



The Oratory School

URN: 123282

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Archbishop of Birmingham

21–22 January 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

1

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

2

Compliance statement

- This school fully complies with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- This school is fully compliant with the additional requirements of His Grace.
- This school has fully addressed all previous areas for improvement.

What the school does well

- The Oratory School is an inclusive and welcoming community which values and respects individuals, truly living out the charism of its founder, St John Henry Newman.
- The strength of all relationships between staff and students embodies the school's motto.
- The leadership of all areas of the Catholic life and mission of the school, religious education, and prayer and liturgy is strong, with unstinting commitment to further development.
- The extensive and authentic subject knowledge and lived faith of all members of the religious education department provide a powerful witness to all students.
- Students and staff show generous commitment to charitable outreach and service within the wider community.

What the school needs to improve

- Ensure students understand their current achievement in religious education and how to improve.
- Provide routine opportunities for students to engage in a wide variety of ways of praying, including student-prepared celebrations of the word, and in house groups.

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

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

1

The ethos of the school is described by students and staff as one of family, communication, and the celebration of the talents of all; it is a place where individuals are known and valued. Students clearly understand the school's charism and apply it to their daily lives. Parents typically comment on the school's 'nurturing, family-like environment' and express gratitude for the way Catholic life is lived out in everyday care, guidance and example, 'shaping students spiritually, morally, and emotionally for the future.' Students show strong engagement with the principles of Catholic social teaching, although their expression of the theology underpinning these is limited. Students offer generous support of local, national, and international charities and provide service to the most vulnerable, for example by volunteering in local care homes. The school is an inclusive community; students show great respect for others and for themselves. Students take pride in their connection with St John Henry Newman, and his teachings are regularly referred to at school events. Staff value the mutual respect between staff and students of all faiths and worldviews. Parents typically comment: 'My child's faith has deepened since joining.' Students serve their peers through a wide range of leadership roles and participate enthusiastically in chaplaincy; the motto 'Ad Meliora' ('Towards better things') reflects their desire for continued development.

The school's charism, expressed in the motto 'Cor ad cor loquitur' ('Heart speaks unto heart'), is lived out widely, with staff showing strong commitment to the school's Catholic life and mission; one example is the promises made by staff across the community to support the mission, which are prominently displayed as a visible witness. The school environment proclaims its Catholic character, and attractive displays of students' work promote the creative talents of individuals as part of the school's charism. The closeness of the community is strengthened by the support

offered to students and staff, and the commitment shown by those involved with houses' pastoral life is notable. The extensive Sixth Form programme includes a focus on vocation, and the dynamic Chaplain provides clear leadership of many initiatives that strengthen the school's Catholic life and mission.

The leadership of the Catholic life and mission of the school is exemplary; the commitment and drive to strengthen this work across the school are inspiring. Promoting and developing the school's Catholic life and mission is fundamental to the work of leaders and governors and is a clear priority in planning and evaluation. Staff report that they feel well supported. Engagement with the diocese brings significant developments, such as the revision of the relationships, sex, and health education (RSHE) programme; support for parents, particularly through the bursary scheme, reflects leaders' commitment to the principles of Catholic social teaching. This is also evident in the extensive support for charitable fundraising, initiatives to care for the school environment and well-cared-for grounds, and extensive systematic mapping of Catholic social teaching across the curriculum, demonstrating its centrality. There is frequent engagement with parents through newsletters, social media, and invitations to be involved in charitable fundraising, and parents respond generously, reflecting their engagement and understanding of the school's work. The headmaster provides clear leadership of the mission, and his openness to engage with the diocese is instrumental in the school's development.

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

2

Provision

The quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in religious education

2

Leadership

How well leaders and governors promote, monitor and evaluate the provision for religious education

2

2

From the evidence of class discussion and written work, students are developing secure knowledge in religious education, and students make good progress and achieve well in lessons. This is less consistent in written work, where presentation varies and students use a limited range of forms of expression. In lessons, students are engaged, shown by their willingness to answer questions and discuss issues raised; they readily seek clarification and applying learning to their own lives. This engagement supports good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning; students concentrate well and move quickly from discussion to focussed individual work. Students have some understanding of their current achievement and what they need to do to improve, but this is inconsistent and often superficial; consequently, they do not consistently understand how to make improvements to their work.

