

# St Benedict's Catholic High School, Whitehaven

URN: 112398

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Lancaster

05–06 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

No

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

Fully

## What the school does well

- Leadership of Catholic mission and life by head teacher, governors, and staff.
- Excellent behaviour rooted in a Catholic and Benedictine understanding of the virtues.
- Pastoral care which puts the most vulnerable at the heart of the school's work.
- The care of staff for all the students in their charge and for each other.
- Excellent sign and symbol throughout the school expressing its Catholic identity.

## What the school needs to improve

- Develop teaching and learning in religious education drawing on evidence-based practice.
- Develop the consistency of feedback to ensure students know how to progress further.
- Roll out to a wider group the good practice of chaplaincy in the sixth form and the chaplaincy team.

## 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

2

**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

1



From the moment you enter St Benedict's it is quite clear that this is a Catholic school, with a strong Benedictine heritage. It is evident from the signs and symbols of faith throughout the school, but also in the warmth of welcome and the respect and kindness shown to all. Students appreciate and understand the Catholic identity of their school and its links with the Order of St Benedict, creatively expressed in a 'wheel of virtues' reflecting Gospel values and the traditional Benedictine medal. A culture of responsibility is genuinely embraced by the students, who feel cared for and value their place in the school. They actively engage with year group charities and embrace the Church's preferential option for the poor, though links with Catholic social teaching could be made more explicit. God's love of all and the uniqueness of each is well grasped and shows in generally excellent behaviour. For example, students explained that bullying is always wrong because it does not respect human dignity. A team of sixth formers take an active lead in the school's chaplaincy work, creatively contributing in many ways. A chaplaincy group of younger students willingly read and embrace opportunities to take part in liturgies.

The school's mission statement is widely displayed, setting out the ethos and charism of the school with admirable clarity. Some find it hard to remember, which may limit its impact, but this is balanced by the use of excellent explanatory materials and a vivid focus on Virtues, which is understood, accepted and used by all. The Word of God and Benedictine values permeate school life. The staff enthusiastically embrace this – thanks to engaging professional development – and actively live it out. Pastoral care and the ministry to the most vulnerable is exemplary and this is recognised and embraced by the wider community – fittingly, the school shares some resources with the local special school. Christ and his Gospel are at the heart of

the school, leading to a focus on dignity and helping the vulnerable, and a sense of the hospitality of St Benedict. Sign and symbol witnessing to this is exceptional and very well thought through. Students and staff of other Christian denominations – and those of other faiths – speak of the welcome they find, and the provision made for them. Indeed, the committed work of the head teacher, lay chaplain and local priests have ensured strong spiritual help and support for all, whatever their previous commitment.

The head teacher, leaders and governors are committed to the Catholic mission and have reinvigorated it with resilience and enthusiasm. In transforming the blank canvas of the new school into a clearly Catholic environment, they have reflected their deeper mission. A number attended the school themselves or have children at the school, so they reach out to parents very naturally: the vast majority deeply appreciate the school's approach and one wrote that the 'ethos is the golden thread that runs through everything'. The school is seeking actively to embrace the bishop's vision for academisation within its shared-site context. Links with the local church are very strong, and benefit from the generous support of priests who support the school's sacramental life as much as they can. All departments have reflected on how their work connects with the school's ethos particularly through the virtues, and effective professional development and materials have facilitated this. Leaders and governors target resources towards those in greatest need and in support of the mission, are strategic and offer appropriate challenge, and have high levels of expertise in a range of fields. The school's self-evaluation is also of a high standard, consultative, and strongly focussed on the Catholic mission.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

**Pupil outcomes**

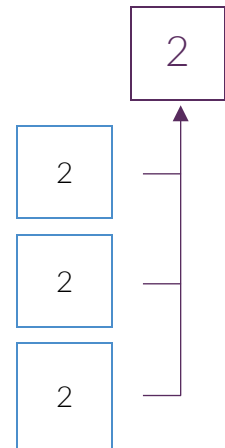
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

**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



The religious education department have committed themselves wholeheartedly to the new *Religious Education Directory* (RED) and worked hard to write new schemes of work, underpinned by excellent resources. GCSE progress is good for the context and there is clear evidence for progression in understanding through the school. Attainment in GCSE, while still lower than English, is on a clear rising trend and close to national averages in a context of very mixed ability. Students with certain particular learning needs have bespoke sessions, leading to definite learning gains. Religious literacy and theological reflection across the subject need to be developed further, although there is evidence of them growing in the sixth form. Good questioning is a strength of the department and could be used, with the modelling of students' work to exemplify good practice, to help students become more confident using subject specific vocabulary and methodology. Students do work independently, particularly in extended writing tasks. They are always quietly engaged and show respect for the subject. Good relationships with teachers lead to enthusiastic engagement in some lessons, with A Level work being a good example. There is clear evidence of the opportunity to respond to assessment, but this could also be deepened and made more consistent.

