



# Grays Convent Catholic High School

URN: 115239

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Brentwood

02–03 October 2025

## 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

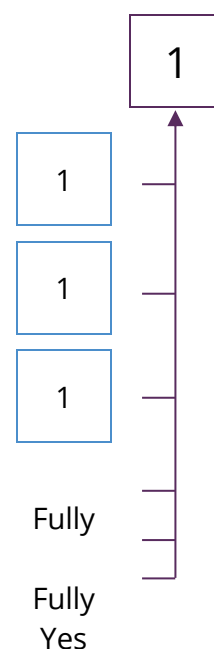
#### Collective worship (p.7)

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



## 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.

## What the school does well

- Staff greatly appreciated the contribution and dedication of the chaplain, and students truly value her tireless support for their spiritual development.
- The wide variety of student leadership within the school creates an atmosphere where the Catholic faith is lived out with joy and reverence.
- Leaders and governors are ambitious for the school and work hard to ensure the Catholic identity is preserved.
- The pastoral care of all members of the school community is exemplified through the loving relationships which recognise the unique human dignity of every person.
- Behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is exemplary and as a consequence excellent progress is made by all groups in religious education.

## What the school needs to improve

- Students need to be able to articulate the theology underpinning their actions in support of Catholic social teaching.
- Ensure students encounter a range of prayer experiences that will enable them to grow in confidence to plan, lead and evaluate their prayer and liturgy.
- Provide opportunities in religious education lessons for students to present and lead, making the teaching more interactive.

## 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

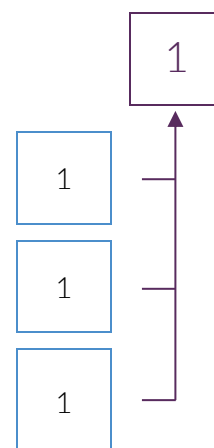
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

#### 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



Grays Convent High school is a welcoming community where students are nurtured and feel valued. Not only do the students know and understand La Sainte Union Sisters' charism of Union and the motto, 'We are one with God', they also live it through their wide range of charitable activities. Students are proactive in their charitable work and can articulate some aspects of the theology underpinning their actions in support of Catholic social teaching. However, the students are not yet fully conversant with the principles of Catholic social teaching and the theology that underpins them. In the recent past significant sums have been raised by the students for Calais Light, Ukrainian refugees, St Luke's Hospice, a La Sainte Union school in Tanzania and Cafod. At Christmas hampers are donated to the homeless, school families and to others through the local St Vincent De Paul society. The school also has strong links with the Thurrock food bank; with students and their families making regular valuable donations. There is a genuine respect for the dignity and worth of the individual, demonstrated best by the school's warm inclusive culture. This reflects what a parent said: 'We are grateful for the core Catholic values that permeate every aspect of school life. The result of which is a school that is deeply caring'. Students have a clear understanding of the school's commitment to follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd, by looking out for each other. This was succinctly expressed by a student who said, 'We have each other's back, no matter what our differences'. Students make newcomers feel welcome and ensure that the vulnerable feel safe in a small school with a genuine family ethos.

The school excels at being a community based on Catholic tradition and practice. Students know and say the school prayer with pride. Staff enthusiastically participate in and contribute to activities which reflect the life and mission of the school. A perfect example of this was the Eco club which was run by a member of the science department. Students gladly embrace their personal responsibility to care for our Common Home. They have created an Eco garden which helps to raise awareness for Laudato Si' and during our visit they were busy recycling plastic bottles into poppies for a Remembrance Day service. Consequently, the school received the

Green Eco School award which flies proudly at the front gate. Pastoral care is of the highest quality with one parent commenting, 'My daughters have found solace and support in the school's pastoral team during challenging times in our lives'. Staff go out of their way to provide an exceptionally supportive and joyful community for each of its members. The school celebrates the presence of those from various cultures and belief traditions. A highlight of the school calendar is the celebration of cultural diversity during Black History Month and Arts, Culture and Diversity week.

