

St Swithun's Catholic Primary School

URN: 116386

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Portsmouth

09 July 2026 – 10 July 2026

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

Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education RE

Collective worship (p.7)

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

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

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

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

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Yes

Yes

Fully

What the school does well

- The headteacher shows servant leadership in her direction of the school: as a result, the whole staff team are united in their pursuit of the mission.
- Pupils show an exceptional understanding of how the mission of the school influences their behaviour and relationships.
- Leadership of religious education and collective worship is inspirational and has led to outstanding practice across the school.
- Pupils are religiously articulate and can confidently recall prior learning using subject-specific vocabulary.
- There is a wide range of high-quality forms of prayer on offer to the community.

What the school needs to improve

- Provide opportunities for pupils to use their creativity and individuality to demonstrate their learning in religious education.
- Broaden the involvement of a wider range of staff and pupils in the planning, preparation and delivery of prayer and liturgy.

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

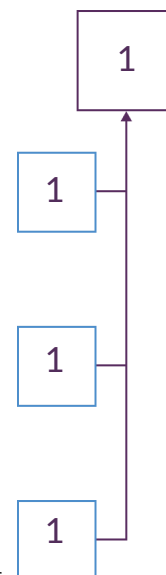
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

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



Pupils at St Swithun's do not simply know the school's mission; they live it enthusiastically and joyfully. Older pupils described it as the 'root of all our actions', guiding them to 'think before you speak', while younger pupils spoke simply and sincerely about showing kindness and supporting those who feel lonely. Pupils understand and embrace the distinctive Catholic identity of their school and readily explain how it shapes their actions and relationships. They speak confidently about the importance of treating all people with dignity, recognising that everyone is created in the image and likeness of God. Pupils are exceptionally happy and feel secure and looked after. They highly value the many opportunities to serve others through leadership roles, such as language leaders, wellbeing ambassadors and eco warriors and understand the responsibilities these bring, recognising how they prepare them for adult life. Pupils show deep respect for themselves and others, and their exemplary behaviour reflects the strength of the school's Catholic ethos. They respond proactively to Catholic social teaching, explaining how this inspires practical action, from caring for God's gifts through saving electricity and setting up a drainage garden to putting other first by donating to Stella Maris and the local foodbank.

Conscious that Christ is at the heart of the school, staff embrace the mission wholeheartedly: it is evident in the warmth of relationships, the quality of care and the way every member of the community is valued. One member of staff reflected, 'we're in this together, we are one community, all wanting the same thing', while another commented, 'I feel very lucky, the mission of this school is not just words, it is lived and breathed by everyone here.' This commitment is further reflected in the school's achievement of the Oscar Romero Award at

Developer Level. A deeply embedded culture of welcome ensures that all are known, valued and included, regardless of background, faith or circumstance. The school places service at the heart of its mission and responds thoughtfully to the needs of the local community through sustained partnerships and charitable outreach, including support for refugees and asylum seekers at the Beach Hotel, where they have among other things created a learning area for residents. Staff provide exceptional pastoral care and know pupils and families extremely well. Daily informal contact, regular check-ins and strong relationships enable concerns to be identified and addressed promptly. Carefully considered initiatives, including relational practice ambassadors, a pupil-requested British Sign Language club and dedicated support for forces families, demonstrate the school's unwavering commitment to the dignity and flourishing of every person.

Leaders and governors articulate the Church's mission in education with clarity and conviction. The headteacher provides highly effective Catholic leadership, ensuring that the mission is translated into lived experience for pupils, staff and families. Staff feel very well cared for and say that leaders' 'doors are always open' and 'we can speak to anyone about anything'. There are flourishing links with the parish, with the school supporting parish initiatives such as outreach to the homeless, and the parish priest is a regular and welcome visitor, known and valued by all members of the school community. Leaders work hard to maintain a strong partnership with parents through regular communication and a strong family-centred approach. Parents speak warmly of a school that is 'not just a school, but part of the community' and where Gospel values 'shine through' all aspects of its work. One parent shared that 'we appreciate the dedication of all the staff in creating such a caring and faith-filled environment.' Governors' ambition for the school is evident in their challenge and support of the leadership: this is exemplified in their monitoring and discussions, and they should now consider involving more stakeholders in their self-evaluation schedule.

