

Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for
St. Mary's Catholic Academy, Blackpool

URN: 141257

Carried out on behalf of the Right Rev. Paul Swarbrick, Bishop of Lancaster on:

Date: 18th and 19th October 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	Fully

Summary of key findings

What the school does well

- The school has exceptionally high standards of pastoral care and support for its students. Through the extensive range of services, student welfare is given the highest priority.
- Provision for chaplaincy, as well as the impact this team make on the lives of the students and staff, in and beyond the school is outstanding.
- Sixth form core religious education is very strong and strengthens the distinctive offer to Catholic students.

- The headteacher, leadership team, governors and trust board show a great dedication to the development of St Mary's as an inclusive and caring school. The highest priority is given to Christian formation and academic success.

What the school needs to improve:

- The '*St Mary's Way*' is a distinctive feature of the school. However, not all students understand its place alongside the school mission statement. These should be bound together and better linked to pastoral life and students' formation.
- There are variable standards of student feedback across religious education. This means that not all students make the progress that they should. Systems and practices should be reviewed to ensure standards improve.

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



Many students understand the mission statement "*I have come that you may have life and have it to the full*" (John 10:10). While not all fully comprehend '*The St Mary's Way*', a majority acknowledge its alignment with the school's founding values. Students feel well-cared for, and staff display reverence in meeting their needs, fostering strong student-staff relationships, and providing a secure framework for sharing concerns. Students recognise that part of their own formation is to be guided by the example of Jesus. A very strong commitment to Catholic social teaching is evident throughout this community and students proactively engage in charity work; this is exemplified by Year 12 Cafod Young Leaders who commit to a leadership training and development programme. Sixth formers positively choose the distinctive ethos and caring atmosphere of St Mary's, saying that the way they are known by the staff, and know them in return, makes for an excellent transition from GCSE. The head of sixth form knows them all by name and is proactive in engaging with them. Their separate top-floor suite gives a distinctive feel, but their connection with the main school facilitates leadership, including influencing and helping younger students. Many students face personal life challenges, sometimes reflected in their behaviour, but those responsible for their guidance demonstrate exemplary patience and serve as role models. The chaplaincy team, deeply respected by all students, provide guidance to a small group of pupil chaplains who actively support the school's Catholic Life & Mission, fostering the development of prayer and liturgy. Because of this, the group gains a deeper understanding of spirituality, leaving them equipped to share their experiences with others.

'*The St Mary's Way*' serves as a framework for students to explore their inner potential and provides guidance to staff in nurturing their talents. Staff display a strong commitment to this mission, actively participating in various roles and ministries, demonstrating that they fully embrace their role as educators of character as well as of their subject specialisms. Staff and pupils share a commitment to serving the common good, readily revealing an understanding of gospel values. This, and the use of scripture in form time prayer and liturgy, are strong indicators that Christ has been put at the centre. The strong sense of community is a defining characteristic and visitors often remark on the warm and inclusive atmosphere, extending to individuals of all faith backgrounds, making them feel part of the Catholic community. Pastoral care provided for students is exceptional, catering to the diverse needs of its students. The two school chapels, at the heart of the school, set a very high bar in terms of physical provision. Their effective use reflects an understanding of students' and staff's needs. The provision for chaplaincy has been a long-standing strength of the school and is a positive and distinguishing feature. The chaplaincy has, over a sustained period, taken on the full responsibility for the spiritual nourishment of students and staff. The curriculum for relationships, sex and health education is well-designed, drawing from trustworthy sources like *Ten-Ten*. Thoughtfully curated materials meet student needs, with well-trained staff and quality assurance systems ensuring appropriate delivery.

