

# Alton School

URN: 116537

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Portsmouth

30 November – 01 December 2023

## 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

3

#### Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education

4

#### Collective worship (p.7)

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

4

The school is fully compliant with the curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference

No

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

No

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

N/A

4

## What the school does well

- Alton School is a warm and friendly environment in which staff and children have a genuine compassion for each other and those around them. Pupils appreciate the warm pastoral care that they receive from the staff who support them well to form affirmative relationships with each other.
- In a relatively short period of time, the new headteacher has quickly and accurately identified the main areas of development with respect to the Catholic identity of the school. He is highly ambitious for improvement and has already produced embryonic plans to move the school forward.
- Two religious sisters from the school's founding order, The Sisters of Our Lady of Providence, are highly visible and much loved members of the school community. Their influence around the school is positive.

## What the school needs to improve

- Through a comprehensive review of the mission statement, leaders should develop a common understanding of the school's Catholic identity amongst all stakeholders and subsequently ensure that the Catholic nature is central to life at the school.
- Raise standards in religious education through effective planning, teaching, continuous professional development and robust monitoring and evaluation.
- Ensure that the school is fully compliant with the 10% religious education curriculum requirements (5% for the sixth form) laid down by the Bishops' Conference, and that the school is compliant with the Bishops' directive on the GCSE examination syllabus.
- Develop a communal understanding of the prayer and liturgical obligations of a Catholic school and implement an effective strategy to build provision, so that fruitful prayer and liturgy becomes commonplace.
- Draw on external support and advice so that leaders, including governors, can build a systematic strategic plan which comprehensively addresses the above targets. This plan needs to be open to regular scrutiny and evaluation and used by governors to both challenge and support the school's leadership team in order to drive positive change.

## 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

3

#### Provision

The quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

3

#### Leadership

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

3

3

Pupils at Alton School are kind and courteous to one another and demonstrate respect for every member of the community. During the inspection, one child commented '*Alton school is like home to me because I have so many friends. The school is so warm and welcoming*'. Pupils are respectful of those who are different such as people from other faiths and religions. Their overall behaviour is good. However, pupils struggle to articulate what it means to be part of a Catholic community and are largely unaware of the specific mission of a Catholic school. Whilst the school helps and encourages pupils to support multiple charities and good causes, pupils have only a limited understanding of Catholic social teaching. Pupils are not given opportunities to participate in any chaplaincy provision.

The mission statement does not reflect the school's Catholic identity and there are some discrepancies and a subsequent misunderstanding around its precise wording; this results in it having little impact on school life. Other opportunities to emphasise the school's Catholicity are lost, for example, the new house names do not reflect the Catholic character. Although staff are highly committed to the school they are inconsistent in their understanding of its Catholic mission. Whilst relationships are warm and inclusive the sense of community is not overtly Catholic in character. Staff do however act as positive role models to pupils and set a broadly Christian example to them. The school prioritises the pastoral care of all pupils and there is a commitment to support for the most needy. The physical environment of the school contains some signs of its Catholic heritage however these are not explicit or consistently evident. Chaplaincy provision is very limited and consequently the spiritual and moral development of the community is underdeveloped. There are inconsistencies in the teaching of relationships and

sex education and an insufficient consideration of Church and diocesan requirements with respect to this subject.

A coherent and accurate discernment of the specific mission of Catholic schools is not evident amongst the great majority of leaders and governors. Due to competing priorities over the last number of years, they have not considered the Catholic life of the school to be of prime concern. Consequently, policies and procedures that relate to the Catholic charism have been only partially developed. In recent years there has been negligible involvement with the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth; although, there is a growing ambition to correct this, particularly from the new headteacher. The school has recently sourced the support of a priest from further afield to visit in order to celebrate Mass and has had some contact with other parishes in the past. However, the school and local parish need to work more closely together to establish mutually beneficial links. Two of the religious sisters from the founding order, the Sisters of our Lady of Providence, are regularly present around the school community and are much loved by all. Nonetheless the particular charism of the order is not widely understood. The school is effective in its relationship with parents. However during the inspection, a notable amount of parents expressed views suggesting that they felt that the Catholic identity of the school was not in a healthy position. Such parents were also explicit in their desire for this situation to be rectified, with one summing up this view by saying; *'I would like the traditional Catholic values to be upheld'*. There is universal ambiguity regarding Catholic social teaching and little thought has taken place regarding how its principles should be implicit in school life. The religious education curriculum has not been sufficiently planned and implemented, resulting in inconsistencies in its quality across the school; this is further impaired by a lack of continuous professional development for staff. The headteacher has made a good start at evaluating the school's Catholic life and mission and understands that this is crucial in order to implement plans to drive improvement. Governors and other senior leaders should also be part of this approach. Despite the above shortcomings, leaders and governors do genuinely care for the staff at the school and provide strong levels of pastoral support for them.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