Religious education

How faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church's educational mission.

Religious education key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

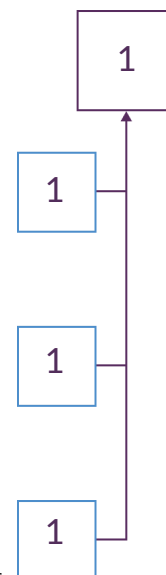
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

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 deep engagement and enthusiasm for religious education, concentrating highly effectively and responding thoughtfully to challenge. In lessons, they actively participate in discussion, drawing confidently on prior learning to deepen understanding. For example, pupils in lower Key Stage 2 engaged in focused paired discussions to interpret the symbolism of oil, making strong links between the sacraments and Catholic belief. Pupils speak fluently about their learning, using subject-specific vocabulary accurately and confidently. They recall prior knowledge exceptionally well and make meaningful connections across different areas of learning. This was evident during memory retrieval activities and in Reception, where children confidently retold the story of Zacchaeus, explaining themes of forgiveness, reconciliation and personal change. Pupils produce work of a consistently high standard, demonstrating pride, care and excellent presentation. High-quality outcomes, including double-page spreads, posters, cartoon strips and booklets, reflect secure knowledge, deep understanding and strong progress over time. Pupils reflect thoughtfully on questions of meaning and purpose and understand how faith influences daily life. As a next step, opportunities to further develop creativity and individuality in how pupils record and respond to learning would enable them to showcase their understanding in an even wider variety of ways.

Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise, enabling pupils to make consistently good progress. Learning is carefully planned and adapted to meet the needs of all pupils, and effective support for pupils with additional needs was evident

through skilled adult intervention, including scribing, the use of visual scaffolds and the reframing of explanations to deepen understanding. In upper Key Stage 2, for example, teachers used lots of short paired talk activities alongside matching tasks and annotating texts to support pupils in recalling prior learning on the Eucharist. Assessment is used highly effectively to identify misconceptions and deepen learning. Skilled questioning, including the use of hinge questions, enables teachers to check understanding and adapt teaching in the moment. Feedback is precise and purposeful, helping pupils understand how to improve. One pupil explained, 'If I leave anything out, my teacher writes a question in my book, and I try to add that learning next time.' Another commented, 'Green makes me feel proud; I know I've done a good job.' To build further on the strong range of learning activities already in place, pupils should be given increased opportunities to select the format through which they express their understanding, allowing for greater individuality and personal response.

The subject leader for religious education provides inspirational leadership and communicates a clear, ambitious vision for excellence that staff embrace and implement consistently. Drawing on strong subject expertise, he identifies priorities with precision and drives improvement through focused action. For example, in preparation for the introduction of the Religious Education Directory much work has been done to strengthen staff confidence in scripture and theology, supported by a meticulously planned two-year action plan and masterclass powerpoints created and sent to all phase leaders for every topic. The subject leader works closely with senior leaders and governors to monitor the quality of religious education through learning walks, book scrutiny, moderation activities and working with other schools. Leaders analyse findings carefully, identify areas for improvement and translate these into targeted professional development, which continually strengthens classroom practice and improves pupil outcomes. Leaders have sequenced the curriculum thoughtfully, ensuring that pupils build knowledge and understanding progressively over time. They identify key learning for each lesson and make this explicit in planning and teaching materials. Leaders also ensure that all pupils access the same ambitious curriculum through grouping pupils within phases and thereby allowing them to reach similar outcomes at their own pace. Staff are therefore able to adapt support, pacing and resources effectively, enabling pupils with additional needs and those requiring greater challenge to achieve well.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

