



## St Mary's School Ascot

URN: 110120

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Portsmouth

14 May 2026 – 15 May 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

##### Religious education (p.5)

The quality of curriculum religious education RE

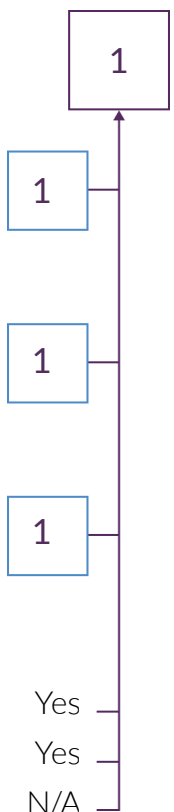
##### Collective worship (p.7)

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



## What the school does well

- The mission and charism of Mary Ward permeate the very fabric of all that the school undertakes, from care for the boarders to meeting all their spiritual and academic needs
- The school is a warm, united, joyfully inclusive community where the Catholic faith is lived through the dedication, care, and values embodied in every relationship.
- The head of department and team of expert teachers, plan an effective religious education curriculum that ensures high engagement and expectations, resulting in exceptional GCSE and A-Level outcomes for all learners, irrespective of need.
- The beautiful chapel is openly accessible to the whole community, where the chaplain is available to support in the spiritual development of the whole school community.
- The pattern of prayer provides a natural rhythm for all members of this community to participate, reflect and grow in faith.

## What the school needs to improve

- Create focal points for prayer in classrooms to support the well planned and engaging daily prayers.
- Enhance the core sixth form religious studies programme by implementing a tracking and recording strategy that reflects the high quality and challenge of the input.

## 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



Students fully embrace the school's Catholic identity and mission to work for the 'greater glory of God.' Rooted in the charism of Mary Ward to be 'seekers of truth and doers of justice', students clearly understand and live out Gospel values in their daily lives. They speak warmly of the school as a loving community where they feel happy, safe, listened to and proud to belong: community and loved are words frequently used by students to describe their experience. Strong pastoral systems ensure students know they are deeply cared for and understand who to approach for support when needed. Initiatives such as buddies, minders and sisters provide exemplary care for younger students, especially those joining in Year 7, helping students to flourish within the boarding community. Students confidently lead prayer and opportunities for worship, with sixth form students providing outstanding leadership through the eleven student committees and as liturgy captains. Catholic social teaching is deeply understood and reflected in extensive charitable outreach, locally and internationally, including donating house points to charitable causes. Behaviour throughout the school is exemplary, reflecting students' dignity, compassion and commitment to service of others.

Provision for Catholic life and mission is outstanding because the school's Catholic identity permeates every aspect of community life and is strongly aligned with its founding principles. The mission to provide a holistic Catholic education for young women is lived authentically through worship, pastoral care, service and relationships. Staff and students share a strong sense of belonging, tradition and purpose, and staff, regardless of faith background, feel welcomed, valued and fully included in the school community. Catholic social teaching is embedded across school life, inspiring students to recognise their responsibility to serve

others; as one Year 8 student reflected, 'We must do charitable works.' The school environment powerfully reflects its Catholic character through the chapel, prayer garden, John Henry Newman statue and visual displays, all of which foster reflection, wonder and awe. Staff demonstrate exceptional commitment to student flourishing through generous pastoral care and participation in the wider life of the school. Prayer and formation are central to staff induction and development, including retreats and liturgies. Chaplaincy provision is rich and innovative, while the Ten:Ten programme ensures a coherent and carefully planned approach to relationships, sex and health education in partnership with parents.

Leadership of Catholic life and mission is outstanding because governors and senior leaders place the Catholic identity of the school at the heart of every strategic decision. Inspired by the charisma of Mary Ward, leaders are committed to providing 'not just an education but an upbringing,' ensuring the holistic formation and flourishing of every student and member of staff. The appointment of a full-time priest chaplain, alongside generous investment in chaplaincy, pastoral care and staff formation, demonstrates the priority given to Catholic life. Staff and students feel safe, valued and supported, with one early career teacher commenting, 'We are viewed holistically by the senior team, not just as teachers.' Leadership actively promotes a culture of service, outreach and partnership with St Francis of Assisi Catholic Primary School and the wider diocesan community. Relationships with parents are exceptionally strong and pastoral, reflecting the school's commitment to accompaniment and care. The curriculum is deeply illuminated by faith and Gospel values, while leaders ensure Catholic social teaching permeates academic, pastoral and co-curricular provision. Governors provide highly effective challenge and support, ensuring the school's Catholic mission remains dynamic and central to all aspects of school life.

