



# St Leonard's Catholic Secondary School

URN: 143583

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle

09–10 October 2025

## 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

- St Leonard's Catholic Secondary School is fully compliant with the general norms for religious education laid down by the Bishops' Conference.
- St Leonard's Catholic Secondary School is fully compliant with the requirements of the diocesan bishop.
- St Leonard's Catholic Secondary School is fully compliant as the previous areas for improvement have been addressed.

## What the school does well

- The mission statement of St Leonard's that, 'all pupils are known and loved' is powerfully lived out across the whole community. This commitment is particularly evident in the exceptional pastoral care offered to every pupil and the deep sense of belonging experienced by all.
- St Leonard's has an extraordinary Catholic community of staff who have flourished in the face of significant adversity. Their resilience and faith-filled witness ensure that the Catholic character of the school continues to strengthen and inspire.
- Leadership at all levels is authentically Catholic and firmly rooted within the mission of the Church. Students are at the heart of all decisions that are made.
- The Prayer and Liturgy policy is robust, innovative and strategic. Staff are confident and skilled witnesses to the faith, modelling prayerful and reflective leadership in their daily practice.
- Outcomes in religious education are sustained and exceptional for all pupil groups. Pupils achieve highly, make outstanding progress and articulate their faith with clarity, confidence and conviction.

## What the school needs to improve

- To use knowledge and expertise to support other diocesan schools by providing professional development in relation to securing high outcomes at Key Stage 4.
- Provide students with more frequent opportunities for reflection within religious education lessons to deepen spiritual engagement and personal response.
- Embed the new marking policy within religious education to ensure that pupils consistently act upon and respond to the high-quality feedback provided by staff.

## 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

There is a profound sense of belonging at St Leonard's Catholic Secondary School, where every member of the community is truly known, loved and valued. Students speak with conviction about being part of a school rooted in Christ's love, which inspires them to become the best version of themselves. They understand they are made in the image and likeness of God, and their behaviour towards one another reflects deep respect and compassion. Students of different faiths and none feel fully included and speak of being respected by both staff and peers. The impeccable conduct of students across the school reflects the mission that is lived joyfully every day. Despite recent challenges with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, the Catholic character of the school has grown stronger. This resilience is a clear sign of a mission that is authentically lived and deeply embedded. Students are proud to belong to a community they describe as a family built on relationships. One student captured the ethos, saying, 'This school has made me become a better person.' The sense of transformation and gratitude permeates the school and shapes how students see themselves and their responsibility to others. Students show a mature understanding of Catholic social teaching and a deep commitment to social action. They lead initiatives that make a considerable difference to those in greatest need locally, nationally and globally. Fundraising activities such as staff karaoke, Christmas bauble dedications and tutor-led events raising significant sums for Cafod, including funding a village's water supply for a decade. Engagement in the Faith in Action and Pope John Paul II Awards is exceptional. Students also enjoy rich opportunities for retreat and formation through extensive visits, allowing them to grow spiritually and encounter Christ in transformative ways.

The school's mission is visible in every aspect of its life. Staff speak warmly of St Leonard's as a family, with many describing it as, 'A place we adore.' This shared sense of vocation inspires staff to live out the gospel daily: supporting charitable causes, leading environmental initiatives abroad or accompanying students pastorally. Pastoral care is outstanding. Staff go above and beyond to ensure every student, whatever their background or circumstance, feels known, loved and supported. The extensive enrichment programme, led by staff and sixth formers, ensures that all students experience a broad and inclusive education that nurtures both faith and aspiration. The relationship, sex and health education curriculum is thoughtfully designed and rooted in Church teaching, offering clear guidance as students grow in understanding of themselves and others.

