

# St Nicholas Catholic High School

URN: 111450

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Shrewsbury

26–27 February 2025

## 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

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

## Compliance statement

- The school is compliant in relation to the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- The school is compliant in relation to any additional requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- The school is compliant in relation to previous areas for improvement.

## What the school does well

- Students are proud to be part of the St Nicholas community. They understand the mission statement and seek to live it out in their day to day lives. They know and demonstrate that at St Nicholas everyone matters
- Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and are wholly committed to the value of religious education
- As a result of strong and shared planning in religious education students learn well
- The rich and varied opportunities for prayer influence the students' daily experience of life at St. Nicholas
- The quality of prayer and liturgy provided by the school is both outstanding and authentic and at the heart of all that St Nicholas Catholic High School represents

## What the school needs to improve

- Embed formative assessment across all key stages to enhance student progress and learning
- Continue the strategic focus to close the gap for disadvantaged students and boys

## 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

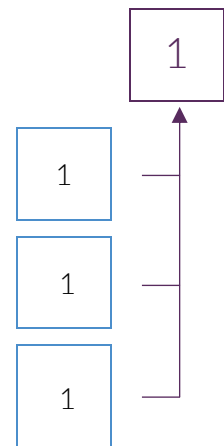
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

#### 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



Students are proud to be part of the St Nicholas Catholic High School community. They can speak clearly about the school mission statement, were part of creating it and seek to live out in their day to day. They know and understand that 'at St Nicholas everyone matters' is a cornerstone of this community. It is a welcoming, supportive and inclusive community recognised by so many within as a family. In the words of one student: 'The main message of this school is that everyone matters – this is an inclusive Christian message.' Sixth form students are proud ambassadors for the school and recognise that all that they do relates to the mission statement and the core values instilled in them. They want to be role models for younger students just as previous Sixth form students were role models for them. Students recognise Catholic social teaching as central to the life of St Nicholas Catholic High School and it underpins all aspects of the curriculum. There are many examples of student leadership and participation in service to others which is a rich seam throughout the school. Social action is an essential element of life at St Nicholas involving working with Cafod, Caritas and the Jubilee Campaign. Students are also allowed to choose charity campaigns that are important to them, and they are keen to do so.

From the minute you walk in the building, you feel that this is a warm, supportive and inclusive Catholic community. Vibrant displays across the school witness to its Catholic identity. Departments have chosen their own scripture passage to reflect their department and these enrich the environment. Structures reflect the essence of this Catholic community, and the recent restructure of the pastoral framework is a fine example of this. However, it is relationships that are paramount. Staff live out the school mission on a daily basis. This is a family, and all warmly acknowledge that fact. Testament to this is the number of staff who send their children to the school. Parents, students and staff speak with pride and genuine love for St Nicholas.

Students value highly the pastoral care on offer. They know and trust their teachers and see their form tutors as supportive, understanding and accessible. Chaplaincy is integral to the school's Catholic life and mission. One parent notes: 'I deeply appreciate the way in which this school nurtures both the faith and academic growth of my child. The school does a wonderful job of making faith relevant.' Personal, social, health and citizenship education, and relationships and sex education fully support the distinctive Catholic ethos of the school.

Governors and leaders are ambitious for this community and Christ at the centre is key to the expression of all aspects of their work. This is also the prism through which they approach self-review. It is a well thought out and carefully planned process. It is also central to partnerships with parishes and parents. Everyone recognises that the headteacher leads the school with deep humility and compassion. Service is at the heart of all he does. Catholic social teaching is rooted across the curriculum and underpins all aspects of school life, for example, the promotion of the dignity of all the community is clear. New colleagues are well supported in their induction to this Catholic community and there is an annual training day for all staff focussed on Catholic ethos and mission. The pursuit of the common good is a genuine expression in the school. Governors, leaders and staff are proud to serve and are actively involved in all diocesan training and development opportunities.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

**Pupil outcomes**

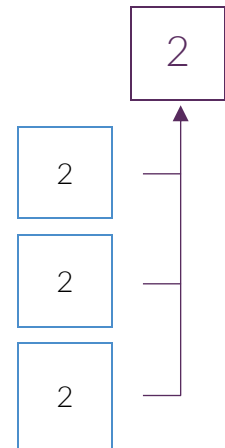
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

**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



Overall students have a strong understanding of learning in religious education at St Nicholas Catholic High School. They enjoy their lessons; indeed, some students say it is their favourite lesson. They appreciate the different voices and opinions that are encouraged in the classroom and welcome the opportunities for discussion, debate and reflection. Behaviour is good in the classroom and most students are engaged in their learning. Outcomes at GCSE are above national and diocesan levels. This is a consistent picture over time however, outcomes for disadvantaged students and boys are not as strong as the general picture for the rest of the cohort. Most work produced is of a high quality with a variety of tasks used to engage learners. These include extended writing and independent work which builds upon key learning from the classroom. Post sixteen students enjoy their learning, and most engage well in lessons. Uptake of the subject post sixteen is consistently above diocesan and national levels however the outcomes for students are not yet as positive as outcomes at KS4.

Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and are wholly committed to the value of religious education. As a result of strong and shared planning across the religious education department, most students learn well in the subject. Staff encourage and celebrate success in the religious education classroom, and this ensures that most students are motivated to succeed. They have a positive experience of the subject as a result. Classrooms are inviting spaces and displays reflect the richness of the subject. Student books show excellent curriculum coverage and, where appropriate, specialist religious literacy. In the best examples seen, feedback helps students progress in their learning. Provision for religious education for those students based in the St Carlo Centre and the (Autism Resource Centre) ARC means learning is carefully planned to meet their academic needs. The school is fully compliant with the *Religious Education Directory*. Aspects of the whole school teaching and learning and assessment priorities

are not yet fully embedded into regular pedagogical practice within religious education. For example, there is more limited use of formative assessment and feedback in the classroom. Checking for understanding is not used as a matter of routine by teachers. This means that students are not always clear as to how to progress in their learning. Post 16 student voice identify examples of where strong classroom practice is effective in improving their work. Sixth form core religious education lessons are distinctively Catholic and offer a broad opportunity for themes and discussions that are Gospel based and rooted in the school values. In the words of one student: 'they help us to deal with life lessons and challenges and really prepare us for life beyond St Nicholas.'

Leaders and governors have identified key areas for development which are linked to school and department priorities namely, closing the gap in outcomes for disadvantaged students and boys. They have an established mission and ethos committee which addresses these development areas and through this committee ensure appropriate and systematic challenge for the department. The head of department has identified strategies to further enhance the quality of teaching in the subject and relevant professional development opportunities. These are beginning to make a positive impact on pedagogy. Leaders and governors have made appropriate strategic decisions which will enhance this. There is a clear and sequential curriculum which is a shared departmental priority. This continues to be developed. The head of department is fully committed to and passionate about student success, and wishes that all students have a positive experience of religious education.

## 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

Prayer and liturgy are deeply embedded in the fabric of school life at St Nicholas Catholic High School and faithfully follow the liturgical year. The school provides rich and varied opportunities for prayer which is known by all in the community as sacred space time. Through it, students are given regular experiences of different forms of prayer and liturgy. These are rooted in Jesus' teachings with a direct link drawn to students putting faith into action in daily life. Students understand these opportunities and welcome them respectfully. The school has a strong tradition of liturgical music, and all year groups are involved in routine hymn practice assemblies. These are skilfully led and well-planned opportunities to pray through music. Assemblies, known as celebrations of the word, are reverential and reflective experiences. They take place both in person and online. Students in all year groups lead prayer and work collaboratively with others to enrich the collective experience. Sixth form students regularly lead worship for the rest of school. Students are encouraged by the lay chaplain to keep their own prayer journal, and each form class has a collective prayer book. As a result of this rich offering, celebrations of the word and prayer influence and shape the students' day to day lived experience. All in the community value the opportunity for whole school Masses and speak powerfully of their prayerful impact on the school.

The variety of outstanding and creative resources provided by the lay chaplain enables staff to shape their sacred space time. Sacred space is central to the life of the school. It is both outstanding and authentic and is at the heart of all that St Nicholas represents. There is an abundant variety of spiritual opportunities including year group retreats, and weekly Mass celebrated by local clergy. Routines of prayer are integral here. Staff model and lead prayer with confidence and sincerity. They value it as essential to their day to day. There is weekly morning staff prayer on Fridays. Provision is well mapped and reflects the liturgical year, form saints and

other themes, for example the jubilee year of hope. Opportunities for celebrations of the word are deeply meaningful. The Gospel lies at the heart of prayer and liturgy at St. Nicholas. The lay chaplain is a highly gifted leader. She models and supports colleagues and students in the provision of prayer at the school. The chapel is central to the community and is a place of prayer and welcome. Parents are very appreciative of the richness of the prayer life of the school and value the weekly prayer and reflection shared by the headteacher.

Leaders and governors invest the highest priority in prayer and liturgy and ensure that staff have appropriate training in order to lead sacred space time effectively. Staff value this support and are particularly grateful to the outstanding work of the lay chaplain. Leaders demonstrate excellent stewardship of the school's prayer and liturgical life and ensure that they engage with the opportunities to pray together as a school. They make it a priority in their timetable to join form classes for their sacred space. Governors are regularly involved in the prayer life of the school and support all key liturgical moments of school life. Evaluation of prayer and liturgy is routine and is carried out through active participation by senior leaders and through an effective and supportive monitoring system led by the lay chaplain.

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Nicholas Catholic High School
School unique reference number (URN)	111450
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8964610
Full postal address of the school	St Nicholas Catholic High School, Greenbank Lane, Hartford, Northwich, CW8 1JW
School phone number	01606706000
Headteacher	Craig Burns
Chair of governors	Chris Mottram
School Website	st-nicholas.cheshire.sch.uk
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	18 May 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

## The inspection team

Jane Beever	Lead
Katherine Packham	Team
Dermot Rainey	Team
Simon Duggan	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