



## Downside School

URN: 123910

Catholic Schools Inspectorate report on behalf of the Bishop of Clifton

25–26 April 2024

### 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 curriculum requirements laid down by the Bishops' Conference

Yes

The school is fully compliant with all requirements of the diocesan bishop

Yes

The school has responded to the areas for improvement from the last inspection

Fully

### What the school does well

- Downside School provides a holistic education which respects the dignity of every member of the community and is underpinned by its Benedictine values.
- The religious education faculty is a strong team and all members of the faculty contribute extremely effectively to students' moral, ethical and spiritual formation.
- Positive relationships between staff and students across all year groups are evident which creates an environment where students are able to learn in a purposeful way and serve others.
- The level of pastoral care provided for all members of the community is exemplary and is an outstanding strength of the school which allows students to flourish.

- The chaplaincy team are a visible presence in the school and provide excellent role models. The Lectio Divina is at the heart of prayer life and makes a unique and valued contribution to the Catholic life of the school.

### What the school needs to improve

- Continue to plan and develop the implementation of the *Religious Education Directory* (RED) including working collaboratively with the diocese.
- Further develop opportunities to harness the strong practices within the faculty in adaptive teaching to support all groups of students and enable them to make further progress.
- Ensure consistency of standards of written work, and response to teacher feedback in the lower school.

## 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**

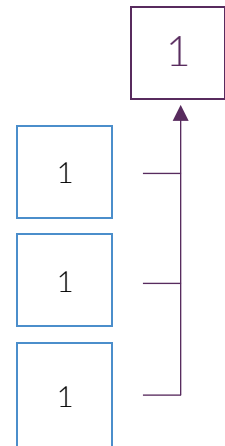
The extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school

**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



Downside School is explicitly a Catholic Benedictine boarding school which puts Christ at the centre of every aspect of school life. Students have a profound understanding of their distinctive Catholic identity and are authentic witnesses to their faith. They are encouraged to show respect for themselves and for others and feel highly valued for who they are and what they achieve. Both day students and those who board thrive through their holistic education and consequently feel a genuine sense of care. Students respond extremely positively to the call to service to others and recognise how helping others enriches them in their own lives. They articulate how the very practical work they have accomplished has enabled them to deepen their relationship with God. The school benefits greatly from the work of established communities, each named after a particular saint, for example, the St Teresa community of service providing the soup run every Thursday and help for the homeless. Prayer punctuates daily life and students have a deep understanding of what their faith means to them. The Lectio Divina groups enable students to reflect in a meditative way, away from the busyness of daily life and focussing on what God is saying to them. This is a unique and integral aspect of school life and is another exceptional feature.

Downside School goes to great length to provide a range of full and inspiring activities which clearly impacts on every aspect of school life. This vision is a clear expression of the educational mission of the Church. Staff commitment at all levels is exceptional. They readily serve the community and participate willingly in activities and routines which promote the school's high expectations and standards, and especially those which reinforce Benedictine values. Staff actively encourage students to try their best and they accomplish many outstanding outcomes. This underpins the belief that each student has gifts and talents which are unique to them. There

is a well-established culture of support which encourages all students to be the best version of themselves in every aspect of their lives and this is a strength. The personal, social and health education programme (PSHE) is well crafted and delivered by tutors. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is taught as part of this, and these lessons are valued greatly by students. The pastoral care of students is outstanding and allows students to flourish. Staff are exemplary role models, and they show respect and compassion for the individual in all their dealings with students. This is clearly illustrated in the consistent provision of high-quality house prayer where group and individual achievement is celebrated.

Leaders and governors have a shared understanding of their responsibilities in leading a community of faith and are committed to the ongoing development of Catholic life. The headteacher has an inspirational vision for Catholic education and provides exceptional leadership which is valued by all. He is ably supported by a dedicated and enthusiastic leadership team. Students' views are regularly sought, and they are readily involved in shaping the Catholic life and mission of the school. The student led work on 'Shattered Pens Day' for Aid to the Church in Need is remarkable. Leaders and students are actively involved in the life of the parish and wider community. Outreach work also includes active collaboration with the diocese, local Catholic schools, and other Benedictine schools nationally. The link governor provides excellent support in monitoring and evaluating Catholic life. Governors and leaders enthusiastically support new staff induction which encourages full participation in the school's Catholic life and mission. One INSET day is used each year to develop teachers' understanding of Catholic ethos. Consequently, staff speak eloquently about what their involvement means to them on both a practical and personal level. The latest work on Catholic social teaching has had a notable impact on the whole community at Downside School.

## Religious education

The quality of curriculum religious education

### Religious education key judgement grade

**Pupil outcomes**

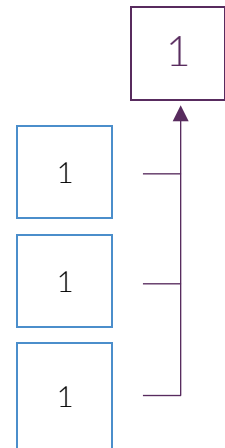
How well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in religious education

**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



Outcomes in religious education over the last three years have been outstanding. Evidence from the school’s own detailed analysis indicates that nearly all students have continued to make at least expected and above expected progress. Students engage extremely well in a variety of activities and approach their work with great interest and enjoyment. They treat each other with respect, and all listen attentively when discussing religious concepts and alternative views. Work is appropriately adapted to meet the needs of all students and they are challenged effectively in their learning throughout the lesson. The faculty focus on developing extended writing across all year groups is highly commendable. Key vocabulary is revisited routinely which supports students well in becoming confident in their use of religious language. Students learn about other faiths as part of the curriculum and value the opportunity this gives them, and they articulate how this adds to the richness of the community as a whole. Sixth form lessons demonstrate high expectations, outstanding outcomes, and deep theological discussion. A lesson observed on Eschatology was truly exceptional with students demonstrating secure and profound knowledge and understanding which they applied to their discussions.