## Religious education

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 key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

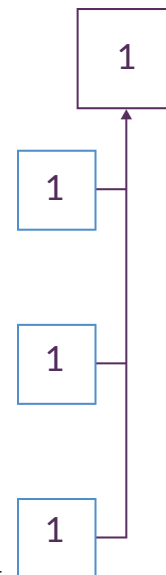
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

#### 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 at St Mary's School demonstrate outstanding outcomes in religious education because they are highly religiously literate, intellectually curious and deeply engaged in their learning. Students develop excellent knowledge, understanding and skills through a challenging and well-sequenced curriculum from Key Stage 3 to Sixth Form, enabling them to think ethically, spiritually and theologically with maturity and confidence. Students speak fluently using sophisticated theological vocabulary and ask insightful questions which demonstrate a genuine desire to deepen their understanding of God, faith and the world. As one student explained, they 'enjoy religious education because it allows them to ask important questions about God.' Engagement in lessons is exemplary, with students reflecting critically on feedback, refining their work and showing notable independence in research, discussion and presentation tasks. Students enthusiastically participate in wider opportunities such as the Catholic and Theology societies, retreats and chapel prayer, demonstrating how learning in religious education contributes significantly to the Catholic life of the school. Outcomes at GCSE and A Level are exceptional. Students across all groups, including those with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), make excellent progress from their starting points and achieve standards well above national expectations.

Provision in religious education is outstanding because leaders and teachers share a highly ambitious vision that is inclusive, academically rigorous and rooted in Catholic tradition. The subject leader has established a culture where religious education is valued as a core academic discipline and where all students are expected to achieve highly and engage deeply

with theological, philosophical and ethical questions. Teaching is consistently strong and often contains elements of outstanding practice. Teachers demonstrate authentic subject expertise, high levels of confidence and a deep commitment to the subject, which they communicate exceptionally effectively to students. As a result, students are challenged intellectually and inspired to think critically and reflect spiritually. Skilled questioning is a particular strength of the department; teachers accurately assess students' understanding and adapt explanations and tasks to deepen knowledge and maximise engagement. Planning is carefully informed by assessment and knowledge of individual students, ensuring that lessons consolidate learning while extending understanding for all groups, including students with SEND. Learning environments are purposeful, supportive and respectful, enabling students to participate confidently in discussion and debate. Rich resources, detailed feedback and ambitious teaching contribute directly to exceptional outcomes at GCSE and A Level and the engaging Sixth Form core religious education programme. Further enhancing the core sixth form programme through developing a tracking and marking system akin to that in the lower years would further enhance the provision.

Leadership of religious education is outstanding because leaders and governors ensure that the subject remains central to the Catholic mission and academic life of the school. The curriculum is a faithful expression of the *Religious Education Directory* and is enriched through imaginative use of resources, enabling students to engage deeply with Catholic teaching and theological reflection. Leaders have designed a carefully sequenced curriculum that builds knowledge and skills systematically across all key stages while meeting the needs of all learners through thoughtful adaptive teaching. Religious education enjoys full parity with other core subjects in timetabling, staffing, assessment, reporting and professional development, reflecting the school's unwavering commitment to the subject. Governors, the headmistress and senior leaders provide strong oversight through regular review, monitoring and strategic evaluation of curriculum implementation, assessment and teaching quality. The subject leader provides inspiring and highly effective leadership, combining extensive academic expertise with a clear vision for outstanding teaching and learning. Collaborative departmental practice, robust self-evaluation and high-quality professional development ensure continual improvement and consistency across the department. Enrichment opportunities, including Theology Society, academic talks and elective programmes, further strengthen students' engagement and intellectual curiosity. As a result, religious education is highly valued, exceptionally well led and contributes significantly to the holistic formation of students.

