



St Michael's Catholic Primary School

URN: 148262

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

18 March 2026 – 19 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

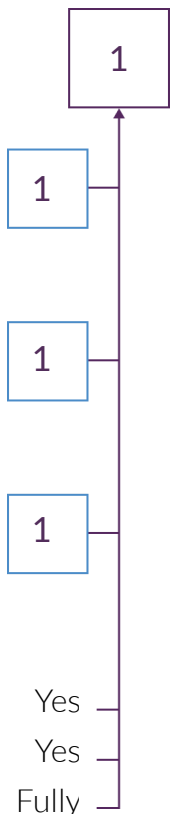
Collective worship (p.7)

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



Yes

Yes

Fully

What the school does well

- With Christ at the heart of the school, there is a real sense of a warm, united community, living out the mission statement and the eight gospel values, together, every day.
- Leaders and Governors are passionate about the priority given to maintaining and improving the Catholic ethos of St Michael's Catholic Primary School: they are ambitious for its focus on the best possible Catholic education for all.
- Religious education is outstanding, marked by visionary leadership, dedicated and committed staff and enthusiastically engaged pupils.
- Prayer and Liturgy are central to the life of the school: staff modelling of celebrations enable the confident planning and leadership of pupil ministry.
- Links between the school, parish and local community are particularly impressive, with several examples of shared activities that include pupil leadership groups.

What the school needs to improve

- In religious education, ensure that pupils are given extensive opportunities to present their learning using a wide variety of forms of expression across all year groups.
- Develop pupil independence, individuality and creativity in religious education, including confident articulation of and reflection on 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

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 relish being members of St Michael's Catholic Primary School: they have a strong sense of belonging and are very proud of its Catholic ethos. They understand its values, what it stands for. They know that everyone in the school community is unique, and worthy of care and respect. Pupils are very happy and secure. Pupils have a sound knowledge of the school mission statement: 'Finding Christ in Each Other' and the eight identified gospel values. They understand that these are the teachings of Jesus, the guide for their daily lives, and they try to respond to them consistently. Pupils also have a very good understanding of Catholic social teaching and how to link the principles to their actions and those of the school. This is exemplified most strongly in their willingness to take up responsible roles in several groups: Mini-Vinnies, eco-warriors, sports leaders, well-being warriors, the gardening gang, are all examples. They have a deep understanding of what is required and why they undertake this service, understanding the theology behind their actions at an age-appropriate level. They show a deep respect for each other, and their behaviour is exemplary. They highly value the chaplaincy provision, and willingly participate, particularly as members of the chaplaincy team.

The school mission statement is lived out on a daily basis, recently refreshed, and exemplified in the stunning display in the hall. The statement and its associated gospel values have a significant impact on all the school's activities. All staff embrace it, and contribute to it consistently, as expressed by parents: 'Throughout every interaction, the school staff and headteacher go above and beyond to ensure that every child is supported, nurtured and loved', being a typical comment. The sense of community is palpable, with welcome for all and

the valuing of all described by parents and staff alike. Relationships in the school are very positive: staff model these in their support for each other, and for the children in their care. Pastoral care for pupils is outstanding, gentle and patient, empathetic, and therefore developmental and supportive. The physical environment celebrates the Catholic faith impressively, with a range of displays of high quality. Care for the environment is evident, with the school close to achieving the Cafod 'Live Simply' award. Chaplaincy provision is dynamic and provides high-quality opportunities for spiritual and moral development for pupils and staff.

Leaders and governors hold the Catholic life and mission as a consistent priority, with Christ at the centre, firmly influencing a wide range of projects and activities that reflect the Catholic identity, charism and mission of the school. Leaders and governors are active in their role in the diocese and the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust. Parish and community links are very strong, exemplified by the Advent and Lent calendars created for the parish in partnership with another school and a parish team, and by the strong bonds with a local care home and elderly village residents. Parents wax lyrical about the support and engagement with the school: 'The school provides a wonderful environment where children feel supported, valued and inspired to live out the gospel values in their daily lives,' summing up the feelings of many. The Church's preferential option for the poor can be seen in the school's charitable activities, for Cafod, St Cuthbert's Hospice, Treetops children's unit and Mind being a few examples. Governors are mindful of the wellbeing of staff, who feel well supported. Governors are highly ambitious, seen in the serious way in which they take their responsibilities and get involved. Self-evaluation is very rigorous; all know the school well and are constantly striving for the best.

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

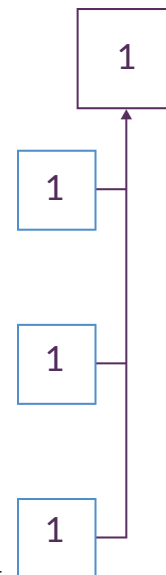
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 hold religious education in high regard. They enjoy their lessons and engage fully in them. Their behaviour is excellent: they show full attention to what is being taught and concentrate in a sustained manner. They collaborate well with each other. They are developing excellent knowledge, understanding and skills, including a wide knowledge of scripture, and all groups make consistently good progress. Relative to their age, they can reflect spiritually and are very aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life, with its focus on self-discipline and the needs of others. Pupils receive a firm foundation from the earliest years and as they advance through the school, so that by upper Key Stage 2 they are able to draw on a range of sources to augment their learning, including very good knowledge of how to access scripture from the Bible. Pupils' work is presented well in all classes. Older pupils show independence, confident articulation, individuality and creativity in their learning, but pupils in other classes are more scaffolded in the range of response, in writing and speaking. Pupils understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Attainment is very good in all classes.

Teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge is very strong, appropriate to the age group they are teaching. They show a deep commitment, high expectations and enthusiasm for religious education, and this is effectively conveyed to pupils. Planning is thorough, following agreed principles, with particular strengths in consolidation of learning, with an appropriate emphasis on the development of vocabulary, ensuring pupils' understanding of key concepts. Questioning is highly effective, ensuring a consistent focus on what needs to be learnt and

retained by pupils. Recall of previous learning and a focus on understanding key vocabulary are positive features. Praise is used regularly, creating a very positive environment for learning, and encouraging the engagement of all pupils. Teachers make lessons relevant to their pupils, with real concrete or personal examples that help them to make sense of the world around them in terms of moral and spiritual development. Teaching assistants contribute significantly through their empathetic support of pupils. Older pupils are given extensive opportunities to present their learning using a wide variety of forms of expression. These are less frequently offered to other age groups.

The religious education curriculum is a faithful expression of the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory 2012*. The main resource, 'Come and See', has been carefully adapted to bring clarity to key learning objectives, and to enhance teaching quality. Religious education is given core parity with other subjects, in status and resourcing, and all classes have a minimum of 10% of the timetable allocated to the subject. Continuing professional development has been particularly effective. The outstanding subject leader gives impressive support consistently to all staff. Her passion and commitment, her clear vision for the subject's development, and her ability to inspire and support others has had a profound impact. Her expertise has been shared generously beyond the school. There is an appropriately sequential curriculum, set within an agreed structure to ensure learners progress in an increasingly demanding way. It is augmented by a wide range of enrichment activities. Parents value the school's approach to pupils' learning, as exemplified by this typical comment: 'Religious education is engaging, and encourages children to think deeply about their faith, values and responsibilities to others'. Leaders and governors' self-evaluation procedures are rigorous and accurate: They know the school's strengths well, and support leaders in their drive for the highest standards.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

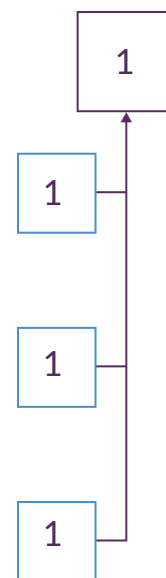
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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 participate fully, consciously and actively in experiences of prayer and liturgy. They show this in their deep and profound respect for each gathering, in the way they engage in prayer, through their attentiveness, their willingness to be involved, appropriate periods of silent reflection and their joyful singing. They understand that there are a wide variety of ways of praying in the Catholic tradition. They know about the different seasons of the Church's year; and about the elements that are present in a celebration. They undertake liturgical ministries with high levels of confidence, at age-appropriate level. In celebrations of the word, they have developed an understanding of the centrality of scripture, and how themes develop from its proclamation, including ways to gather, how to respond and what mission to take into everyday life. They have developed a capacity for evaluating the quality of prayer that they have planned. They are able to link the message of scripture to the school's gospel values and Catholic social teaching principles, and how these inspire them to action. 'It's made my faith stronger. It's made me closer to God' and 'We take the message from the Bible story and live it out in our daily lives', are two examples.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the daily life of the school. Leaders have devised a comprehensive programme of celebrations across each week, and the year as a whole. These are planned with full attention paid to the Church's liturgical year. They offer participants a wide range of engaging and creative experiences. Scripture is central to each gathering and is carefully chosen to match the liturgical season and its appropriateness to the pupils. Staff are exemplary in their modelling of engagement in prayer and liturgy. They are highly skilled in helping pupils to confidently plan and lead well-constructed celebrations. High-quality music

and other art forms are used to enhance services, with particular attention paid to the prominence of the word in display and in the focus area. Careful attention is paid to prayer spaces across the school, including the chapel and the hall, with outside space also in future plans. Families and parishioners are welcomed into the prayer life of the school. The regular 'Stay and Pray' gatherings and the weekly Mass celebrated with one year group in the chapel are cherished by parents, grandparents and parishioners: 'We love being able to pray with them and as a community'.

The school's approach to prayer and liturgy is communicated effectively and well understood by all staff. There is a clear understanding of how skills of participation should progress across the age groups. The Annual Plan of Provision is comprehensive in its coverage and has been skilfully and thoughtfully created. All significant feasts are celebrated appropriately. Staff have received high-quality professional development and have implemented it in their own practice swiftly for the benefit of pupils, increasing the range of prayer experiences. Leaders have a thorough understanding of a broad range of ways of praying that are part of the Catholic tradition. As well as regular opportunities to participate in Mass, the celebrations of the word, and seasonal devotions such as the rosary in October and the stations of the cross in Lent, pupils are encouraged to learn traditional prayers as well as engage in reflective moments and spontaneous prayer, such as through their individual prayer journals or the school's prayer tree. Leadership of prayer and liturgy has been highly effective, resulting in the developed skill of all staff. Self-evaluation has been regular and accurate, involving leaders and governors, leading to improvements of significant impact.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Michael's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	148262
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	9133407
Full postal address of the school	Front Street, Esh Village, County Durham, DH7 9QY
School phone number	0191 3731205
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Christina Parker
Chair of Governors	Veronica Kelsey
School Website	www.stmichaelsesh.durham.sch.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non Selective
Age-range of pupils	3 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	18 January 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

The Inspection Team

Alan Dewhurst Lead

Stephanie Mary Brown

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