



Saint Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy

URN: 146260

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Nottingham

29 January 2026 – 30 January 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

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Yes

Yes

Fully

What the school does well

- Leaders provide inspirational Catholic leadership, shaping a school community that is unmistakably rooted in the teachings and values of the Catholic faith.
- Leaders have expertly planned and embedded the Religious Education Directory across the school, creating a culture where pupils are consistently challenged, nurtured, and empowered to become confident missionary disciples.
- Teachers and the lay chaplain demonstrate strong commitment to the Catholic life and mission of the school and are faithful witnesses to the gospel of Christ, enabling all pupils to grow in faith, knowledge and responsible citizenship.
- Pupils are happy and confident, and show exemplary behaviour and attitudes. They undertake a wide range of meaningful leadership opportunities and demonstrate remarkable independence in planning and leading prayer and liturgy.
- Teaching assistants are highly skilled and deeply committed to supporting pupils' pastoral needs and educational progress. They play a full and active role in the Catholic mission of the school, contributing meaningfully to the nurturing, inclusive ethos that enables all pupils to flourish spiritually, socially and academically.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide intentional and meaningful opportunities for silence and reflection within religious education lessons.
- Ensure that extended moments of silence and reflection are included in the wide range of prayer and liturgy celebrated in 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

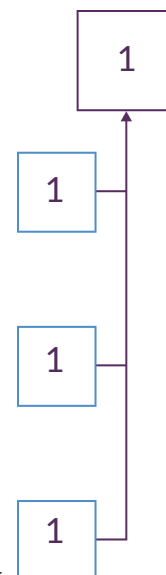
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



From the moment you enter the school grounds, it is clear that St Mary's is a community that confidently lives and celebrates its Catholic identity. Visitors are warmly welcomed into the school family, where the richness of faith is evident in both the physical environment and through the respectful and caring interactions of pupils and staff. Pupils fully understand the school's mission and actively live it out by bringing Christ to others through their actions and exemplary behaviour. They know that they are created in God's image and likeness, affirmed through their ability to proclaim, 'I'm important and precious because God loves me'. Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of Catholic social teaching, applying its principles to their daily choices and to wider local and global issues. In upper Key Stage 2, pupils benefit from dedicated global learning lessons which deepen their understanding of sustainability, social justice, and global relationships. Across the school, pupils show a mature respect for other faiths and cultures. They value chaplaincy and engage wholeheartedly in leadership opportunities through the FISH (Faith in Small Hearts) groups, recognising that these roles help them to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

The mission statement at St Mary's is displayed prominently throughout the school and is fully owned by all stakeholders. Scripture is the foundation for all aspects of school life, and there is a strong sense of community evident in discussions with pupils, staff, parents and governors. As one parent commented 'We feel we are part of a family and not a school'. Pastoral care is exemplary, which is shown by the commitment of staff to inclusiveness and to addressing the needs of their most vulnerable pupils. A parent commented 'I know that I am leaving my children with staff who care about them and go above and beyond, every day, to

support them to be the best they can be'. High quality displays support the pupils' development of their faith. Recognising the need to give Eastertide greater prominence, pupils designed Eastertide Stations and placed them around the hall, ensuring the joy of the season could be fully explored and celebrated. The school's Catholic life and mission is further strengthened by the dedicated support of the parish priest, a warmly welcomed presence in school. The adoption of the *Life to the Full* programme ensures that the requirements for relationships, sex and health education are met effectively and appropriately.

Leaders and governors promote and monitor the Catholic life and mission of St Mary's with exceptional commitment. They share a unified and determined vision. The partnership with the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, and the diocese, is highly beneficial; St Mary's shares excellent practice across the diocese, contributing to and benefiting from 'time away from the operational' through opportunities to think strategically, ensuring that the school continues to grow and is never complacent. The bishop's vision for the diocese is fully embraced, and the relationship between the school and parish is strong. The lay chaplain and headteacher have collaborated to produce a well-structured programme of study for First Holy Communion, further strengthening parish links. Leaders have established highly effective strategies for engaging with parents, including the half termly religious education 'morning drop-in', which fosters open communication and support. Governors receive thorough self-evaluation that enables them to monitor the school's mission with clarity and confidence. Staff comment on their effective induction and warmth of welcome. As one noted, 'I knew the moment I walked in the door it was a place I wanted to work and grow, and I am thankful every day for being part of this school family'.