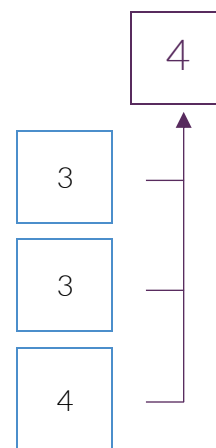
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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



Within religious education lessons, pupils generally demonstrate good attitudes to learning, and are keen to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. However due to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching of religious education across the school they are not always supported to work with independence and are insufficiently challenged. As a result academic progress in religious education is restricted when considering the ability and potential of most pupils. Pupils are not as religiously literate as they could be and their thinking around theological and ethical concepts is vague. Although some pupils evidently enjoy religious education, particularly in the lower school and in GCSE examination classes, they have limited opportunities for self-assessment which contributes to an overall variance in the level of progress and attainment throughout the school. Due to restrictions on the school timetable for religious education, pupils do not produce a sufficient amount of work. However, some of the work produced by younger pupils does display a good degree of individuality and creativity.

Some teachers in the school do not have a clear and comprehensive understanding of how pupils learn in religious education. Such teachers also exhibit a degree of passivity about religious education and consequently certain lessons lack challenge or ambition. Variances in planning within religious education impact the quality of pedagogy found across the school. Although questioning is commonplace in religious education lessons it is often closed and inhibits more in-depth discussion. Teachers assess pupils' work in different ways with some providing minimal feedback to pupils about how to improve their work. Few, if any, opportunities within religious education lessons are given to spiritual and moral development. Some teachers in the lower school provide stimulating and creative resources for children within religious education lessons and overall practice here is better. However this is not evident in all classes within the upper school.

The religious education curriculum does not adequately ensure that the requirements of the *Religious Education Directory* are implemented. Religious education is not given the same status as other core subjects such as English and mathematics. For example, religious education is not taught within the sixth form at all and it is only an optional subject at GCSE level. This prevents older pupils from having the opportunity to benefit from all this subject has to offer. In the past, insufficient continuous professional development has resulted in many teachers not having the skills or ability to deliver effective religious education lessons, although the new headteacher has already made a start to rectify this. There is little if any evidence of teachers adapting their planning and approaches to support pupils with a variety of learning needs and only limited opportunities for enrichment are considered. Historically, self-evaluation of religious education has not brought about meaningful change. Moving forward the head of religious education, who is very new to the school, will require the support of the headteacher, other senior leaders, including governors, and external sources to rectify the deficiencies within the department.

## 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

4

#### Provision

The quality of collective worship provided by the school

4

#### Leadership

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

4

4

As a result of the infrequency of prayer and liturgy that takes place most pupils are typically indifferent to collective worship within the school. They have no meaningful understanding or appreciation of the Church's liturgical cycle and the forms of prayer that exist within it. Pupils have no significant opportunities to plan, deliver or evaluate forms of prayer and liturgy. Although pupils appreciate that prayers said within the school do in some way link to current activities, topics and discussions, their overall understanding is shallow. As a result, they are unable to make clear connections between the reasons for prayer and how these link with the needs of the community and the wider world.

Since the beginning of the academic year, the headteacher has ensured that prayer takes place every day. However, prayer is currently on the fringes of life at the school. Although assemblies take place each week, these are not in a distinct form that would be recognised as collective worship; indeed there is confusion amongst all staff about the difference between an assembly and an act of collective worship. The use of scripture within prayer and liturgy is limited. Currently Mass is only celebrated on three or four occasions throughout the year and other liturgies reflecting the Catholic tradition rarely, if ever, take place. Staff commitment to prayer and liturgy is variable. There is a lack of expertise among the school community about how to plan, deliver and evaluate prayer and liturgy. Although the school benefits from a chapel, this is rarely used in an effective way. Opportunities for families and other members of the community to come together to pray are in short supply and links with the local parish are deficient.

The school does not have a coherent policy for prayer and liturgy. Staff currently lack the expertise required to develop this without the support of external agencies. Opportunities to

celebrate Mass are insufficient, including on holy days of obligation. No effective professional development has taken place to enable staff to be able to deliver fruitful prayer and liturgy. Over time, leaders have not appreciated the necessity for this and the overall impact of leadership with regards to prayer and liturgy has been detrimental to the spiritual life of school.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	Alton School
School unique reference number (URN)	116537
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8506073
Full postal address of the school	Alton School, Anstey Lane, Alton, GU34 2NG
School phone number	0142082070
Headteacher	Andrew Reeve
Chair of Governors/Trustees	Clive Hexton
School Website	<a href="http://www.altonschool.co.uk">http://www.altonschool.co.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Congregation of Our Lady of Providence
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	All Through
Type of school	Catholic Independent School
Admissions policy	N/A
Age-range of pupils	1-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	N/A
Previous denominational inspection grade	N/A

## The inspection team

Jamie Carroll	Lead
Joanne Smith	Team
Roxy Ashworth	Team
John Wright	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