



# St Joseph's Catholic Infant School Birtley

URN: 148809

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle

14 June 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 curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference

Yes

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

Fully

## What the school does well

- St Joseph's Catholic Infant School community fully embraces the Catholic mission, 'All are welcome'.
- Everyone follows St Joseph's virtues in their daily lives.
- Leaders ensure Christ is at the heart of the school by living out the mission daily.
- Pupils enjoy religious education lessons and benefit from staff subject expertise in this subject.
- Prayer and liturgy are central to school life and leaders are exemplary role models for staff and pupils.

## What the school needs to improve

- To improve the precision of feedback in religious education so that pupils have a clear understanding of how to make further progress.
- To provide adaptations and scaffolds that allow pupils to work independently.
- To provide opportunities to allow pupils to independently plan, lead and evaluate prayer and liturgy so that they can identify how to develop.

## 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



Everyone at St Joseph's Catholic Infant School understands their Catholic mission where all are welcome. Pupils know that they are significant in God's world as they share the school's vision. They flourish as they seek opportunities to grow in St Joseph's virtues. All community members embrace the mission and parents say that their children love coming to school. Behaviour in and outside of classrooms is exemplary. Pupils know that they are loved and well cared for by the staff team. There is a commitment to following the teaching and example of St Joseph by caring and showing compassion. For example, Mini Vinnies made flower crowns to celebrate the month of Mary and spend their lunchtimes joining in prayer with local SVP members. Following this, the pupils shared the rosary with the younger pupils. They are keen to respond to Catholic social teaching. For example, pupils representing school at the St Cuthbert's Good Shepherd Mass. In doing this, they are showing support for local charities and serving others. The youngest children prayed for the safe travels of their butterflies released from their Creation Garden, showing how they care for God's creatures. Furthermore, the pupils have taken part in the Cafod 'Big Lent Walk' to show their solidarity with those less fortunate.

A powerful sense of community runs through St Joseph's. Staff are fully committed to the school's mission which is regularly reviewed and they follow St Joseph's virtues to live out the mission in their daily lives. They are excellent role models and welcome people of other cultures and faiths into their community. During discussions, staff described the school as a 'special place', that they all feel part of the Catholic family and shared their experiences of support from each other. The nurturing of all pupils is given the highest priority, and the excellent level of pastoral care is widely appreciated by parents. Parents recognise, 'the calm and prayerful ethos of the school that reaches all aspects of the community'. They describe a culture of welcome where they feel

that their children are authentically loved. One parent shared her experience of the influence of the Catholic life of the school within her own family and how it has brought the Church into their home. The provision for relationships, sex, and health education is carefully planned and effectively meets statutory and diocesan guidelines.

Leaders and governors are committed to the formation of all pupils. They live out the school mission. Furthermore, they are well regarded models of Catholic leadership, particularly the Executive Head Teacher who is inspirational in her ambition for the community. The school provides a carefully maintained, engaging Catholic environment. Displays of pupils' work communicate the message of Jesus and showcase religious education work alongside Mini Vinnie displays, house groups and creative prayer spaces around school. They are dedicated to ensuring pupils experience an enriching Catholic education that provides excellent formation. They see parents as the primary educators and through a planned pastoral support programme, fully support them in their mission. Leaders maintain strong links with the parish. The priest and deacon are frequent visitors, further strengthening parish links. Governors are actively involved in evaluating the Catholic life of the school, offering challenge and support. They are highly active in school and parish life and therefore understand the lived experiences of pupils. Leaders have created a highly supportive culture where the wellbeing of staff and pupils is paramount, resulting in an ethos of mutual respect and growth. New staff are fully supported within the small team, and training is tailored so that the Catholic life and mission of school is consistently strong.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

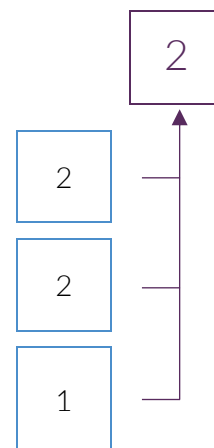
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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 are engaged in their religious education lessons and have a real willingness to learn. They are proud of their books and their learning. A pupil described how in religious education lessons, they 'learn about Jesus' and enjoy their lessons. Pupils' learning is of a comparable standard to other curriculum subjects. Furthermore, achievement in religious education is similar to that of English, demonstrating that the school holds religious education as a priority. Pupils are able to work independently and when given the opportunity, they can take initiative in their learning. As a result of this, pupil behaviour and attitude to learning is excellent and they respond to the challenge. With some prompting, pupils can talk about their religious education. They are encouraged to be inquisitive; this was observed in a Reception class lesson on God's world where a child articulated, 'I wonder how rainbows are made.' Work in books is generally presented well and shows a range of activities introducing key concepts. However, pupils could not describe confidently how they know how well they are doing in lessons and what they need to do to make further progress.

