage and motivate pupils, as seen for example in an Early Years session on Lent where children were provided with activities such as making shelters for Jesus in the desert and in a Key Stage 1 lesson on Palm Sunday where pupils were making palms in order to re-enact the entry into Jerusalem. However, in some lessons, teachers rely too much on oral strategies which don't always engage all pupils. Teachers

create positive learning environments and pupil effort is frequently recognised and celebrated. Pupils' work is acknowledged through the 'Proud Work' award during celebration assemblies and through displays around the school. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to present and express their learning in a variety of ways, such as artwork, comic strips, drama and decorations. For example, pupils participated in hot seating activities and role play to learn about the events of last supper. Although some teachers use questioning effectively, leaders should now support all staff to use questioning skilfully to check pupils' understanding so that they can increase engagement and maximise learning for all pupils.

Leadership of religious education is effective and ensures that the subject is given appropriate priority within the curriculum. The subject leader works hard to ensure that all staff feel supported and confident to deliver the curriculum and staff speak positively about the encouragement and guidance they receive, resulting in high morale. Leaders support teachers in planning learning that meets the needs of different groups of pupils and adults are deployed thoughtfully during lessons so that pupils receive discreet and appropriate support when needed. In a lesson observed, for example, scaffolded activities were provided while in another session, a teaching assistant effectively supported a pupil with special educational needs and/or disability by facilitating a sensory response to learning. Leaders also ensure that pupils benefit from engaging enrichment opportunities that enhance their understanding of religious education, such as the Jesse Tree decorations created by lower Key Stage 2 pupils to support their understanding of salvation history. Governors are kept informed through the link governor for religious education, who regularly visits the school and talks to staff and pupils. Leaders and governors now need to ensure that their self-evaluation and monitoring activities are more detailed and identify the precise actions that need to be taken to improve teaching and learning further.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

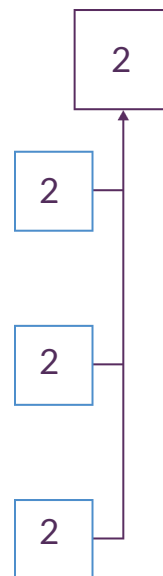
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

Leadership

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



Pupils respond positively to the experiences of prayer and liturgy provided by the school. They participate reverently in prayer, singing and moments of reflection, as demonstrated during a whole-school liturgy where pupils were attentive, respectful and engaged for sustained periods of time. Pupils show an understanding of a variety of ways of praying that are part of the Catholic tradition including praying the rosary on the school field, participating in the stations of the cross in church and taking part in the crowning of Our Lady in the prayer garden. Older pupils show a developing understanding of the Church's liturgical year and are able to identify the liturgical colours associated with different seasons, for example explaining the focus on forgiveness during Lent. Pupils are clear about the spaces within the school where they are able to pray and talk enthusiastically about how they take an active role in preparing prayer spaces, for example, their role in designing and building the prayer garden. Appropriate to their age, they work collaboratively with teachers to plan and lead prayer and liturgy but do not yet routinely evaluate the quality of prayer and liturgy: as a result, they are unsure how to improve further the prayers they lead or articulate how their experiences of prayer and liturgy lead them to action.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school and are thoughtfully planned to form part of the regular rhythm of school life. Acts of prayer and liturgy are carefully structured and include elements such as seasonally-appropriate scripture, silence, music and reflective prayer. A wide range of experiences are offered and inspectors observed Visio Divina in an upper Key Stage 2 class, spontaneous prayer during a whole school collective worship and an Early Years liturgical dance on the theme of caring like Jesus. Staff are models of good practice

but need further professional development to support them in leading and enabling pupils to facilitate high quality and inspiring acts of worship. The school makes good use of the spaces available to enhance the prayer life of the community, such as the various statues and prayer displays in the common areas, the well-maintained prayer focuses in every classroom and the outdoor prayer garden. Leaders carefully and thoughtfully plan how to include families in the prayer life of the school and parents are always welcome to attend school Masses and the parent prayer group. One parent commented, 'It's evident that prayer is the heartbeat of the school day.'

Leaders ensure that prayer and liturgy are carefully planned and given appropriate priority within the life of the school. The school's annual plan of provision clearly identifies liturgical celebrations linked to the Church year, including Advent and Lenten reconciliation services, stations of the cross, rosary during May and October and Mass for holy days, such as Epiphany and All Saints Day. Leaders understand and model a variety of ways of praying that are part of the Catholic tradition, including celebrations of the Word based on the format of the Liturgy of the Word. The weekly whole school worship follows the theme of the homily given on the Sunday by the parish priest, who regularly visits to support staff and pupils in their prayer life. Leaders and governors demonstrate their commitment to prayer and liturgy by investing in high-quality resources, including small world figures, cloths, artefacts, candles and prayer beads. Although they have begun to monitor collective worship through visits to the school, there now needs to be a more robust and systematic cycle of self-evaluation linked to ongoing professional development so that staff are increasingly confident in planning and leading high-quality liturgical experiences.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St John's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	126039
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	9383331
Full postal address of the school	Blackbridge Lane, Horsham, RH12 1RR
School phone number	01403 265447
Headteacher or Head of School	Finula Farr
Chair of Governors	Lorraine Vinall
School Website	www.stjohnshorsham.school
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	4 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	01 July 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The Inspection Team

Michael Lobo Lead

Jessica Devlin

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