



Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection report for  
**St. Columba's Catholic Primary School,  
 Barrow-In-Furness**

URN: 112364

Carried out on behalf of the Right Rev. Paul Swarbrick, Bishop of Lancaster on:

Date: 23rd and 24th November 2023

Overall effectiveness The overall quality of Catholic education provided by the school.....	1
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 curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference	✓
The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop	✓
The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection	Fully

## Summary of key findings

### What the school does well

- The Catholic Life and mission at St Columba's is lived in every encounter, ensuring a real sense of belonging and community which is valued by all and shows the school's priority to put Christ at the heart of everything it does.
- Pastoral support and inclusion, particularly the support and care shown to the vulnerable pupils and their families is outstanding. The school has responded well to the changing needs of the community post covid.
- The rich Catholic traditions are regularly celebrated and often the school is chosen because many generations have attended. The school feels like one family.

- The ambitious introduction of the new *Religious Education Directory* curriculum across the school shows the strong leadership from staff and governors, ensuring all staff are highly aspirational for the pupils in their care.
- A welcoming community that permeates love and kindness to all.

What the school needs to improve:

- Develop the role that pupils take in leading, designing and developing prayer and liturgy throughout the school now it has been modelled to them effectively.
- Offer more diverse enrichment opportunities further afield so that pupils' understanding of the universal church is enhanced.

## 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:.....

1

### 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



Pupils at St Columba's, from the youngest to the eldest, understand the mission statement of John 10:10 "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full". This understanding permeates through every aspect of the whole of school life. One pupil stated that 'you can't live a full life without Jesus'. Pupils have a clear understanding of their place in the community and their role as part of the mission of St Columba's, both school and parish. Through various groups, including *Mini Vinnies*, *Laudato Si*, *Prayer Leaders* and *Legion of Mary*, they recognise and confidently articulate their role to carry out Jesus' mission to serve others. Senior leaders work closely with parishioners and children in their work and there is a strong understanding in all stakeholders that their place is at the heart of ensuring that the local community is supported. Pupils are actively involved in responding to the demands of the Church's social teaching to meet the needs of others, both locally, nationally and globally. For example, *Mini Vinnies* spoke of how they put the notion of 'see', 'think' and 'do' into practice and used the example of their work with the local food bank to illustrate their actions within the school community. Pupils also talked about the long tradition of raising money to provide resources for children to have an education for a school in Monze, Africa.

St Columba's is a supportive and joyful community valuing all and acknowledging Christ's presence in each other. The school's firm Catholic identity is built on strong Catholic values and tradition, where staff feel appreciated and cared for. They contribute to and participate in activities which enhance the Catholic life and mission of the school. Pastoral care is exemplary for pupils and families, and this is recognised and appreciated by parents. There is an explicit and concrete commitment to the most vulnerable. Pupils interviewed said 'Everyone is equal and

works together' and 'St Columba's is very accepting'. This recognition illustrates the pupils commitment to help others. Pupils commented on how helping others made them feel good. The provision for relationships, sex and health education is carefully planned and monitored and meets all statutory requirements.

Governors and leaders can clearly articulate the mission of the Church and they support parents as first educators in meeting the demands of the vocation. Parents recognise the calm and welcoming environment that is provided at St Columba's and talked about the strong family traditions of attending the school. Inspectors witnessed how the kindness and care for children and families was celebrated. This leadership has ensured that the children have a true understanding of Catholic social teaching and are building a caring community by responding to ecological and social crisis. The curriculum provides opportunities for topical ethical issues, for example, how Catholic scientists have contributed to the origins of the universe and engagement with the justice officer in the diocese. The stunning use of art throughout the school encapsulates the children's view of their faith and how to live it. Governors give the highest regard to the Catholic life of the school and preserving it for the future, being ambitious in their leadership. The many prayer spaces invite the pupils to reflect on their faith and all classrooms have designated prayer areas with colours and readings connected to the liturgical year.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade:.....	1
<b>Pupil outcomes</b> How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education.....	1
<b>Provision</b> The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education.....	1
<b>Leadership</b> How well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for religious education.....	1



Pupils achieve well in religious education, making very good progress as they journey through the school, leading to excellent outcomes. They are developing into religiously literate pupils as is clearly evidenced in class discussions and written work. Pupils' attitudes to all aspects of learning in religious education are consistently positive and make a significant contribution to the progress they make. These attitudes ensure that there is no significant variation of progress between groups of learners. Pupils enjoy their lessons, engage fully, participate with enthusiasm, demonstrate a real commitment to learning. They show a desire to deepen their knowledge and understanding and link their learning with their daily lives. This was witnessed in the Nursery where children were all journeying to Bethlehem with Mary and Joseph through many different engaging activities. Teachers plan lessons which are creative, engaging and that one built on prior learning and achievement. They have high expectations of their pupils and are skilled in checking understanding and addressing any misconceptions quickly and effectively. Planning ensures that pupils are given opportunities to present their learning in a variety of ways including role play, responding to religious art and music, and writing for a range of purposes including diary extracts, newspaper accounts or witness statements. Staff know their pupils and their individual needs and adapt their teaching accordingly. Committed and experienced teaching assistants are deployed well to support vulnerable pupils or those with additional needs ensuring that all pupils are successful learners. Opportunities to work together to assess and moderate pupils' work within school and across the diocese, help teacher assessments maintain accuracy.