Staff subject knowledge for religious education is a strength in the school, and this is ongoing due to the support and training provided by the religious education leader. High quality teaching is delivered to allow the pupils the best opportunities to learn. Lessons are clearly well thought out and planned for. Staff prepare a range of tasks within lessons ensuring that pupils can respond to teaching and learning in a variety of ways. Teaching assistants support pupils, including those with additional needs and this ensures that pupils are able to access learning effectively in all classes, for example, the use of prompt cards during lessons. However, evidence in books shows this support does not always allow the pupils to work independently. Teachers ensure that religious education lessons develop pupils spiritually and morally. They use good-quality resources and a range of activities which engage pupils and bring the curriculum to life.

For example, the use of an actual treasure chest in one lesson was used to enable pupils to place their litanies inside and in another a range of coloured fabrics were used to retell the creation story. Teachers used questioning within lessons to embed the pupils' knowledge. However, feedback does not consistently allow pupils to understand what they have done well and inform them of their next steps to progress further. Catholic social teaching links within lessons enable pupils to think about how they can make a difference in the wider world.

Leaders have identified priorities for religious education and have clear action plans to meet them. They ensure that the contents of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* are enhanced through a range of resources. The new religious education subject leader has been instrumental in keeping a strong consistency of approach across the school; staff feel highly supported by her, which aids the subject's development. The Executive Head Teacher and subject leader are insightful in their analysis of monitoring, resulting in a leadership team that is very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of religious education at St Joseph's. They work incredibly well as a team, supporting staff to plan effectively to meet the needs of pupils. As a result of this, the curriculum is sequenced and progressive. This results in positive behaviour in all religious education lessons and good outcomes. The religious education link governor provides support and challenge to school leaders and reports to the full governing board regularly. Consequently, they all know the school's strengths and developmental needs well.

## 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

Prayer is the heartbeat of the school and all pupils willingly join in confidently with school prayers and joyfully sing hymns during worship. Pupils fully participate with prayers such as the Glory Be and demonstrate their knowledge of a range of other Catholic prayers. Pupils work alongside adults effectively to prepare engaging prayer times across the school week, for example during house group celebration of the word every Friday. This provides opportunities for the oldest pupils to gather with the youngest children to plan prayer together. Pupils are beginning to evaluate prayer and liturgy that they have planned and are gaining confidence within this. For example, pupils talk about how they planted seeds in the Creation Garden as they look after God's world. In response to scripture, one pupil said, 'My family is my treasure.' However, they are not always able to talk about how these experiences inspire them into action.

Leaders ensure that prayer is central to school life, which is in line with Catholic traditions. Leaders and staff are role models for pupils, providing a range of prayer experiences for pupils. Pupils enjoy using prayer bags during social times of the school day. The Executive Head Teacher shares her musical talents with the school community exposing the pupils to a wide range of liturgical music, where pupils join in and sing readily. The school uses its spaces creatively for example, God's Creation Garden is a calm tranquil space for pupils and staff to reflect and talk to God. Pupils would like the opportunity to use this area more regularly. The religious education leader is skilled and a role model to other staff, developing their confidence in leading prayer and liturgy. Older pupils are being supported in developing their expertise by joining the junior school pupils for celebration of the word. Staff assist pupils in planning prayer and liturgy using a good understanding of the norms of the Church. An example of this was when Reception led the community in prayer during a Palm Sunday service at the parish church. Families appreciate the opportunities to join in with prayer and find the home school prayer diaries useful in helping

them with the formation of their children. One parent commented, 'Pope Francis said that a better world can be built because of the efforts of young people, and that is certainly true of the efforts of Mrs Swaddle and all staff.'

The Executive Head Teacher and religious education leader provide training and development to support staff in the provision of prayer and liturgy. As a result, staff are supported in developing quality experiences for pupils and their families. Staff comment on the fact that leaders provide regular opportunities for them to pray together alongside the junior school staff team, uniting them and supporting each other in times of need. The school calendar is timetabled to provide opportunities to celebrate significant times within the liturgical year. Governors know the school exceptionally well and are regular visitors. Relationships between the governors and the school are a strength. Consequently, they provide highly effective support mechanisms to pupils, staff, and the whole community. The Executive Head Teacher and religious education leader have a thorough understanding of a variety of ways of praying in the Catholic tradition. They use their knowledge to serve the needs of their community exceptionally well. Staff describe the school as a spiritual place and parents appreciate the opportunities the school provides. Leaders are committed to prioritising prayer and liturgy by investing significant amounts of school budget into resourcing. As a result, staff and pupils have what they need to experience quality prayer times.



## Information about the school-

Full name of school	St Joseph's Catholic Infant School
School unique reference number (URN)	148809
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	3903325
Full postal address of the school	St Joseph's Catholic Infant School, Mitchell Street, Birtley, Chester le Street, DH3 1LU
School phone number	01914102324
Executive Headteacher	Kate Swaddle
Chair of Governors/Trustees	Timothy Spain
School Website	<a href="http://www.stjosephcatholicschoolsbirtley.org">www.stjosephcatholicschoolsbirtley.org</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	N/A
Age-range of pupils	5-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	March 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

## The inspection team

Louise Nealings  
Julie Carr

Lead  
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