

# St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary and Pre-School

URN: 139547

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Northampton

28–29 January 2026

## 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

2

#### 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 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

- Leaders have strengthened Catholic life by choosing St Francis of Assisi as patron, establishing clear values that guide the school community.
- An invitational culture celebrates Catholic identity and actively fosters inclusion and welcome.
- High-quality resources and professional development secure strong pupil religious literacy.
- A consistently applied teaching approach supports pupils to recall prior learning, deepen understanding and progress confidently.
- Pupils engage reverently in Celebrations of the Word, showing respect and understanding.

## What the school needs to improve

- Develop pupils as leaders who link their actions to theology.
- Strengthen challenge for pupils by providing support only where it is needed, so they can develop independence and deepen their learning.
- Broaden pupils' experience of prayer by increasing opportunities for them to plan, lead and participate in a wider range of prayer forms from the Catholic tradition.

## 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

2

#### Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

2

2



Pupils are proud of their school and speak confidently about the mission statement, 'let all that you do be done in love'. Pupils articulate how it guides their daily choices and relationships. They report feeling happy, safe and secure, recognising their place within a nurturing community inspired by the teachings of Christ. This view is strongly endorsed by parents; of the forty-one who responded to the survey, the vast majority agree or strongly agree that their children feel both safe and well cared for. Pupils from other faith traditions describe the school as welcoming and respectful, noting that they are valued members of this faith community and feel comfortable celebrating their own beliefs. The school's weekly focus on virtues encourages pupils to seek opportunities to serve others, reflected in their support for charities at global, national and local levels. While pupils willingly engage in acts of service, they do not yet demonstrate a secure understanding of the theological principles underpinning their charitable actions. Behaviour is consistently good, creating a calm and purposeful environment for learning. Pupils show positive attitudes and emerging leadership through pupil care roles; however, these opportunities are not yet fully embedded across the school.

Staff and pupils consistently use the mission statement as a practical expression of faith. Recently revisited, it now shapes the school's response to daily life and decision-making with clarity. The school actively seeks to meet the needs of the most vulnerable through meaningful initiatives, guided by the principles of Catholic social teaching and demonstrated in its practical support for families. One staff member reflected that Catholic life and mission are evident not only in lessons and liturgies but in the quality of relationships across the community. Diversity is celebrated, and all members are welcomed, respected and enabled to live with integrity according to their own faith commitments. Staff feel well supported by leaders, contributing to

professional trust, collaboration and a shared sense of purpose. During the transition to the new school site, the community bore witness to Gospel values, particularly through the practical and pastoral support offered to one another. The environment clearly reflects the school's Catholic mission and, although just recently opened, leaders have given deliberate attention to promoting Catholic life and mission. Provision for relationships, sex and health education meets diocesan requirements, remains faithful to Church teaching and presents an integrated understanding of human dignity and relationships.

The Trust works in close partnership with school leaders, providing both support and challenge to sustain and develop Catholic life and mission. Governors visit regularly and are actively involved in the school's spiritual and pastoral life, demonstrating a clear commitment to the mission and charism. Policies provide a strong framework for decision-making. Leaders' thoughtful decision-making in renaming the school St Francis demonstrates a clear understanding of the importance of presenting a meaningful role model whose example resonates with pupils. Collaboration with other Trust schools ensures the school plays an important role in shaping the Catholic educational offer for families in the local community. Leaders show genuine concern for staff well-being, ensuring decisions are guided by Catholic social teaching. Although Catholic social teaching is not yet consistently articulated or fully evidenced across the curriculum, leaders have accurately identified this as a priority, and appropriate professional learning is in place. Leaders and governors are organised, diligent and conscientious in fulfilling their responsibilities. Professional development deepens staff understanding of how Catholic social teaching permeates the life and work of the school.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

**Pupil outcomes**

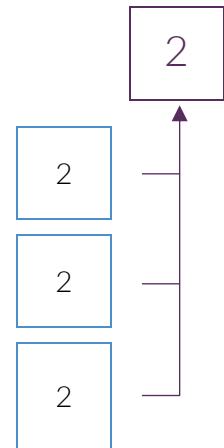
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

**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 are developing the knowledge, understanding and skills outlined in the *Religious Education Directory* and make good progress over time. They demonstrate growing religious literacy and, when prompted, reflect theologically. In upper Key Stage 2 lessons, pupils confidently used Bibles to source examples of Jesus’ response to his followers during the miracle of Lazarus. They built thoughtfully on one another’s answers and offered further scriptural references to deepen discussion. Pupils work at an appropriate pace, contributing to purposeful lessons. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported effectively through appropriate scaffolded learning, enabling them to access the curriculum alongside their peers. More opportunities for pupils to think deeply, make connections and strengthen their understanding would further extend their learning. Pupils concentrate well, engage positively and take pride in presenting their work creatively, demonstrating both enjoyment and commitment to religious education.

Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge, strengthened through collaborative planning that promotes consistency across topics. A strong pedagogical approach is evident. In lower Key Stage 2 lessons this is complemented by focused questioning that enables pupils to recall prior learning and apply it in new contexts. In Key Stage 1 lessons, pupils benefited from regular revisiting of key vocabulary when studying the parables; as a result, they demonstrated good religious literacy and confidently discussed the parable of the Lost Sheep. Teachers maintain consistency while ensuring that high-level questioning supports deeper thinking and richer theological reflection. Teachers are committed to making religious education meaningful and engaging. In the Early Years, pupils learning about Jesus feeding the five thousand developed secure understanding because the teachers regularly checked for understanding and reinforced key language. There is scope to further develop the outdoor provision so that it more fully

enriches children's learning. The recently introduced approach to assessment for learning provides a positive foundation for helping pupils understand how to improve their work, although it has not yet been embedded long enough for leaders to evaluate its full impact.

Leaders and governors ensure that the religious education curriculum is aligned with the Directory and that religious education is afforded the same status as other core subjects. Professional development has strengthened staff subject knowledge and built confidence in delivering the curriculum. Staff describe a positive and supportive culture, underpinned by an open-door approach in which they feel comfortable sharing progress, discussing challenges and seeking guidance. A sustained focus on pedagogy has resulted in consistently good teaching. The headteacher, who also serves as subject leader for religious education, demonstrates clear vision and determination in driving high standards. Self-evaluation is accurate and rooted in purposeful monitoring, careful analysis and professional reflection, enabling leaders to identify priorities with clarity. Strategic actions taken by the leadership team are positively impacting pupil outcomes, supporting both academic progress and developing religious understanding.

## 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

2

2

Pupils engage reverently in Celebrations of the Word, demonstrating a growing appreciation of prayer and liturgy. In a Key Stage 2 celebration, pupils created a distinctly prayerful atmosphere by giving careful attention to mood and setting. They selected scripture that supported meaningful reflection. Pupils in lower Key Stage 2 showed full engagement as they considered their mission to be a light for others, responding with maturity and sincerity. They reflected thoughtfully in silence while listening to chants from the Taizé Community, prayed for one another and for the wider community, and drew confidently on scripture to shape their responses. Prayer spaces within classrooms, along with liturgical celebrations, reflect the Church's liturgical year and support pupils' spiritual development. The junior mission team works collaboratively with leaders to promote prayer throughout the school, embedding a strong and consistent culture of faith. As a result, pupils are increasingly confident in participating in and leading prayer.

Prayer is central to the life of the school and reflected in a clear daily rhythm alongside the thoughtful use of scripture to mark the liturgical season. Staff model good practice, while Trust and school leaders provide effective guidance that enables the junior mission team to lead well-structured and meaningful prayer. The junior mission team supports the planning of a Celebration of the Word for Key Stage 1 pupils, using scripture as a secure foundation. Leaders recognise that strengthening pupil leadership in prayer, and broadening pupils' experience of the diverse prayer forms within the Catholic tradition, remains a priority for further development. A notable strength lies in the consistency of approach; from the Early Years through to Key Stage 2, Celebrations of the Word contribute significantly to pupils' spiritual formation. Pupils listen attentively to scripture and all, including those with special educational needs, are supported to participate fully. The new school environment offers dedicated spaces

such as the chapel and the Mary garden, enhancing opportunities for quiet reflection and prayer. Classroom prayer areas are well maintained, reflect the liturgical year and provide a fitting focus for prayer. The parish priest is a regular and warmly welcomed presence, further strengthening the school's prayerful community and deepening its connection with the parish.

Leaders ensure that Christ is at the heart of the school, with prayer spaces thoughtfully prioritised in the new building to support the spiritual life of the community. An attractive corridor display illustrating the timeline of Christ deepens pupils' understanding of the liturgical year and invites reflection. Leaders place strong emphasis on high-quality staff formation, ensuring that prayer and liturgy remain central to school life. Through well-planned professional development, strong modelling, meaningful parish partnerships and appropriate resourcing, staff are confident and well supported to lead prayer. As a result, pupils and staff receive strong formation in prayer, contributing to a shared sense of purpose and belonging. Leaders provide opportunities to celebrate prayer life with parents; the Pentecost picnic is a notable example of this invitational approach, where everyone, including those from other faiths and none, comes together to celebrate the birthday of the Church. Leaders ensure that pupils and staff from other faiths have their beliefs respected and celebrated. As one member of staff reflected, 'As a non-Catholic member of staff, I have found the prayers and reflections prior to staff meetings and inclusion meetings very mindful, giving space to think about morality, kindness, patience and love in what we do in our busy daily schedules.'

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary and Pre-School
School unique reference number (URN)	139547
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8224601
Full postal address of the school	Biddenham Turn, Bedford, Bedfordshire, MK40 4AT
School phone number	01234352062
Headteacher	Gemma Otter
Chair of governors	Ilona Bond
School Website	<a href="https://www.stfrancisofassisiprimarybedford.co.uk/">https://www.stfrancisofassisiprimarybedford.co.uk/</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Academies Trust Ltd
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	March 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

## The inspection team

Evelyn Ward

Jennifer O'Prey

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