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

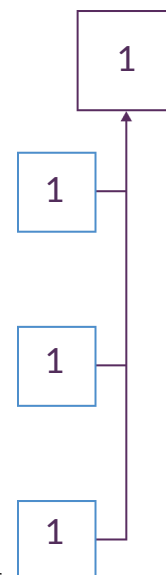
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 at St Mary's are developing excellent knowledge in religious education and thoroughly enjoy their learning. The school is in its second year of teaching the new *Religious Education Directory*, which has been fully embedded and is having a significant impact on pupils' progress. As a result, pupils demonstrate excellent scriptural knowledge, understanding and religious literacy. They relish the challenge provided in religious education, which is evident in their strong recall of prior learning, independence and sustained levels of concentration in lessons. Pupils confidently make links across scripture; for example, pupils in Class 3 connect Jesus calming the storm with God's power, drawing from the story of creation in Genesis, while Class 1 relate the feeding of the five thousand to the Catholic social teaching principle of 'option for the poor'. Oracy is a notable strength, enhanced by effective use of 'stem sentences' to recall knowledge. Behaviour for learning is exemplary. All pupils, including those with additional needs, make consistently strong progress because religious education is accessible, appropriately challenging, and engaging for all. Work is beautifully presented and demonstrates creativity, depth of thought and pride. Pupils have a secure understanding of how well they are doing and can articulate their next steps with confidence.

Teachers have fully embraced the challenge of piloting the new directory and demonstrate consistently strong subject knowledge and expertise. A clear and coherent approach to planning and teaching is evident across all classes. This consistency ensures pupils feel secure in their learning and build knowledge progressively as they move through the school. The use of battery candles on each desk establishes reverence and helps pupils recognise

religious education as a special and sacred time. Teaching is enthusiastic, purposeful and highly engaging. Lessons are active and inclusive, with effective use of widgets, visual supports and 'stem sentences' to strengthen pupils' religious literacy. For example, pupils confidently recall five different miracles of Jesus using the phrase, 'I remember these miracles of Jesus ...,' demonstrating secure understanding. Teaching assistants contribute significantly to learning, ensuring all pupils can access and succeed in religious education. Teachers skilfully deepen pupils' knowledge through high-quality questioning, encouraging thoughtful responses and theological reasoning. Pupils' efforts are celebrated, fostering pride and motivation. In their dedication to high-quality teaching, teachers occasionally prioritise activity over quiet reflection, missing the opportunity to strengthen and consolidate through, for example, prayerful stillness.

Leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for religious education with strategic clarity, and a shared sense of mission. They have played a pivotal role in introducing the new directory, work significantly strengthened by the headteacher's considerable expertise as subject leader. As she describes it, the school is 'a small school that punches above its weight', and this is reflected in the ambition, quality, and wider influence of its curriculum development across both the St Ralph Sherwin Catholic Multi-Academy Trust and the diocese. Her inspirational drive, deep subject knowledge, and generosity in supporting colleagues have been instrumental in ensuring the new directory has been embedded within two years. Achieving this within mixed-age classes is an impressive accomplishment and reflects the strong, strategic support of leaders and governors. Religious education is given full parity. Leaders ensure staff access a wide range of high-quality training, drawing on school-based expertise alongside diocesan, trust, and national opportunities. As a result, staff confidence and subject expertise are strong. As a pilot school for the revised religious education curriculum, monitoring has been rigorous and developmental, enabling leaders and governors to evaluate provision accurately and drive continual improvement. Strong links with the wider community enrich the curriculum and strengthen the school's Catholic mission.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