Leaders and governors are highly ambitious for the Catholic life and mission of the school. They are authentic witnesses to the faith and provide clear and strategic direction rooted in gospel values. Christ is truly at the centre of life at St Leonard's, and the ethos is evident across the school. Leaders maintain excellent relationships with parishes, and students are regularly involved in church life through Advent and Lenten celebrations. The senior leadership team model servant leadership: staff describe them as approachable, compassionate and fully invested in their well-being. Professional development opportunities for all staff, including early career teachers, are exceptional and contribute significantly to the Catholic formation of the community. Governors are knowledgeable, and unwavering in their commitment to the school's mission. Their oversight ensures that the Catholic life of the school remains vibrant, inclusive and outward-looking. They actively evaluate provision for continuous improvement, ensuring Catholic life and mission continues to transform hearts, minds and lives. Students play a meaningful role in this process, shaping the ethos and future direction of their community. The school is an authentic Catholic community where Christ's love is known, shared and lived enabling all to flourish.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

**Pupil outcomes**

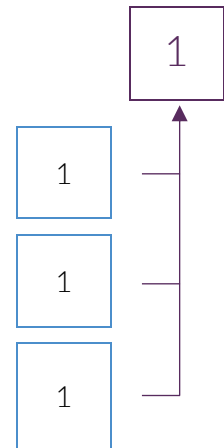
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

**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



Religious education at St Leonard's is a model of academic and spiritual excellence. Teachers are expert practitioners who inspire a culture of high expectation and curiosity, particularly at Key Stage 5. As a result, students know and remember more, applying their learning with accuracy and confidence. They use precise religious vocabulary fluently and think ethically and theologically about complex issues such as genetic engineering and euthanasia. External outcomes are consistently above national averages, reflecting exceptional progress at Key Stage 4. Retrieval practice is central to learning, enabling students to articulate how knowledge builds over time and to make secure links across topics. Students engage thoughtfully in discussion and debate, often taking their enquiry beyond the classroom. Lessons are purposeful and inclusive, with behaviour exemplary and respectful dialogue. Work in books is of a consistently high standard, demonstrating understanding and pride. Students are reflective learners who show independence and resilience in applying prior knowledge to new contexts. Sixth form students speak with enthusiasm about how religious education has shaped their beliefs, moral awareness and future aspirations, with many inspired to pursue theology, philosophy or social justice work beyond school. Through religious education, students encounter the richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition and develop the skills to engage confidently with the world around them. The subject makes a significant contribution to their intellectual, moral and spiritual formation, embodying the school's mission to form the whole person in truth and love.

Staff are passionate specialists who inspire excellence through deep subject knowledge and authentic witness to faith. Lessons are carefully planned with engaging and challenging tasks that enable all students to thrive. Teachers know their students well and build positive, trusting relationships that foster enjoyment and success. High expectations are evident in every classroom, underpinned by care, compassion, and a belief that every student can achieve highly.

Learning environments are purposeful and inclusive, promoting engagement and focus. Several students commented that their teachers, 'take great care to ensure that they love RE and achieve well,' reflecting the department's passion for high-quality provision and commitment to student success. Leaders recognise they need to include more planned opportunities for stillness and reflection within lessons to deepen spiritual engagement and allow time for prayerful consideration of what they have learned. Teachers use questioning effectively to check understanding and ensure students make strong progress over time. Their enthusiasm and expertise nurture genuine interest in religious education, supporting students to develop their reasoning skills and apply their learning to real-world contexts. A new marking policy has recently been introduced and will take time to embed fully so that students can respond systematically to the high-quality feedback that they receive.

The department is fully compliant with the *Religious Education Directory* at Key Stage 3, evidenced through a well-sequenced curriculum, high-quality resources, and excellent student outcomes. Learning is progressive, purposeful, and interwoven, deepening understanding over time. Leaders ensure religious education has full parity with other core subjects within all whole-school systems and policies. They also ensure that the needs of all students are met, which is reflected in the strong outcomes achieved across all student groups. The head of department provides clear direction, rooted in a vision to inspire a deep love of the subject and foster ambition for all. Continuous, high-impact professional development strengthens both subject expertise and the approach to teaching. Leaders, including governors, ensure that religious education remains at the core of the curriculum, giving due regard to rigorous self-evaluation and ongoing improvement. As a result, excellence is sustained and continually built upon across the department.