An ambitious approach in establishing *Religious Education Directory* directives across all year groups was observed by inspectors and the extent to which staff working together, supported by a recently appointed specialist teacher, to immerse the children in quality learning opportunities is

admirable. There is a consistent approach throughout the school to ensure the children experience a curriculum where the gospel teaching is at the heart, with children accessing scripture from the Bible and relevant hymns and artwork, to develop their understanding throughout the liturgical year. The children have opportunities to reflect on their learning, wanting to know more and have a thirst for knowledge. They have a good theological understanding of the bible; this was seen when observing a lesson where pupils could make connections between the Old and New Testament characters, revealing their strong biblical knowledge and religious literacy. They use this knowledge to articulate how they should live as disciples of Jesus. Pupils achieve above average attainment in religious education when compared with other core subjects.

Curriculum content is carefully mapped out so that learning is sequenced to build on prior learning, giving time to ensure the children have all the required knowledge and identifying any gaps. The resourcing of religious education is comparable with that of other core subjects. Leaders ensure that staff have access to regular and effective training to improve their practice. Pupils would benefit from opportunities to visit peers from local Catholic communities and other Christian communities in order to celebrate and enrich their understanding of membership of the universal church. The head teacher and leadership team for religious education share a clear vision for teaching and learning. They expertly draw on the specialist knowledge of the staff member, who readily shares her knowledge and expertise with colleagues, enabling them to continue to develop their practice. Staff who are not Catholics are well supported and confidently deliver religious education. Staff spoke to inspectors about the support they have in developing their understanding of the delivery of the new curriculum and the challenge involved. The supportive head teacher and subject leader have a clear and accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for development and take effective action to secure improvement. They track and monitor the delivery of religious education using lesson observations, work sampling and pupil interviews. Governors and leaders have a secure understanding of the standards of religious education and consequently have the knowledge and skills to self-evaluate St Columba's school accurately.

## Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade:.....	1
<b>Pupil outcomes</b> How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship .....	1
<b>Provision</b> The quality of collective worship provided by the school .....	1
<b>Leadership</b> How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for collective worship .....	1



St Columba's is a prayerful community with Christ at its heart; prayer and liturgy is central to all aspects of school life. The thoughtful and moving prayers are prominently displayed throughout school, and pupils enjoy sharing them with their class. Dedicated areas around the school provide opportunities for pupils to spend time in personal prayer and reflection. Spaces are used well to ensure that prayer and liturgy are very special; effective use of music and religious artefacts are used to transform the school hall into a sacred space for weekly assemblies. Pupils speak with great respect about the prayer life of the school and the different ways they can talk to God. The strong links with the parish ensure that pupils can celebrate the Eucharist and other liturgies throughout the school year. The school could develop further by offering enrichment opportunities further afield so that pupils' understanding of the universal church is enhanced. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered to pupils during Advent and Lent and the celebration of the school's feast day is memorable to pupils. The beautiful prayer boards displayed around the school reflect their enjoyment of the subject.

Prayer and liturgy is highly valued across school and is passes through all parts of school life. There is a clear and embedded pattern of prayer which is integral to daily gatherings of pupils and staff. The call to prayer was evident during the celebration of the Word and pupils and staff respond with reverence and respect. Appropriate scripture is the key to all prayer and liturgy experiences, and these are intrinsically linked to daily life. Pupils have a good understanding of a variety of ways of praying that are part of their rich Catholic heritage. Pupil prayer leaders lead a variety of liturgical celebrations for their peers. During the inspection, pupils prepared a service in the prayer room, based on the Feast of Christ the King, which was attended by a selection of pupils from all year groups. A group of Year 6 pupils supported a gospel assembly with the head

teacher where all children were engaged. They behaved with respect and reverence. Prayerful silences and joyous singing show the commitment that pupils feel towards prayer and liturgy and their singing is a real strength. Inspectors witnessed pupils using sign language when praying and singing hymns, and they responded to prayers in Latin and Greek as well as English. This helps with the understanding of the inclusivity and universality of the church.

School leaders have developed a prayer and liturgy policy which clearly sets out their expectations and which is firmly embedded. Staff have a good awareness of the expectations and are supported very well to ensure that all in the school community can experience high quality prayer and liturgy. The dedicated head teacher, deputy head teacher and subject leader together with staff, prepare pupils to become confident leaders of prayer and liturgy in upper Key Stage 2. This good practice needs developing further throughout the school. All pupils have prayer partners and look forward to spending time with them. Pupils in Key Stage 2 can evaluate what they have prepared and delivered, suggesting what they could do better; younger pupils have yet to become as skilful, with this process. The governing board is active in its commitment to the school's prayer life and together with the inspirational senior leadership team, they have a deep and true commitment to ensuring prayer and liturgy are given the highest priority. This dedication ensures that St Columba's School continues to be a community that is devoted to inspiring its pupils and preparing them for the next stage in the faith journey.

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St. Columba's Catholic Primary School
School unique reference number (URN)	112364
Full postal address of the school	Church Lane, Barrow-in-Furness, LA14 3ED
School phone number	01229 471522
Name of head teacher or principal	Mrs Claire O'Donnell
Chair of governing board	Mr Peter Craig
School Website	<a href="https://www.stcolumbas.cumbria.sch.uk">https://www.stcolumbas.cumbria.sch.uk</a>
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age-range of pupils	3 to 11
Trustees	Lancaster Roman Catholic Diocesan Trustees Registered
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	October 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	1 - outstanding

## The inspection team

Frances Wygladala

Lead inspector

Anne Charnley

Team inspector

## 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