



## Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for St George Catholic College, Southampton

URN: 116507

Carried out on behalf of the Right Rev. Philip Egan, Bishop of Portsmouth on:

Date: 24-25 May 2023

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	x
The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop	✓
The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection	Fully

### Summary of key findings

#### What the school does well

- Staff, governors, and students are ambitious and passionate in their vision for improving the school, and the fruits of this ambition are evident.
- The culture of continuous improvement permeates the school community, with good and outstanding practice the norm.
- Students make excellent progress in religious education, demonstrating an accurate understanding of core concepts and the ability to discuss, apply and evaluate their learning.
- Governors' support in investing in the religious education department reflects their understanding of their role and the specific nature of a Catholic school.

- The head teacher is an inspiration for the staff and students, resolute in his desire to ensure that St George's is an outstanding Catholic school. His innovative approach is aided by his readiness to learn from the best, whether locally, nationally, or beyond.

What the school needs to improve:

- Leaders must ensure full curriculum entitlement in religious education for all students.
- Students need to take a greater role in the design, leadership and evaluation of worship.
- Religious education leaders need to ensure the department is prepared for the theological rigour of the new *Religious Education Directory*.

## 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



Students value, embrace and actively contribute to the school's Catholic life and mission, as evidenced by student voice, the pride they take in their school, their recognition of what makes the school distinctive and their contribution in service-based extra-curricular activities. These activities are fully inclusive and engage students from across the age and ability ranges. Consequently, students are happy and secure members of the school community, with one student saying: 'I love this school; it is incredible. Everyone looks out for each other, and the teachers are so helpful.' Students' behaviour is exemplary, showing the respect they have for themselves and others. Students are proud of their 'ASPIRE' approach to school life which informs both their learning and their relationships with students and staff. Students speak confidently about how their school welcomes those of all faiths and none, provides a safe and empowering space for all and, therefore, aids their moral development. One student commented that 'Even though we are a Catholic school, in a way it does not matter what your beliefs are, because they will be respected.' Students' contribution to charitable work is exemplary, and they feel their ideas about helping others are listened to by the school. Their understanding of Catholic social teaching is embedding, and they recognise its place both across the curriculum, as well as foundational to it. The overwhelming majority of parents express a high degree of satisfaction with the school's ethos and regard staff willingness to go the extra mile as a prime indicator of belief informing action. One parent commented: 'This is an amazing school; the whole staff really care, and my children have been so happy here.'

For many students and staff, Christ is at the centre of the community, underpinning the 'ASPIRE' approach which acts as a set of preferred characteristics, permeating the life of the school, with each characteristic celebrated. Staff commitment at all levels is exceptional; they readily serve the community and participate in activities and routines which promote the school's high standards, and especially those which reinforce the ethos of the school. Staff survey responses reflect an

overwhelming support for the school's approach and the leadership that underpins it, one speaking of the school as being 'a special place with family values.' One member of staff commented she had 'never worked anywhere like this. The support and care is just phenomenal and my friends at other schools are amazed at some of the things I tell them are just standard here.' The provision for relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) meets all statutory requirements and is firmly rooted in Church teaching. These lessons are much valued by the students, and parents expressed confidence in their content and delivery. The pastoral care of students is excellent, with the work of the Trinity centre, catering for the most vulnerable, deemed exemplary. Staff are positive role models and, in all their dealings with students, they show respect and compassion for the individual; this is also shown in the provision of prayer and worship, which is never less than good. The school environment coherently reflects the school's Catholic character, including a well-used chapel.