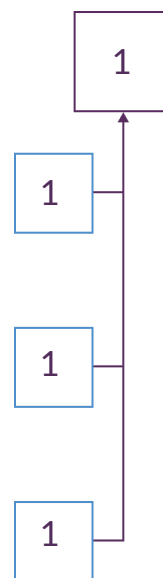
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

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



At St Mary's, praying together forms a key part of the experience for all pupils and staff. This shared practice fosters a strong sense of family and shapes the spiritual identity of the school. All pupils, including the youngest, are reverent and engage happily in prayer with confidence. As pupils progress through school, they are given increasing responsibility to plan and deliver prayer, so that Year 6 pupils take total responsibility for planning, preparing, leading, and evaluating prayer and liturgy, whether it is the whole school, class or a small prayer group. 'Mary's Missionaries' undertake their ministry with confidence, understanding and skill. Although pupils are very proficient in the delivery of prayer and worship, ministry can appear to place greater importance on written reflection rather than personal, inner prayerfulness. Their understanding of the liturgical year is highly developed, and they can articulate prayers and practices specific to each season of the Church's year, for example the Rosary in the months of May and October, and Stations of the Cross in Lent. Pupils clearly articulate how prayer makes them feel closer to God and impacts their daily lives, explaining, for example, 'I forgive because Jesus wants us to do that'.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the daily life of St Mary's, with opportunities for both formal and informal prayer throughout the day. Pupils have a secure understanding of the different purposes of prayer, such as thanksgiving, seeking God's blessing, and asking for forgiveness. The headteacher, working closely with the lay chaplain, has established a clear, sequential, and progressive plan that enables pupils to deepen their understanding of prayer and liturgy as they move through the school. This progression is evident in the creativity and confidence during pupil-led worship, observed both in school and showcased on the school website.

Pupils make thoughtful connections between scripture, the lives of the saints, Catholic social teaching, and the virtues being explored, demonstrating a mature understanding of how faith is lived out daily. The physical environment significantly enhances the quality of worship. The chaplaincy room, prayer garden, and the recently developed 'Carlo Acutis Shed' provide sacred spaces for reflection and prayer. Internally, prayer tables and altar areas are well-maintained, and responsive to the liturgical year, serving as meaningful focal points for worship. Pupils clearly understand the symbolism of the sacred objects they use. Parents engage readily in celebrations of the word.

The headteacher, as the leader of prayer and liturgy, radiates faith throughout the school community and sets an inspiring vision. Pupils articulate this impact with remarkable clarity, stating that their headteacher, '...has a really strong faith... she wants to give that as a gift to everyone'. The headteacher's inspirational leadership, in partnership with governors and school leaders, ensures that the school's policy for prayer and liturgy is inclusive, progressive, and effective in equipping pupils with the skills to be future leaders of worship. Former pupils affirm this stating, 'It's taught me not to be afraid to share my faith'. Leaders and governors are attentive to the context of their community; they have created an environment where every child, regardless of faith, is welcomed and fully participates in prayer and liturgy. Leaders and governors place the highest priority on professional development. Weekly chaplaincy reflections intentionally 'fill their cup,' strengthening both personal spirituality and professional practice. All staff are exemplary role models of faith, inspiring pupils, parents, and the parish community. Prayer and liturgy is regularly evaluated to ensure it is responsive to the evolving needs of the community. Prayer and liturgy sit unmistakably at the heart of St Mary's.

Information about the school

Full name of school	Saint Mary's Catholic Voluntary Academy
School unique reference number (URN)	146260
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8303509
Full postal address of the school	Longlands Road, New Mills, SK22 3BL
School phone number	01663 742412
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Patricia Chapman
Chair of Governors	Mrs Sarah Elizabeth Greene
School Website	www.stmarysnewmills.srscmat.co.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	St Ralph Sherwin CMAT
Phase	Academy
Type of school	
Admissions policy	4 - 11
Age-range of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	21 March 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The Inspection Team

Angela Mary Phillips Lead

Lucy Gunton

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