Under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher, leaders and governors place Catholic life and mission at the centre of all they do; 98% of respondents to the staff survey agreed or strongly agreed that Christ is at the heart of this school. A member of staff noted, 'I have not known a school to ever care as much as this one'. There is an explicit and concrete commitment to the physical and mental health of staff. During mental health week staff are invited to bring their pets to school. Effective use of a dedicated and supportive staff social media group ensures that colleagues take responsibility for each other's welfare. A teacher commented, 'This school is like a second home for me'. 100% of respondents to the staff survey agreed or strongly agreed that students behave respectfully in the school. The school has a dynamic relationship with the diocese, actively participating in the services provided. A recent staff induction day included the blessing of hands ceremony led by the Bishop. Leaders and governors are fully committed to Catholic social teaching with particular emphasis on caring for our Common Home and providing for those in greatest need locally, nationally and globally. Governors are passionate and ambitious for the school and work hard to ensure the Catholic identity is preserved.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

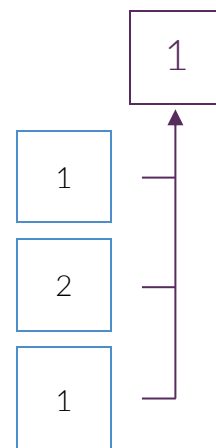
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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



Students are developing excellent knowledge, understanding and skills that exemplify the learning required by the *Religious Education Directory* at Key Stage 3. Students, including disadvantaged students, achieve the best possible outcomes, particularly at Key Stage 4, with above average attainment achieved. Data from baseline tests showed that a significant number of students arrive with little or no prior knowledge of Catholicism; highlighting the value that the department adds and the results achieved in religious education at GCSE all the more impressive. A high level of religious literacy is demonstrated with students using subject specific vocabulary to speak confidently and articulately. Behaviour in lessons is outstanding, fostered through extremely positive teacher-student relationships. Students remain fully engaged, asking incisive questions and clearly enjoy their learning; for example, Year 7 pupils were eager to explore the contribution of the Catholic priest and scientist Father Lemaître to the development of scientific theory on the origins of the universe. Progress tasks and trackers are used effectively to give students a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Book reviews revealed that students take pride in their books, produce work of a consistently high standard and display excellent presentation skills.

Teachers of religious education have high expectations of their pupils and demonstrated deep commitment to this subject. Most teachers have a high level of confidence which is based on theological literacy appropriate to the phase they teach. Teachers adapt explanations and tasks well to ensure all students can access and engage fully in the curriculum. Relevant and specific feedback is provided in lessons and in books to ensure students understand what they need to do to improve. The 'do-now' tasks which are a regular feature of each lesson consolidate students' knowledge and understanding and in most lessons this is further extended through the use of skilful questioning. Teachers have a profound understanding of the impact of religious

education on the moral and ethical development of students and their ability to meaningfully make sense of their experience of the world. This was perfectly illustrated in a Year 7 lesson where students discussed the positive and negative actions humans make as stewards of the planet. When teaching and learning is outstanding, lessons are taught at pace with a variety of tasks and encourage more active participation from students. Students do not always have the opportunity to lead and present to the rest of the class their knowledge and understanding of the learning.

Senior leaders ensure that religious education is well monitored. Governors and leaders have a strong understanding and clear vision for the development of the subject. The school is effectively using the *Religious Education Directory* across all of Key Stage 3. Leaders, including governors ensure that there is regular training and embedding of the new curriculum so that it becomes fully aligned to the ethos of Grays Convent High school. A carefully planned sequential curriculum is in place which ensures students' achievement is strong as they progress through the school. Leaders view religious education as the 'core of the core' with parity between the subject and the rest of the core subjects in relation to resourcing, timetabling, staffing and accommodation. Professional development is seen as a key priority for the department and 7 staff members have completed the Catholic Certificate for Religious Studies while another 2 teachers are currently studying the course. This is an impressive number of people with this qualification and confirms the commitment of the school towards Catholic education. The department is fortunate to have both the SENDCO and assistant SENDCO teaching within the department as well as providing training so that staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to enable students with SEND to learn consistently well.