Staff have high expectations for their students and the embracing of further research-based pedagogy could sit well with this and ensure the effectiveness of the well-planned resources. The assessment plan through the year is clearly built on prior learning but it is not always clear where all assessments sit, and some could be given fuller feedback. The practice in some groups and topics of providing the students with a summary of what is to be covered – perhaps in the front of their books with spaces to record what they need to do to improve – could be more widely and consistently implemented. Effective questioning was clearly evident, however: for example, in a lesson on euthanasia, students were constantly asked to justify their opinion

and explain their answers. Sometimes students needed more guidance and help in setting out their work. Here again modelling (perhaps aided by the use of visualisers) might help. In addition to the religious education curriculum, there is planned opportunity for reflection in lessons through use of Ten Ten resources. Students, however, greatly appreciate the 'quiet time' in tutor group prayers on Fridays, and similar initiatives could perhaps deepen reflection in religious education. The use of outside speakers – notably the parish clergy – has proved supportive and helpful.

The department is well led and makes good use of online resources and the *Religious Education Directory* effectively. Content is therefore sound, and staff are always looking for ways to enrich and build on this. Planning is diligent and well matched with assessments, but teaching and learning would benefit from some development, particularly in the area of up-to-date research-led pedagogy. This could be explored online and through professional development opportunities. For example, students would benefit from an improvement in scaffolding of work in ordinary lessons, although this does take place in revision sessions. Religious education is nonetheless always given proper weight and priority in the school, with more than ten per cent of curriculum time allocated. There are also opportunities for enrichment of the curriculum such as the trip to Rome, opportunities to visit local churches and outside speakers. These are particularly valuable as some students leave their home communities only infrequently. Departmental self-evaluation is good, though it could benefit from a more detailed approach in some areas. Again, the relative isolation of the school makes everyday collaboration with other departments far from easy – something that the hoped-for academisation may help.

## 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

Students are always respectful in liturgy and prayer, and a good deal of effort goes into forming their understanding. Assemblies always provide opportunities for students to take key roles, particularly through readings and prayers. Care is also taken to introduce all year groups to some of the riches of Catholic prayer and liturgy: we visited in the week following Corpus Christi and students had the opportunity to see and understand the purpose of a monstrance, watch a video of a Blessed Sacrament procession, hear a well-loved Eucharistic hymn, and think about the word 'transubstantiation'. There is similar variety in prayer and liturgy opportunities, assemblies, Holy Mass, tutorial prayers and quiet time. With a range of Catholic art already widely displayed, the school is well placed to draw on this (and the Church's rich musical tradition) in enriching understanding. Participation in planning and leading assemblies is outstanding in the sixth form, where the lay chaplain has trained students well. There is now a need to roll this out throughout the school. Links between curriculum and the Catholic ethos could also be explored further. There is some reflection on and evaluation of prayer and liturgy in the sixth form and the chaplaincy group, but this could now be developed.

Prayer and liturgy form a central part of school life, with Mass throughout the year and prayer in every meeting. Daily reflections unfailingly reflect the Church's year and the Lectionary. Resources for staff who are less experienced in leading the practice are comprehensive and much appreciated. Some innovative practice at linking reflection with the curriculum also takes place, for example in geography, where slides link new modules to aspects of scripture or the mission. This could provide a helpful model for other areas. The head teacher leads by example, encouraging staff to engage with the school's pattern of prayer, aided by the knowledge and skills of the lay chaplain, parish clergy and head of religious education. Indeed, there is scope to introduce more of the creative gifts and skills of staff and students in

assemblies and liturgies through art, drama, and music, as with the existing school choir. Great care has been taken to beautify the small second-floor chapel with its *Laudato Si* garden, but there as elsewhere the school is limited by its original plans, which featured no sizeable hall or central spaces to link chaplaincy, student support and religious education. All classrooms however are dignified by appropriate texts and symbols of Catholic faith.

In the renewal of the Catholic identity of this school and its life of prayer, the impact of leadership and policy is very clear to see. Investment in the physical space and in the provision of a lay chaplain has been important. Unfortunately, only a few days before the inspection, the latter had moved to other work, but he made himself available to support the inspection and has left a strong legacy to be built on. In particular, work with the sixth form and chaplaincy team can now be widened. Fortunately, the school has priests who greatly appreciate the efforts being made and support them sacramentally. One priest provided the inspection team with profound insights into the Catholic life of the town, setting the school's work in context. In many cases students are experiencing liturgy and prayer for the first time, underlining the importance of what is being achieved. Catholic families that are new to the area are taking a full part in parish life. This involvement enriches the school's Catholic mission. Leaders and governors ensure that excellent materials, appropriate professional development, and effective resourcing all support the progress being made, which they constantly review as a priority in their work.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Benedict's Catholic High School
School unique reference number (URN)	112398
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	9424622
Full postal address of the school	St Benedict's Catholic High School, Red Lonning, Hensingham, Whitehaven, CA28 8UG
School phone number	01946692275
Headteacher	Emma Jackson
Chair of Governors	Kayleigh Daniels
School Website	<a href="http://st-benedicts.cumbria.sch.uk/">http://st-benedicts.cumbria.sch.uk/</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	March 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	2 – Good

## The inspection team

Daveth Frost	Lead
Philip Allen	Team
Helen Hall	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