The religious education faculty is a strong team and have extremely impressive subject knowledge and high expectations of students. As a result, they ask searching and incisive questions to both test and develop student understanding in lessons. Students concentrate well and have a clear understanding of their level of progress and how to improve further. Assessment is used to identify students who make exceptional progress or who may need further support. However, responses to written feedback from teachers is not consistent amongst students in the lower school. Students know that ‘clinics’ are available to them during prep to access further support and guidance when necessary. All teachers are committed to maintaining high standards of learning and teaching. Lessons are well planned and provide a

range of diverse activities which enhances the sense of enjoyment that students' express for their learning. Pair and group work is used effectively to consolidate student understanding. The religious education faculty has a clear understanding of its role in supporting the moral, ethical, and spiritual formation of students which is outstanding.

The experienced head of faculty provides a clear vision for learning and teaching and encourages all teachers to develop their own unique style that draws upon their strengths and theological interests. Learning walks, lesson observations and book scrutiny all occur as part of the school's regular monitoring, evaluation, and review processes. Faculty evaluation and improvement planning is reviewed formally each year. The link governor is vastly experienced and has strong links with the religious education faculty and meets regularly both formally and informally to monitor progress and discuss issues for development. Records of governor visits are available which enables governors to be very well informed of present standards and ensure plans are in place to sustain further improvement. Leaders and governors have ensured that religious education receives the required time allocation in all year groups. Therefore, this complies with the requirements of the Bishops' Conference. The budget allocation for religious education is in line with other core subjects in the school. Schemes of work have been reviewed to implement the requirements of the *Religious Education Directory* (RED). This has already been introduced in the first and second years and will be rolled out further next year.

## 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 are fully immersed in the meaningful prayer and liturgy life of Downside School. A rich and varied experience of prayer includes morning and evening prayer, Benediction, Lectio Divina, individual house prayer, personal group prayer, the rosary, stations of the cross in addition to the three Masses held during the week and on Sunday. Students are highly respectful, and everyone participates thoughtfully and reverently in prayer. Downside School has successfully created an environment where students can celebrate together with a deep sense of joy. This includes the use of plainchant as well as the inspirational communal singing experienced during the inspection. The school is rightly proud in saying that 'staff are very skilled in supporting students to plan and lead well-constructed celebrations of prayer and liturgy'. Students are extremely confident in recognising and articulating the connection between prayer and liturgy, and the curriculum and life of the school. They speak enthusiastically about their involvement in prayer and liturgy and have great ownership of their own spiritual experience. This is reflected in the very high numbers of students who make their First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Indeed, one student was received into the Church during the house celebration during the inspection. The many icons, statues and paintings around the school all reflect the Catholic life, mission, and Benedictine values of the school.

Praying together follows the natural rhythm and richness of this Benedictine school. The school benefits greatly from the support of the priest chaplain, the lay chaplain and the Manquehue community who provide a wide variety of enriching worship experiences. The St John community provides prayer and Lectio leaders, and the St Luke community provides servers, readers, and liturgical preparation. Reflection is used effectively to allow students to make connections between current issues being experienced by communities around the world and the impact that this has on their daily lives, for example, the origami cranes for peace. Students have a

secure knowledge and clear understanding of how to put faith into action. An extensive range of well-planned charitable activities provide support for Cafod, Mary's Meals, Aid to the Church in Need and Help for the Homeless. A rich and well-designed programme of retreats are available for students in all year groups with sixth form students being given the opportunity to experience monastic retreat. Parents speak enthusiastically about the school's caring and supportive ethos, one family describing 'a wonderful school which puts service, grace and values at its heart', and another commenting that it is 'a fantastic school where children feel happy, safe and able to develop both spiritually and academically'.

Leaders and governors have a deep understanding of their role in leading a community of faith. Senior leaders inspire others through their modelling of exemplary practice. Student leadership of prayer is encouraged and the work of the Lectio leaders is outstanding. Senior students serve as excellent role models for younger students and support them willingly on their faith journey. They carry out their responsibilities joyfully and demonstrate a genuine commitment to the community. The chaplaincy team is a visible presence, are outstanding role models and make a significant contribution to the prayer and worship of the school. Leaders plan the school calendar carefully to ensure that all key celebrations in the Church's year are observed including Mass, the sacraments, and Holy days of obligation. All leaders, the chaplaincy team and Lectio leaders provide outstanding training opportunities for prayer and liturgy across the school which is welcomed by all members of the community. The governing body is fully involved in the monitoring and evaluation of collective worship. Systems are formalised which ensures that the provision of collective worship is appropriate for all. The Old Chapel and the Abbey Church are exceptional sacred spaces and are physically and spiritually central to the life of the community.



## Information about the school

Full name of school	Downside School
School unique reference number (URN)	123910
School DfE Number (LAESTAB)	933/6021
Full postal address of the school	Downside School, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Radstock, BA3 4RJ
School phone number	01761 235100
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Hobbs
Chair of Governors/Trustees	Mr John Ludlow
School Website	<a href="https://www.downside.co.uk">https://www.downside.co.uk</a>
Trusteeship	Benedictine
Multi-academy trust or company (if applicable)	N/A
Phase	Secondary
Type of school	Catholic Independent School
Admissions policy	N/A
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Date of last denominational inspection	31 <sup>st</sup> October – 2 <sup>nd</sup> November 2006
Previous denominational inspection grade	Good

## The inspection team

Mr Garry Maher  
Mrs Helen Pepper

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