## Collective worship

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

### Collective worship key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

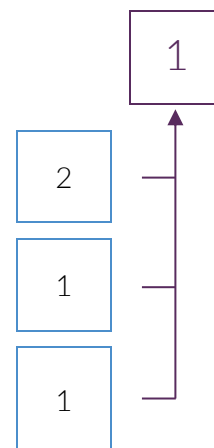
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

#### 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



At Grays Convent High School opportunities for prayer are carefully planned in accordance with the Church's liturgical calendar. Every morning in form time, for example, students reflect on a piece of scripture related to the liturgical season. The school engages students deeply and leads them to full participation in the prayer life of the school. Students are respectful and attentive when the school prayer is said in form time and at the start of every subject lesson. They know the school prayer already in Year 7 and say it with gusto and pride. A wide range of services are offered including the Rosary at lunchtime during October and May, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament to every year group, carol services at Christmas, Lent and Easter reflections including the Stations of the Cross. The programme of annual retreats for each year group is impactful and is something that is clearly valued and enjoyed. The chaplain, a dedicated and popular member of the school community, collaborates effectively with teachers and provides detailed prayer opportunities which occur at the beginning of the school day. The inclusivity of the prayer life of the school can clearly be seen in the engagement of all students including those not of the Christian faith. All students can articulate the different ways they can pray including reflection and moments of silence. They are able to reflect on how prayer has helped them understand more about world events.

Prayer is central to the life of the school and daily opportunities for prayer are a natural part of each day. The school year begins with a welcome Mass for Year 7 and their parents. One commented, 'The school puts God at the centre of students' lives'. The school also encourages parents to attend the annual carol service and the leavers' Mass for Year 11. Prayer opportunities are incorporated into every lesson in the school and every staff meeting. Staff appreciate the celebration of the word provided by the chaplain to assist them with prayer at morning registration. Scripture passages are carefully chosen to reflect the liturgical calendar and the chaplain is highly diligent and committed to provide both staff and students opportunities to

engage in prayer. Students are encouraged to plan and lead prayer using their gifts and talents. More exposure to a variety of prayer experiences will enable them to be more evaluative. The school has strong links with the local parish; a priest often joins the Year 7 retreat to Aylesford to celebrate the Eucharist. The clergy also make themselves available in school during Lent for students to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There is usually weekly Mass before school on Thursdays which is well attended by students and staff, along with regular Masses held throughout the year during class and assembly time.

The school policy on prayer and liturgy is well formulated and is written in such a way that it is easy to follow, accessible and useful to staff. The school calendar is carefully planned to reflect the liturgical year. Staff value the professional development provided by the school on prayer and liturgy. They are confident to lead in worship including those who may not be Catholic. Leaders, including governors, are respectful of those of other faiths and none. During Ramadan a room is provided at lunchtime for Muslim students to pray while fasting. Regular professional development opportunities are made available for all staff and induction for staff new to the school includes training on working in a Catholic school as well as teaching in a La Sainte Union school. Leaders, including governors, are highly effective in facilitating others to plan and lead prayer and liturgy. However, the school now needs to enable students to encounter a range of prayer experiences that will allow them to grow in confidence to plan and lead prayer and liturgy." This is an important development that will further enhance established provision.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	Grays Convent Catholic High School
School unique reference number (URN)	115239
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8834733
Full postal address of the school	College Avenue, Grays, Essex, RM17 5UX
School phone number	01375376173
Executive headteacher	N/A
Headteacher	Mrs Penny Johnson
Chair of Governors	Mrs Laurie Eve
School Website	<a href="https://www.graysconvent.school/">https://www.graysconvent.school/</a>
Trusteeship	La Sainte Union des Sacrés Cœurs
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Voluntary Aided School
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Date of last denominational inspection	June 2018
Previous denominational inspection grade	1

## The inspection team

Dermot O'Neill	Lead
Angela Podmore	Team
Amanda Crowley	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