Teachers of religious education have extensive and strong subject knowledge, which they share sensitively; their practice reflects their personal faith without overwhelming students. Lessons are framed with prayer and reference to Feasts of the Church, and staff have high expectations of students, valuing the subject highly and encouraging students to do likewise. Staff use effective questioning to draw on prior knowledge and provide time for students to reflect; they correct misunderstandings sensitively by reframing responses in ways which build on students' strengths. Working relationships in lessons are characterised by warmth and generosity, and celebration and praise are frequent and sincere in the classroom. However, feedback on written work is inconsistent, meaning students do not always know how to improve. Lessons include religious art and artefacts, such as a priest's stole and chrism, as stimuli for discussion, which engage students. Lessons are adapted to students' abilities and needs, including support for those who speak English as an additional language, who use translation software when

appropriate. However opportunities for students to use a wide variety of forms of expression in response to tasks are limited, which does not fully harness students' creativity and engagement.

The curriculum matches the requirements of the *Religious Education Directory* and the relevant exam specifications, and resources are provided generously, including appropriate contemporary textbooks. Religious education enjoys full parity with other core subjects and is a clear priority in curriculum planning. Survey responses from staff indicate that religious education is comparable to other core curriculum subjects in terms of training, resourcing, staffing, timetabling, and accommodation in the school, and that there is a clear vision for teaching and learning supported by a good level of expertise. Leaders seek support through appropriate training and extensive discussion with diocesan advisors, as well as moderation visits to other schools. The subject leader has a clear vision for the department, promotes the wider moral and spiritual value of religious education for all, and plans a sequential curriculum. Detailed, forensic monitoring and analysis inform carefully planned development; for example, the move for the current Year 10 to a new examination specification, chosen to be more accessible to students in response to a decline in grades. Leaders and governors have a thorough understanding of current achievement in the subject and priorities for improvement.

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

Students engage reverently in prayer and liturgy, although some responses to regular morning prayer in tutor groups are perfunctory and opportunities for reflection are limited. Students understand different ways of praying; this is largely limited to the traditional formal daily prayer, Mass, Vespers and Benediction. The school prayer, written by students, is well known and prayed regularly, and students take up opportunities to prepare prayer with enthusiasm; however, these opportunities are limited to bidding prayers in class, tutor groups, house prayers and at Mass. Students contribute intentions to house prayer boards, which are included in evening prayers, followed by discussions of how prayers are answered. They have a good knowledge of the liturgical year and volunteer to serve as sacristans and in other liturgical ministries; more experienced students mentor others to develop their skills. Students appreciate that everyone, regardless of their worldview, are able to be involved in the weekly Vespers and Benediction, as well as daily prayers. Parents typically comment: 'We appreciate the way the students are involved in all services.'

Prayer is central to school life and is a fundamental part of marking significant moments of joy and sorrow, including the deaths of former students; it is also embedded in daily life. However, the range of ways of praying is somewhat limited. Senior leaders lead prayer and liturgy confidently, including weekly Masses, Vespers, and Benediction. Music, including choral singing and regular hymn practice, and other art forms enhance students' experiences of prayer and liturgy. The school prayer book includes traditional prayers of the Church and prayers specific to school, including prayers for pupil meetings, and 'when playing sport'. An additional prayer book includes aids to prayer, and structures for pupil-prepared and staff-prepared prayer. Staff of other denominations and faiths describe the school as 'a fantastic representation of the Church'. The two chapels are complementary: the main chapel is located at the heart of school life, and

St Joseph's Chapel provides a more contemplative space for early morning and evening Masses for smaller groups; it also provides a focus during 'Inter-Faith Week', organised by students. The prayer areas in houses are less prominent, limited to noticeboards with prayer intentions. Through the chaplain's work, the school works well with parents and families by sharing scripture through the weekly newsletter and inviting them to attend services; it also works with the local parish, wider community, deanery, and diocese, including through ecumenical services. As a result, parents are engaged by and supportive of the school.

The policy for prayer is readily available on the website and supports the school's approach to prayer and liturgy. Leaders, particularly the chaplain, provide constructive support for prayer and liturgy and encourage everyone's involvement. Staff describe them as 'very present' around the school, modelling the charism through their compassion, kindness and inclusive relationships. Leaders identify further developments in prayer and liturgy. Prayer and liturgy are generously resourced, including an extensive calendar which includes the feasts of the Church and celebrations linked to St John Henry Newman, alongside regular provision of the sacraments, including the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There is thorough evaluation of prayer and liturgy, including by the student chaplaincy committee, and this informs planned developments.

Information about the school

Full name of school	The Oratory School
School unique reference number (URN)	123282
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	931 6034
Full postal address of the school	Woodcote, Reading, South Oxfordshire, RG8 0PJ
School phone number	01491 683500
Headteacher	Matthew Fogg
Chair of governing board	Frank Gargent
School Website	www.oratory.co.uk
Trusteeship	The Oratory School Association
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Catholic Independent School
Admissions policy	Selective
Age-range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	May 2019
Previous denominational inspection grade	2

The inspection team

Andrew Maund
Geraldine McCauley

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