

St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School

URN: 103465

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Birmingham

29–30 January 2025

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

1

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

1

Collective worship (p.7)

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

1

The school is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference

Yes

The school is fully compliant with any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

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

Fully

1

Compliance statement

- This school fully complies with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- This school is fully compliant with the additional requirements of His Grace.
- This school has fully addressed all previous areas for improvement.

What the school does well

- Pupils and staff proactively enact Catholic social teaching principles to positively contribute to local, national, and global communities. The whole school embraces opportunities to 'live, love, and work together'.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher articulate an inspiring vision for Catholic education. They are experts in living out the Church's mission to make Christ known to all.
- Teachers' religious education subject knowledge is exceptional. They impart it confidently and authoritatively, so pupils know and remember more.
- Behaviour throughout the school, including in religious education lessons, is outstanding. Staff consider the subject highly prestigious and skilfully deploy teaching strategies that contribute significantly to pupils' enjoyment of learning and high outcomes.
- Pupils show deep reverence when praying. This is demonstrated in their thoughtful responses and exceptionally joyful signing.

What the school needs to improve

- Routinely provide opportunities for pupils to evaluate the school's Catholic life and mission and to lead aspects of school improvement in this area.

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

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

1

The pupils at St Ambrose Barlow are enthusiastic disciples of the Lord. The concept of social responsibility is part of their everyday language; they are keen to teach other people about its importance and to be role models for other young people. They have a heightened awareness of Pope Francis' call to fraternity and embrace opportunities to stand in solidarity with others. For example, pupils were invited to Birmingham City Council House to speak following their letter-writing campaign against the proposed closure of many public libraries because they recognised their importance to many residents. Responding to the diocesan vision to be 'missionary disciples who work together co-responsibly', pupils led an initiative as part of the 'Lift the Ban' campaign, whereby they campaigned for local business owners to support a notion to allow asylum seekers to be allowed to work legally and integrate into British society. This happens because pupils are highly motivated by the school's mission statement and understand its role in their lives. As one pupil put it, 'We have a speciality at our school – Jesus... He is in our hearts and together with St Ambrose Barlow, sets us an example of how to never give up on your faith and other people because He never gives up on us.' A wide-spanning chaplaincy programme, directed by highly competent pupil leaders, challenges everyone to respond to Catholic social teaching by showing deep respect towards their fellow human beings and serving those in need.

All staff know that St Ambrose Barlow is a special place and are subsequently highly committed to contributing to bringing its mission alive. From planting trees with Columban Missionaries in Britain to generously buying world gifts from Cafod instead of sending pupils Christmas cards, they enthusiastically embrace the responsibility of showing pupils how to 'walk the walk' of being an active member of the Catholic Church. They are excellent role models of Christian values;

their selflessness and compassion frame all they do. For example, interactions between teachers and teaching assistants set a wonderful tone in classrooms, which pupils successfully seek to replicate. Jesus Christ is at the centre of school life: everybody talks about Him, leading to a palpable sense of community to which everybody feels they belong. The school welcomes everybody generously: vulnerable community members are invited to Mass, for example, and the special educational needs coordinator regularly receives many emails from parents praising the school's culture of welcome and accommodation of needs. Pastoral care is of a very high quality and centred on the principle of 'doing the right thing', inspired by the gospels.

The headteacher and his deputy have a very clear and inspiring vision for providing outstanding Catholic education. This energises the whole team into a spirit of collaboration, ensuring St Ambrose Barlow is a beacon of excellence, especially in terms of actively fulfilling the Liturgy's command to 'Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord'. Leaders enthusiastically respond to diocesan policies, including collaboration with other schools, when they often lead initiatives and put themselves at the service of the Church. Governors are highly knowledgeable and committed. They are in constant dialogue with leaders, offer support, and, when needed, challenge to maintain the school's high standards. The school's relationship with its parish has been fully restored and is excellent. For example, the school supports the parish's dynamic sacramental preparation programme well and leads annual May and Corpus Christi processions. Comprehensive monitoring strategically informs improvement plans, though pupils are not yet systematically involved in evaluating Catholic life and mission or leading appropriate school improvement actions.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

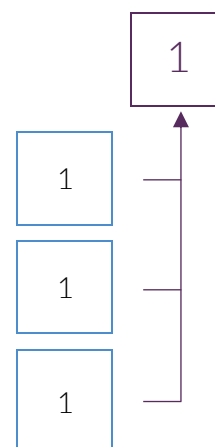
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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



Pupils demonstrate exceptional knowledge, skills, and understanding within religious education. They speak about what they have learnt with great confidence and delight, clearly understanding the link between their learning and lived experience, per the subject's aims expressed in the *Religious Education Directory*. Recent successful work to securely embed the practice of recalling prior learning at the start of lessons has led to pupils consistently knowing more and remembering more. Consequently, pupils make excellent progress. Pupils are religiously literate and use religious terms accurately; for example, pupils in Year 3 speak about the concept of self-sacrifice, linking it to the life of St Ambrose Barlow, whilst in Year 4, pupils competently discuss the meaning of Jesus' proclamation that He is the 'bread of life'. Pupils are passionate about their religious education lessons – they demonstrate a zeal for learning because they enjoy the topics they study. Consequently, their behaviour is outstanding, enabling them to work independently for extended periods. Work in pupils' exercise books is consistently of the highest quality in content and presentation, often better than work produced in other core subjects. They record their work in various ways and are very proud of what they produce. Furthermore, attainment in religious education is higher than in other subjects. All pupils achieve well regardless of their starting points because they are taught remarkably well. The 'purple pen' initiative requires pupils to improve their responses using their peers' answers, helping everyone to achieve a greater depth of learning.

