CATHOLIC SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE INSPECTION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND ACADEMIES

Westminster Cathedral Choir School

URN: 101166

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Westminster

12–13 March 2026

Summary of key findings

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 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 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 fully to the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

This Catholic Schools Inspectorate inspection was carried out under canons 804 & 806 of the code of canon law. For maintained schools and academies in England it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.48 of the Education Act 2005. For maintained schools and academies in Wales it fulfils the statutory requirements of s.50 of the Education Act 2005.

What the school does well

- Pupils fully embrace the school's Catholic ethos and mission, which is shown in their respectful behaviour towards each other and all they encounter.
- The school's exceptional distinctively Catholic curriculum skilfully blends Church history, traditional liturgical music, Catholic literature and sacred art, with governors taking a leading role in ensuring that Catholicity pervades the whole curriculum.
- Pupils have excellent recall of scripture and are highly engaged in their religious education lessons with a real thirst for knowledge.
- Teachers have very strong subject knowledge and are passionate about teaching religious education which ignites pupils' curiosity and enthusiasm.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure pupils take a leading role in responding to the demands of Catholic social teaching.
- Ensure teachers plan to enable pupils across all classes to produce work of a consistently high standard and demonstrate excellent individuality and creativity.
- Provide professional development opportunities for all staff, enabling them to support pupils in planning and evaluating 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

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 fully understand the golden rule to 'do to others that you would have them do to you', and in line with the school's mission, they 'transmit the Catholic faith with joy and fidelity' through their respect for those they encounter. Pupils clearly articulate that they are happy and feel secure at Westminster Cathedral Choir School (WCCS). They confidently discuss how they enjoy the many opportunities the school affords, including attending Mass in the Cathedral. They are able to express themselves well, including suggesting improvements for aspects of school life. Pupils are exceptionally clear that the school as a community follows the teaching of Jesus. Additionally, parents recognise the moral foundation provided by the school. One parent wrote, 'in today's fast-paced and uncertain world, we are profoundly grateful to belong to this wonderful community, where academic excellence goes hand in hand with the nurturing of the children's moral values and their Catholic spiritual formation'. Pupils are keen to embrace a shared responsibility for our common home, and they show an understanding of the principles of Catholic social teaching, linking the preferential option of the poor with alms giving during Lent for Mary's Meals. However, they do not yet take a leading role in responding to the demands of Catholic social teaching.

The mission statement is clearly rooted in the Word of God and is revisited regularly with staff through professional development and in the school's priorities. Staff show exceptional commitment to the school's mission, as excellent role models and in their clear devotion to the education of the whole child and the development of pupils' talents. Staff voluntarily undertake First Holy Communion preparation, which is highly valued by parents. The sense of a joyous community is palpable, and there is an exceptionally strong sense of welcome to all. This spirit of hospitality is extended to all choristers who attend the school from increasingly diverse backgrounds. One parent writes that the school is 'respectful of all faiths, with celebrations alongside the Catholic teaching which we also appreciate.' Furthermore, pupils and parents from a variety of faith backgrounds also feel included within the

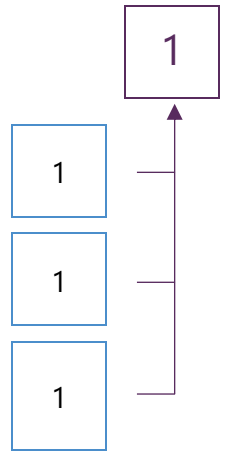
school community. Pastoral care is exceptional, with particular consideration being given to the choristers who are boarders, with a demanding schedule. Staff are always readily available, and they have an excellent knowledge of the pupils' needs through weekly meetings. One parent explained, 'My child has recently started as a boarder, and I'm blown away by the care the school has shown and how well he has settled.' Pupils highly value the school's excellent chaplaincy provision and they articulate how they grow spiritually as a result. The school's communal environment is visually stunning and explicitly Catholic, comprising exquisitely framed sacred art and beautifully inscribed prayers, including the grace before meals in the refectory. The school chaplain is greatly appreciated by school staff, as he liaises with school leadership to provide a dynamic and well-planned chaplaincy programme. The school has consulted with parents regarding the teaching of relationships, sex and health education, with the policy meeting diocesan requirements.