## Collective worship

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

### Collective worship key judgement grade

#### Pupil outcomes

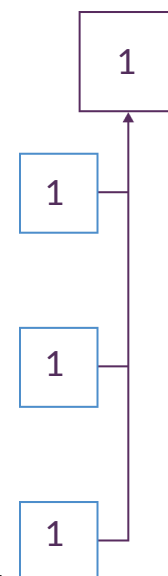
How well pupils participate in and respond to the school's collective worship

#### 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



Students demonstrate outstanding outcomes in prayer and liturgy because they engage deeply, reverently and enthusiastically in the rich prayer life of the school. Experiences of prayer and liturgy enable students to participate fully and consciously, demonstrated by the exceptional quality of prayerful silence, attentiveness and communal worship observed during whole-school Masses and other acts of worship. Students enter worship in a calm and reflective manner and participate confidently using both traditional and extempore prayer, including prayers such as the Hail Mary. Students have a well-developed understanding of the Church's liturgical year and experience this in a real way through the rhythm of boarding school life, including Advent, Lent and feast day celebrations. Weekly tutor prayers, house liturgies and whole-school worship provide regular opportunities for students to lead and plan prayer collaboratively. Sixth form liturgy captains work closely with the chaplain and staff to prepare and lead high quality liturgical experiences with confidence, skill and reverence, while also supporting younger students in their participation. Students reflect thoughtfully on how prayer influences their lives, particularly through retreats and other shared spiritual experiences, and they confidently articulate how worship shapes their understanding of faith, service and the wider world.

Provision for worship is outstanding because prayer and liturgy are truly central to the daily life and identity of the school. A rich rhythm of prayer permeates the school day through tutor prayer, chapel worship twice weekly, Mass, Rosary, retreats and liturgical celebrations linked closely to the seasons of the Church year. Having a focal point in each classroom for prayer would further enhance the experience for students and staff. Prayer is embedded naturally

into lessons, meetings and significant moments of joy and sorrow, ensuring that the whole community experiences worship as integral to school life. The chapel, which is cherished and used daily, lies at the heart of the school and provides a beautiful and prayerful environment for communal and individual worship. Staff and students are fully committed to prayer and liturgy, with liturgy captains, the ministry team and eco ministry contributing significantly to planning and leadership. Prayer experiences are carefully prepared, rooted in Scripture and enriched through music, silence, reflection and creativity. Staff model exemplary practice and skilfully support students in preparing and leading worship with confidence and reverence. Retreats, prayer during examinations, praise and worship gatherings and opportunities for parents, including twice-yearly days of prayer, further enrich the spiritual life of the community. Strong partnerships with the local parish and families strengthen students' participation in the liturgical life of the Church.

Leaders, the headmistress and governors ensure that prayer and liturgy are central to the life of the school and are given the highest priority in strategic planning, resourcing and evaluation. The recently revised Prayer and Liturgy Policy provides clear and accessible guidance for staff and is consistently used to support high-quality provision across the community. The appointment of a resident priest chaplain demonstrates the school's deep commitment to sustaining and developing its rich liturgical life. The chaplain is integral to the delivery, support and ongoing development of prayer and liturgy and is highly valued by students, staff and families alike. Leaders have established a clear and effective strategy for developing students' participation in prayer and liturgy as they progress through the school. Through the work and support of the ministry team, liturgy captains and extensive staff formation, students increasingly lead prayer and liturgy confidently, where appropriate, with reverence and creativity. Staff value the high-quality professional development they receive, particularly in liturgical formation and the planning of prayer experiences. Prayer and liturgy are carefully embedded within the rhythm of the school year through Masses, Holy Days, retreats and sacramental opportunities. Leaders regularly review the quality and impact of provision through learning walks, discussions with students and ongoing evaluation, ensuring prayer and liturgy remains vibrant, meaningful and deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition.

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Mary's School Ascot
School unique reference number (URN)	110120
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8686002
Full postal address of the school	St Mary's Road, Ascot, SL5 9JF
School phone number	01344 296600
Headteacher or Head of School	Mrs Danuta Staunton
Chair of Governors	Ms Clementine Vaughan
School Website	<a href="http://www.st-marys-ascot.co.uk">www.st-marys-ascot.co.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Independent St Mary's School Ascot
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Catholic Independent School
Admissions policy	Selective
Age-range of pupils	11 - 18
Gender of pupils	Girls

## The Inspection Team

Andrew Bull Lead

Bridget Anne Durrant

## 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