Pupil outcomes

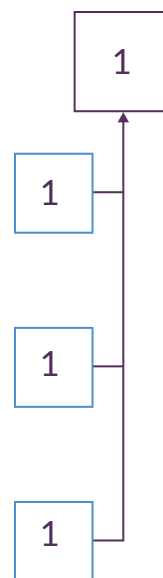
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship



Pupils respond to prayer and liturgy with deep engagement and reverence. In all classes, they demonstrate attentive listening and prayerful silence, confidently joining in responses, singing with enthusiasm and engaging readily in spontaneous prayer by offering personal intentions and reflections inspired by scripture. Their behaviour during prayer and liturgy is exemplary and reflects the importance they place on these experiences. Some pupils work collaboratively with staff and one another to prepare and lead creative worship experiences. Older pupils undertake leadership roles with confidence and sensitivity, supporting younger pupils to participate meaningfully. For example, Mini Vinnies led a celebration of the word in the prayer room with Year 1 pupils, modelling respectful participation and guiding them thoughtfully through reflection using pictures and objects. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of the Church's liturgical year and can explain how the prayer life of the school changes throughout the seasons. Older pupils spoke confidently about Advent, Lent and Eastertide, making connections to practices such as the Rosary in May and October, Stations of the Cross and the return of the Alleluia during Easter. Pupils should now be given more regular opportunities to evaluate the impact of prayer and liturgy on their lives, enabling them to articulate more fully how these experiences influence their attitudes, decisions and actions.

Prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school and provide pupils with a wide range of engaging and creative experiences. There is a rich variety of forms of prayer, including traditional prayers, spontaneous prayer, lectio divina and visio divina. Staff plan experiences carefully so that prayer and liturgy are meaningful, accessible and relevant to pupils of all ages. They lead with confidence and reverence, helping pupils to engage deeply with scripture

and worship and acting as exemplary role models. In Reception, for example, children participated thoughtfully in a celebration of the word using pictures and symbols to help them reflect on St Francis while teachers led older pupils through a guided meditation on the parable of the sower. For all collective worship, staff create prayerful environments through the thoughtful use of music, focal points and atmosphere. The school makes imaginative use of its spaces to promote prayer and reflection. Dedicated areas, including the prayer room and Mary Garden, are valued and used regularly by pupils. Mini Vinnies play an active role in maintaining these spaces, helping to foster a strong sense of ownership and stewardship. Increasing opportunities for pupils to use their creative and artistic gifts when planning and leading prayer and liturgy would further enrich these experiences and broaden participation.

Leaders and governors place prayer and liturgy at the heart of school life and communicate a clear vision that inspires the whole community. They are highly effective in supporting staff to plan and lead prayer and liturgy: through a carefully structured programme of professional development, they provide modelling, coaching, observation and feedback that continually strengthens practice. Staff new to the school quickly develop the knowledge and skills required to lead high-quality prayer and liturgy, resulting in consistent and effective provision across all phases. Leaders have a detailed two-year action plan, informed by staff and pupil feedback, which identifies both short-term and long-term priorities. They analyse findings from monitoring activities to develop targeted formation opportunities, including webinars, professional development meetings and focused training on such elements as the parts of the Mass and the principles of prayer and liturgy. As a result, staff demonstrate growing expertise and confidence in leading meaningful and engaging experiences of worship. Leaders and governors ensure that prayer and liturgy receive a high priority when allocating resources. They have created attractive, well-resourced spaces that promote reflection and worship, including a dedicated prayer room equipped with a rich range of liturgical artefacts and devotional resources.

Information about the school

Full name of school	St Swithun's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	116386
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8513423
Full postal address of the school	Taswell Road, PORTSMOUTH, PO5 2RG
School phone number	023 9282 9339
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Jennifer Verhiest
Chair of Governors	Mrs Cara Guedeney
School Website	www.sscps.co.uk
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	
Age-range of pupils	2 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	22 November 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

The Inspection Team

Michael Lobo Lead

Catherine Whatley

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