Leaders and governors are exceptionally faithful guardians of the school's mission, which they clearly articulate, ensuring it permeates the school. They uphold the school's unique service to the diocese and parish through the provision of choristers in Westminster Cathedral, with a continued focus on supporting a world-class choir. The school's commitment to Catholic social teaching is excellent and embodied within the teaching of civics. The partnership with parents is exceptionally strong. One parent stated that 'the headteacher and deputy head are explicit in their desire to teach the boys within a Catholic environment…I deeply appreciate the fact that parents are welcome.' Staff feel exceptionally well cared for and appreciate the mentoring provided during their induction period. Governors are highly ambitious for the Catholic life and mission of the school with an excellent knowledge of the ethos. This is evidently monitored and evaluated on a regular basis, particularly through the work of the pastoral committee. Pupil involvement in the self-evaluation of the Catholic life of the school is exceptional, with termly surveys to encapsulate pupil voice with clear areas for improvement being identified.

Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

Religious education key judgement grade



Pupils are developing excellent knowledge, understanding and skills that exemplify the learning required by the *Religious Education Directory*. Pupils make consistently good progress by knowing more, remembering more and doing more. They are instinctively curious and have a thirst for knowledge, speaking fluently and confidently, generating incisive questions and engaging in discussions which deepen their thinking and learning. In a Year 6 lesson on the crucifixion, a pupil was listening to the scripture passage intently, and wanted to know why Jesus was given vinegar, thus providing him with greater context and understanding of the cultural norms of the time. Pupils, relative to their age, are extremely religiously literate and engaged. They reflect spiritually and think ethically and theologically. Pupils show notable independence in their learning, thinking for themselves and synthesising what they have learnt. Pupils clearly enjoy their religious education, with pre-prep pupils expressing how lessons 'make me feel closer to God' and 'help us in Mass'. Most pupils' work is of a high quality, although there now needs to be greater consistency in producing individual and creative work across all age ranges.

Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent, which they enthusiastically impart to pupils through well planned lessons that show strong fidelity to the *Directory*. Teachers have high expectations of pupils in terms of knowledge and vocabulary acquisition, and they actively encourage their innate curiosity. In a Year 3 lesson, the pupils rose to the teacher's challenge to pronounce and subsequently explain transubstantiation. Teachers' questions are effective, particularly when building on prior learning and eliciting deeper thinking and reflection. There is detailed marking and feedback in pupil books, with class feedback often given at the beginning of the lesson. Teachers often include thought-provoking questions in their written feedback; although pupils are not always given time to respond. The highest priority is placed on the spiritual and moral development of pupils in lessons. Parents appreciate that the religious education curriculum is highly ambitious, carefully sequenced, and expertly delivered.

One parent explained, 'In the pre-prep, marking and feedback were particularly thorough and helped my son clearly understand both his strengths and the areas where he could improve.' Art is exceptionally well used as a focal point for discussion in religious education teaching. In pre-prep, teachers are adept at using role play and the outdoor environment to ensure a variety of resources are used. In a Year 3 lesson on the Mass, pupils confidently gave definitions for vocabulary related to the Mass and their own personal experiences whilst re-enacting the Mass.

Leaders and governors are ensuring that the school is faithfully and skilfully delivering the *Directory*. Religious education has parity with other core subjects. Parents particularly value the religious education homework and have a good understanding of how well their sons are learning in this subject through regularly reporting. Professional development for staff is regular and highly valued. Staff fully appreciate that they have access to high levels of expertise from the head of religious education, who has an exceptionally clear vision for the teaching of the subject, which he articulates with clarity of purpose. He quickly identifies strengths and areas for development when observing lessons and is humble in leadership and service. The teaching of religious education is enriched with the use of art, and the Cathedral is used as a living resource for all pupils. The liturgical life of the school and the high importance placed on traditional liturgical music also enhance the pupils' knowledge and understanding. Governors receive regular updates from, and engage in discussions with, the head of religious education through the work of the academic committee and undertake learning walks to further enhance their knowledge. Furthermore, through the work of the academic committee, governors have opportunities to question and are involved in the self-evaluation of religious education.