## 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

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

1

Students love the experience of prayer and liturgy at St Leonard's and commented that, 'prayer sets them up for the day'. Students appreciate the wide range of styles of prayer and liturgy on offer that help them to grow in faith, respect and virtue. The reverence shown by students during prayer and liturgy is humbling. Attendance at voluntary acts of prayer and liturgy is exceptional. Students embrace the opportunity to work collaboratively in form classes to produce meaningful, creative and reflective celebrations of the word that inspire and motivate students to explore their faith and live out gospel values in their daily lives. Students stated that they, 'love the opportunity to lead prayer' and demonstrate masterful confidence in their leadership of morning prayer. There is a joyful approach to prayer and liturgy at St. Leonard's. They engage willingly in communal singing and show real passion for leading liturgical music. The enthusiasm and creativity of students engaging in musical praise in the school's weekly Chapel Tunes club encourages students to grow in faith through musical worship.

Prayer is central to school life and is deeply embedded across the school. Staff provide an impressive range of prayer and liturgy opportunities including Lenten prayer walks, Advent nativities and whole school Masses. As a result, prayer and liturgy enriches the entire school community for both students and staff. All staff demonstrate mastery skill in planning and leading engaging, meaningful acts of prayer and liturgy and they go above and beyond to provide the most impactful opportunities of prayer for students. The school's chapel is deeply valued by both staff and students with students commenting that it is like, 'an oasis' and 'a sanctuary of peace'. Students appreciate the work that the senior leader for prayer and liturgy undertakes to provide inspirational opportunities for them. There is a flourishing partnership between the school and the parish. The parish priests provide steadfast, constant support to students and go above and beyond to support the school. The school also runs takeover Masses every half-term

to help lead the parishes in prayer and liturgy. This leads to excellent involvement in parish life. The school's policy on prayer and liturgy is a model of exemplary practice. It is well-considered, appropriate and places the highest priority on developing students' understanding of different styles of prayer and liturgy appropriate to their age.

The school has a robust system of self-evaluation with the views of all stakeholders constantly considered. This ensures that the policy is constantly reviewed and adapted. Leaders place the highest priority on ensuring that all staff receive regular, quality training on prayer and liturgy. This is delivered by parish priests, senior leaders, the diocese and Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust. This ensures that staff are effectively supported in delivering and leading meaningful experiences of prayer and liturgy. Leaders are passionate about celebrating holy days of obligation and St Leonard's feast day. As such, staff and students demonstrate excitement to grow in knowledge and understanding of their school saint and key moments in the liturgical calendar. Senior leaders are inspirational witnesses to their faith. They are highly skilled in leading and modelling prayer and staff feel truly, 'inspired' by their genuine passion for prayer and liturgy. As a result, staff are keen to grow in their own faith and understanding of prayer and liturgy. Prayer and liturgy are the heartbeat of the community—joyful, inclusive and transformative—drawing all closer to Christ and nurturing a genuine love of God expressed through worship, witness and service.

## Information about the school

Full name of school	St Leonard's Catholic Secondary School
School unique reference number (URN)	143583
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	8404691
Full postal address of the school	North End, Durham, DH1 4NG
School phone number	01913848575
Executive headteacher	Mr Christopher Hammill
Head of School	Mr David Simmons
Chair of the local governing committee	Mr Jim Cunningham
School Website	<a href="https://stleonardsdurham.bwcet.com/">https://stleonardsdurham.bwcet.com/</a>
Trusteeship	Diocesan
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Academy
Admissions policy	Non-selective
Age-range of students	11-18
Gender of students	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	22- 23 November 2017
Previous denominational inspection grade	Outstanding

## The inspection team

Francesca Craik Lead Inspector  
 Andrew Young Team Inspector  
 Michael Hughes Team Inspector  
 Lynsey Craig 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