The existing development of a trust-wide approach to the review of policies will, in time, ensure that this outward facing aspect of leadership is secure. Chaplains and a senior leader regularly attend deanery meetings and are able to communicate effectively with the parishes serving the school. Strong links exist with feeder schools - particularly those in the Trust. The absence of a priest chaplain has been a gap and students and staff will benefit greatly from the recent appointment to this vacancy. Staff speak powerfully about the way the school supports staff well-being. There are many ways that leaders consider the needs of staff who are treated with dignity and recognised as being uniquely important. The expression that life in a Catholic educating community is governed by the teachings of Christ, and nourished by the Holy Spirit could be made clearer in curriculum statements. Processes for the induction of early career teachers (ECT), as well as any staff new to the school, are strong. These include appropriate training for the leadership of prayer and liturgy.

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.....

3

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



Students value their religious education teachers and are positive about school. They display good behaviour and attitudes and there is a developing variety of curriculum experiences for them. The depth of learning will be greater when religious literacy is fully developed, and discussion or opportunities to think more theologically is more advanced. In Key Stage 3 and 4, classwork is mostly a good standard. Written work is generally presented well, and expectations are displayed with an insert in books although these are not consistently imposed or followed. The variable standards of student feedback across the religious education team mean that where this is weak, students make less progress. Further, many were unable to explain the progress they were making. In Key Stage 5, the quality of work is stronger with evidence of a better dialogue between teachers and the students. The better-quality feedback here illustrates a standard which should be aimed for across school. Recall tasks in lessons engage almost all students in the mixed ability setting, but do not always allow time for the least able to consolidate learning. There are similar patterns when discussion, and the opportunity to think more deeply and develop arguments, are not given sufficient time. The needs of very able pupils, of which there are many, need consideration. One Year 7 student gave a brilliant answer when asked to describe 'testament'. The response, beyond the level of most students, could have provoked a discussion promoting a wider understanding of this key vocabulary.

Across the team, the quality of teaching is good, with some team members showing greater subject knowledge and expertise. A consistent emphasis on enhancing subject

and pedagogical knowledge through training contributes to this success. The subject leader excels in supporting religious education teachers, effectively mentoring them, and identifying areas requiring additional support. Lessons are well-structured, featuring clear and effective communication, both verbally and through visual presentations. Pedagogical awareness is a team strength, resulting in mostly engaging questioning techniques. A-Level religious studies (known in the school as Philosophy, Ethics and Theology) is well taught and feedback is provided in an exemplary way, enabling students to see clearly how to achieve their targets, and improve with each piece of work. Students are engaged and can connect theological ideas and apply them to their reflection on life and action. Although small in numbers, the course is given priority and resources by leaders. Physical provision for learning is of a good standard with classroom spaces clean and well-cared for. Some teachers adeptly connect the curriculum to students' moral and spiritual development; this is appreciated by students. Celebrating students' efforts and accomplishments fosters higher motivation.

Leaders and governors ensure religious education's parity with core subjects, adhering to diocese requirements for each key stage. The school's strategy for full adoption of the new *Religious Education Curriculum Directory* is clear and practical, with implementation for students in Year 7 and 8 in 2024-25. A new programme of core religious education in the sixth form is appreciated by students, who find it challenging and respectful of their talents and abilities. It takes account of emerging guidance about the curriculum directory and will be progressively developed as this is formalised for sixth form students. It is effectively taught, and the students enjoy it. Curriculum mapping for religious education aligns with other subjects, forming a foundation for medium-term plans. Whole-school quality assurance processes are thorough and in the most part, consistently applied to religious education due to leaders' diligence. Monitoring and evaluation occur regularly through lesson visits and discussions with the teaching team, offering an understanding of teaching, learning, and assessment. Nevertheless, more could be done to ensure consistency of work and feedback in students' books. Overall, this work informs and updates the identification of strengths and areas for development, leading to improvement strategies. Senior leaders share a commitment to school improvement and possess a good vision for religious education within the school.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....