Teachers' subject knowledge is robust, enabling them to teach and respond to pupils' questions with authority confidently. Because they know what they are teaching, they can explain complex aspects of theology, such as original sin, so that even the youngest pupils understand them. They plan effectively to meet all pupils' needs and use questioning skilfully to reshape learning, when needed. For example, in a Year 6 lesson on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the class teacher delicately

responded to an incorrect answer by saying, 'That's how you might use the gift of wisdom, but what is wisdom?' Consistent implementation of the 'teach from the top' mantra ensures that all pupils are always suitably challenged to achieve well regardless of their varied starting points. This is clear in teachers' planning and typical of the school's approach to demonstrating respect for individuals' dignity. Routine verbal praise highly motivates pupils to achieve well. Adults also provide live feedback to all pupils during lessons, giving them clear direction on what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers understand the subject's contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development well. Leaders have monitored this over time, contributing to staff's confidence in providing great moments for reflection, where relevant, during lessons.

Governors ensure that religious education has the same status as other core subjects. They support and challenge leaders so that the school fulfils all requirements; for example, they regularly scrutinise classroom timetables to ensure the prescribed amount of time is allocated to the subject. The subject leader works diligently to promote a dynamic vision for religious education and is highly competent in securing this. A significant undertaking to re-sequence the content of each unit to ensure that it consistently builds upon prior learning has profoundly impacted the quality of provision in each classroom. A thoughtfully planned monitoring programme, closely aligned to the inspectorate's requirements, ensures that a rigorous approach to self-challenge informs subject improvements and that leaders' and governors' evaluations are well-informed and robustly evidenced.

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

1

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

1

Pupils are deeply reverent when praying. The school sets high expectations, which leaders and staff expertly model. Consequently, they engage incredibly well in prayer and demonstrate a deep level of knowledge about how the Church's liturgical year affects how they pray. Pupils enjoy the fantastic variety of opportunities for prayer that they learn about at St Ambrose Barlow. Pupils' singing is a joyful, uplifting expression of their praise for God; they all speak enthusiastically of St Augustine's expression, 'He who sings, prays twice.' A recently refreshed approach to collaborative prayer planning has led to an awe-inspiring degree of consistency throughout the school, where pupils thrive. Pupils have started to evaluate their successes by reflecting on three key questions after they plan prayer but need to routinely refer to these when planning subsequent acts of worship. Pupils speak very confidently about how prayer is featured in the curriculum. For example, they reflect on the plight of migrants when reading *I Am Malala* in literacy. Pupils readily and enthusiastically suggest how the themes they pray about shape their lives. For example, pupils in Year 3 freely offered an extensive range of ways to bring light and hope into people's lives following a prayer service on the jubilee year's theme of Pilgrims of Hope.

Staff are highly skilled in helping pupils plan prayer. Because of the personalised support offered by the parish priest and leaders' high skill levels, they have great confidence knowing that all staff follow the Church's liturgical norms when planning prayers. This ensures that pupil-planned prayers sit firmly within the Catholic tradition. God's word is the foundation of worship at St Ambrose Barlow. Staff and older pupils are skilled in selecting seasonally appropriate scripture passages that emphasise their prayers' themes. Staff are excellent role models for pupils to aspire towards. They are confident when offering responses, using gestures and singing hymns, which leads to full and active participation by their pupils. Prayers at St Ambrose Barlow are

enriched by various creative means, including meditation on artwork depicting St Martin of Tours and using the beautiful prayer garden for opportunities such as the Rosary Club to inspire pupils to raise their hearts and minds to God. The school dramatises the Stations of the Cross each year, which captivates audiences and enriches their Lenten observances. Teachers who are early in their career phase are supported incredibly well in doing this. Parents sincerely appreciate opportunities to join the school in prayer, explaining, 'This is why the school community thrives. We see each other as we gather to celebrate our faith and spirituality; this creates trust and belonging within the community.'

Governors are adamant that the school's new approach to prayer is so successful because of the fantastic example set by senior leaders, supported by well-designed training and this is valued by all staff. The school has now identified its expectations for pupils building their participation skills as they move up the school, making them increasingly independent and confident as they grow older. Governors sought feedback from local Catholic secondary schools as to their expectations, so that skills developed at St Ambrose Barlow would support pupils' formation when they move on to secondary school. Working with the parish priest, leaders prioritise staff training and formation. Feedback from monitoring comes through formal and less formal methods and is a constant focus of governance discussions. Stakeholders' views are routinely sought, meaning a comprehensive analysis of findings can occur before strategic improvement actions are determined. Leaders and governors have strategies to ensure accurate findings, are collated including first-hand experience, and prioritise the review of improvement plans at all meetings.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	103465
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	330 3380
Full postal address of the school	841 Shirley Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 9JJ
School phone number	0121 464 2791
Headteacher	Jon Clinton
Chair of governing board	Paul Johnson
School Website	www.sab.bham.sch.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	June 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

The inspection team

Ben McArdle
Vicki Wayman

Lead
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