Collective worship

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

Collective worship key judgement grade

1

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

The experiences of prayer and liturgy provided by the school engage pupils deeply and lead them to full, active and conscious participation. This is most evident through music and choral singing. The choristers sing sublimely, and there are also opportunities for every pupil to sing throughout the school day. They do so enthusiastically and with increasing levels of skill, particularly the gallery choir. Prep pupils have an excellent understanding of the liturgical norms of the Church and know that in their Friday class liturgies, the readings reflect the Sunday Gospel. They have an excellent ability to respond to scripture and religious art, and to reflect in silence. Pupils work collaboratively with others to lead well-constructed experiences of prayer and liturgy. Pre-prep pupils use their impressive musical skills, such as playing the piano, to create a calming and reverent atmosphere for prayer. Members of the pupil community club write their own prayers and lead the pre-prep pupils in prayer and reflection. Pupils articulate how prayer and liturgy have shaped how they think about themselves and the world, and how this has inspired them to action. One pupil expressed that 'without prayer there's no end goal, no road map for where you're going.' The school now needs to provide further opportunities for pupils to plan and evaluate prayer and liturgy.

Prayer and liturgy are at the heart of the school. Throughout the day, pupils and staff engage fully in appropriately planned liturgies. They come together in prayer, particularly at times of sorrow and joy, such as marking the recent departure of the Cardinal Archbishop. There is a naturally embedded pattern and rhythm of prayer in the school. All pupils know a wide range of traditional prayers, which they recite confidently throughout the school day. Well-chosen scripture passages inspire pupils and are carefully chosen to ensure that all present can fully and actively participate. High quality works of art are used to complement scripture and further enhance pupils' understanding of its meaning. The school and Cathedral are inspiring spaces for prayer and liturgy. Areas such as The Long Corridor are particularly awe-inspiring, steeped in rich religious heritage. The school could further develop

classroom prayer areas and focal points for pupil-planned prayer and liturgies, including use of liturgical colours and religious artefacts. Staff, including senior leaders, are exemplary role-models who live and breathe their faith by engaging in and leading prayer and liturgy. Relevant staff are highly skilled in helping pupils to confidently lead well-constructed prayer and liturgy. The school works with families and Westminster Cathedral to include them in the prayer life of the school. There are strong links with the parish as pupils from Years 3 - 8 attend Mass in the Cathedral each week and choristers sing there daily. One parent highlighted that the school's 'integration of Catholic faith into daily school life has been one of its great strengths'.

The leaders, including governors, have a clear and comprehensive strategy for building up skills of participation in prayer and liturgy as pupils progress through the school. They ensure that professional development for all staff focuses on liturgical formation and planning of prayer and liturgy. As a result, staff are highly skilled and well supported to lead it. One staff member appreciated that 'senior leaders, including the school chaplain, are readily available and provide regular support, guidance and resources.' Leaders are highly effective in facilitating others to lead experiences of prayer and liturgy, resulting in engaging, high quality liturgies which are accessible, meaningful and relevant. Governors have excellent knowledge of prayer and liturgy provision across the school. Leaders place the highest priority on the quality and impact of prayer and liturgy and ensure it is embedded in the school's cycle of self-evaluation and planned improvement. The voice of pupils and other stakeholders are integral and valued. Leaders, including chaplains, have a thorough familiarity with the Church's liturgical sources and bring this understanding to their planning of prayer and liturgy.

Information about the school

Full name of school	Westminster Cathedral Choir School
School unique reference number (URN)	101166
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	2136197
Full postal address of the school	Ambrosden Avenue, London, SW1P 1QH
School phone number	02077989081
Headteacher	Neil McLaughlan
Chair of governors	David Heminway
School Website	www.choirschool.com
Trusteeship	Independent
Phase	Primary
Type of school	Catholic Independent School
Admissions policy	Selective
Age-range of pupils	4-13
Gender of pupils	Boys
Date of last denominational inspection	June 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

The inspection team

Gael Hicks	Lead
Liz Keane	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