Leaders, including governors, are energised, joyful and determined in their duty as guardians of the Catholic life of the school. The head teacher, who is an ever-present leader with a deep sense of his role as 'father' of the school community, is revered in his commitment to fulfilling the school's mission, and the staff recognise in the school's leadership a very real integrity and generosity, further strengthening the school's ethos. A member of support staff said the head teacher 'is so passionate about the school. He works tirelessly for the students and the staff. He is an inspiration when it comes to showing what Catholic social teaching is about.' The cohesive Catholic curriculum is developing, and standards reflect the huge improvement in the school's performance over a number of years. A student was clear that she was at St George's because 'it is the best school in Southampton'. Aided by the dynamic involvement of local clergy, the school has made great and successful efforts to reach out to parents, parishes, and feeder schools, leading to a very healthy number of Catholic students applying to join the school. Governors' commitment is reflected in, for example, their support for strengthening the religious education team, as well as frequent visits to support the Catholic life of the school. The chair of the governing body is deeply knowledgeable about the school and her personal commitment to its future is typical of this school's top leadership.

## 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.....

1

### 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



The ethic of learning permeates the school, including the religious education department, driven by the outstanding leadership of the head teacher. Students respond extremely well to the knowledge-based curriculum which is delivered well by skilled staff. Students enjoy their religious education lessons, and value the creatively produced resources which enable them to engage with sophisticated concepts, using appropriate technical vocabulary, as well as coherent forms of argument. One Year 9 student said ‘I really like discussing things. You can have your own opinion as long as you put it across well.’ Students are extremely cooperative and ready to contribute, and there are examples of sophisticated responses. Behaviour for learning is excellent, reflecting clear expectations and the importance of religious education in students’ intellectual and spiritual formation. Excellent standards at key stage 3 and 4 are evident in students’ books, their response to questioning and in the quality of outcomes at age 16. Key Stage 4 students demonstrate that they are being thoroughly prepared for examinations and respond well to opportunities for practice questions. As a result of these developments, recent exam results for GCSE are good, with attainment and progress above national and diocesan averages. Taking published assessment results, the quality of learning seen in lessons and the trend progress over time, this is outstanding. A Year 9 student said, ‘I didn’t use to like it but now I am learning RE well and the teacher is really good at making sure we look at what we have learnt so we are sure it sticks.’ Books are, in the main, well cared-for and work completed to a standard appropriate to age and ability.

The school has worked tirelessly to ensure that religious education is at the centre of the school’s curriculum and is represented in all aspects of school life. Teaching observed included outstanding and good practice, demonstrating effective use of questioning to maximise learning for students and help develop their specialist vocabulary. There is effective reinforcement over time by the use of lesson starters. In addition, innovative whole-class feedback for assessments

helps address not only any misunderstanding of concepts but also any frequent misspelling of technical terms. In most teaching observed, teachers demonstrated confidence in their subject knowledge. From conversations with students and religious education teachers and from work scrutiny, it is evident that good quality resources are consistently used to help students learn.

Staff are ambitious for students and ensure they use key terms and sophisticated theological concepts with confidence in many lessons. An example was a discussion on the contrast between saying sorry and asking for forgiveness, where the teacher expertly managed a fruitful discussion. In another, a discussion of sin and forgiveness was applied to the perpetrators of the Holocaust, drawing effectively on history, law and ethics. This expertly crafted lesson segment stimulated a rich discussion with which all students were engaged. One student said: 'I am interested in law and I like discussing these ideas.' Teachers use praise and know their students well. There is evidence of planning to ensure that students acquire the necessary knowledge and basic skills to respond to activities. In a few observed cases, teachers were less secure in their theological understanding. Where students have been withdrawn from religious education, the school leadership recognises that, going forward, religious education needs to continue for all, and measures are now being put in place.

The highly effective and well respected subject leader has a solid vision for raising standards further. She is fully aware of the department's strengths as well as areas for development and is open to learning from best practice. In this she is greatly aided by a team that has much experience, with staff who demonstrate presence and credibility in the classroom. She has a clear plan for the department's implementation of the new *Religious Education Directory*. The team recognise the challenge this will offer and are working systematically to ensure they are prepared. From the recent records of training undertaken, the subject leader encourages ongoing theological and pedagogical development for the whole department. She also leads in maintaining active networks with local and national religious groups. Termly observations, responsive planning, dedicated Wednesday morning sessions and support for less experienced members of the department are examples of this practical approach to leadership in the department. Less advantaged students are supported, for instance, by providing support for a trip to a Jewish Museum. Leaders ensure a rich discussion of the place of faith by, for example, exploring the compatibility of science and faith, using the expertise of the science department, generating new insights in the minds of students and staff alike.

## Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....

2

### 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 .....

2



Students' responses to, and participation in collective worship are good, and now need to develop by their taking a leading role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of collective worship in the school. Some students already demonstrate a real desire to be challenged and to lead, including leading prayer. One Year 10 student said, 'I would like us to be able to have a bigger say in how we organise our prayer and worship. I think there would be plenty of people ready to take a more active part.' Another said, 'Bringing our experience of being the age we are with the world around us into prayer and worship would be good.' During form time, students read prayers and scripture reflecting the typicality of this good practice in school. In a service of eucharistic adoration, students were reverential and respectful, demonstrating an understanding of what the ceremony entailed and, on questioning, an age-appropriate understanding of core eucharistic theology. One student said, 'we are really fortunate as a school to have Jesus present to us in this way.' Students' behaviour in worship is very good and their trust in staff and willingness to engage in a range of activities reflects the progress made by the school in normalising such practice. Students speak positively about the way they can already become involved in the Catholic life of the school in a range of roles, including music, drama and in the production of liturgical events. One Year 8 student said 'There are opportunities to use your skills in a number of ways in prayer and worship. I like IT and help out in that way.' Students are not embarrassed to articulate their faith, and those of other traditions feel supported and respected equally. One Muslim student said, 'the school helps me to become a better and more religious person.'

There is an embedding tradition of prayer which is diverse and inclusive. The school ensures that traditional prayer, such as the Angelus, is used alongside more contemporary forms. An increasing number of staff can articulate the language of prayer with confidence and credibility, though further scope exists to ensure the widest number of staff have the confidence and understanding

to model authentic prayer. The delivery of prayer is typically no less than good, and the way in which it has become a natural part of the life of the school is to be commended. The chapel, which is at the centre of the school, is always open and used for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, personal reflection and Masses. The liturgical life of the school is greatly enhanced by the dynamic and very visible local clergy who give of their time generously. Staff benefit from the school lay chaplain who is very willing to support them in designing and delivering liturgy, especially important for new members of staff and those with little or no experience in this field. 'I was terrified at first,' said one member of staff 'until he (the lay chaplain) talked me through it.'

Key messages are delivered through and with prayer at the heart. Liturgical events are well thought through and impactful. Leaders recognise the need to develop student leadership of prayer and worship. They are open to learning from good practice and they recognise this as a core improvement area. The lay chaplain is a dynamic force in the school, supporting students and staff alike. Staff speak of his generosity and innovative approach, such as an early career stage teacher feeling confident that she could approach him for assistance at any time, and that he would produce an effective resource or a solution. He is actively identifying students who can assist in driving forward student leadership. Governors visit the school, attending whole school masses and visiting key staff to triangulate the information provided to them by senior leadership. The head teacher is a full and active member of the wider chaplaincy delivery, recognising the importance of his role in leading from the front and providing a credible witness to the school community and wider stakeholders. Training delivered by senior leaders ensures that all staff are developing an understanding of the centrality of prayer and are supported in developing their skills in providing high-quality collective worship. There is a clear line of sight between leaders' actions and an uplift in the quality of prayer provided by the school, on which the school recognises it now wants to build.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	St George Catholic College
School unique reference number (URN)	116507
Full postal address of the school	Leaside Way, Swaythling, Southampton, Hampshire, SO16 3DQ
School phone number	02380 322603
Name of head teacher or principal	James Habberley
Chair of governing board	Anna McCormack
School Website	www.stgcc.co.uk
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	n/a
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age-range of pupils	11-16
Trustees	Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	22 June 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

## The inspection team

Simon Uttley	Lead inspector
Sadie Whyte	Team inspector
Paul McHugh	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