1

Pupil outcomes

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

2

Provision

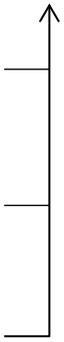
The quality of collective worship provided by the school

1

Leadership

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

1



Most students appreciate their experiences of prayer and liturgy, joining readily in aspects as invited, including when led by the small student chaplaincy team. They understand from this that Catholic prayer takes many forms and is anchored in the Church's year, for example with harvest, Advent, and Holy Week liturgies, when whole year groups gather for prayer and liturgy. Liturgical music is often experienced in liturgies and sometimes through a choir. Teachers, chaplains, and students work together to ensure that student chaplaincy is active and engaging – members are motivated and excited by their development in ministry under strong guidance. They enjoy devising and writing prayers and meditations of originality, which are appreciated by their peers, then evaluated afterwards. Students' understanding of the connections between prayer and the liturgy and the curriculum, as well as with wider life, is developed in specific instances – for example when the floods in Pakistan were studied in geography and then made the focus of a Cafod fast day liturgy. The student chaplaincy team are clearly inspired by prayer and liturgy to action or reflection.

Prayer and liturgy in St Mary's runs through the whole life of the school – 'like Blackpool through Blackpool rock' as the lay chaplains described. Through staff meetings, daily prayer in registration (including for sixth formers) and an extensive chaplaincy programme, it is prioritised and well-resourced by leaders and the academy trust. Daily prayer is embedded and natural, with almost all students and staff willingly taking turns to lead, including, as they are able, those of other faith backgrounds. It is rooted in the Mass

texts of the week or season, with excellent use of Sacred Scripture. Some of the richness of Catholic tradition is glimpsed. Staff, senior leaders and – most importantly – students are excellent role models in leading prayer and liturgy. The chaplaincy team’s knowledge of liturgical norms and sources is excellent and regularly updated, in line with diocesan and national expectations. The creative gifts of staff and students in music and the other arts are used in the carol service and other major liturgies. The ethos day display, chapel cross, Advent banners and choir are examples of this. Beautiful spaces for prayer, effective sign and symbol in every area of the site, and all requisites for the worthy celebration of the liturgy, are generously provided and lovingly maintained. Where possible, the involvement of families and the wider community is fostered, for example, by inviting them into chapel for carols or primary school liaison liturgies. The daily prayer guidance is also shared with families by means of the website.

The school’s prayer and liturgy policy is intelligently written and accessible. Leaders are sensitive to the development of students as they mature, and how this affects participation. Despite the challenges that were brought by Covid and the loss of a priest chaplain, liturgy runs through the school calendar in a way well planned by leaders, marking significant Holy Days and seasons. The full return of sacramental provision, temporarily affected by the loss of the priest chaplain, will unify efforts to enrich the experiences of staff and students. Continuing professional development in the school’s Catholic ethos (including the ‘St Mary’s Way’), and the leadership of prayer and liturgy, are encouraged by leaders and the academy trust. The chaplaincy team, in particular, are deeply formed in a liturgical spirit, understand participation and ministry, and are well acquainted with liturgical sources and guidelines. They are highly skilled in motivating and facilitating the leadership of students and staff. Leaders and the academy trust give the highest priority to prayer and liturgy when allocating resources and place an increasing emphasis on evaluation and improvement. This naturally leads to a high quality of provision and engagement.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St. Mary's Catholic Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	141257
Full postal address of the school	St Walburga's Road, Blackpool, FY3 7EQ
School phone number	01253 396286
Name of head teacher or principal	Mr Simon Eccles
Chair of governing board	Mrs Michelle Staveley
School Website	https://www.st-mary.blackpool.sch.uk
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Blessed Edward Bamber Catholic Multi-Academy Trust
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy
Age-range of pupils	11 to 18
Trustees	Lancaster Roman Catholic Diocesan Trustees Registered
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	February 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	1 - Outstanding

The inspection team

Phil Mooney	Lead inspector
Daveth Frost	Team inspector
John Fetherston	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