

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School



Together we live and learn; we
play and pray

Progression in Prayer

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Purpose

This framework sets out how pupils are progressively formed to participate in, understand, plan, lead and evaluate prayer and liturgy. It should be used alongside the Prayer and Liturgy Policy, the Annual Plan of Provision and phase-appropriate planning and evaluation materials.

Progression is based on age and capacity, not age alone. Adaptations for pupils with SEND should enable genuine participation and growing agency without lowering the theological or spiritual ambition of the experience.

1. Principles underpinning progression

Participation before performance	Pupils are formed first as members of a praying community. Visible roles are only one part of full, conscious and active participation.
Formation before independence	Adults explicitly teach the meaning of prayer, Scripture, silence, symbol, gesture, liturgical seasons and ministries before expecting pupils to make independent choices.
Choice becomes discernment	Progression is not simply giving older pupils more options. Pupils increasingly explain why a choice is appropriate for the Scripture, season, purpose and people gathered.
Prayer leads to mission	Pupils increasingly connect prayer with how they live, serve, forgive, seek justice and contribute to the common good.
Evaluation becomes deeper	Reflection develops from noticing and expressing a response to evaluating participation, faithfulness, spiritual impact and next steps.
Age and capacity	Pupils with SEN are supported through visual, sensory, symbolic, communicative and relational approaches appropriate to their capacity, with meaningful opportunities to participate and lead.

2. Sacred Heart planning language

Gather → Word → Response → Mission

This is Sacred Heart's child-friendly formation language for Celebrations of the Word. "Mission" expresses the Directory's "Send" stage. It is not a replacement for the prescribed structure of Mass or other liturgies of the Church.

3. At-a-glance phase expectations

Dimension	EYFS	KS1	Lower KS2	Upper KS2
Overall formation	Experience, imitate, notice and make simple choices.	Participate confidently in familiar forms and make supported choices.	Explain choices and share responsibility for planning and leading.	Discern, justify, lead and evaluate with growing independence and theological understanding.
Adult role	Model, name and scaffold.	Teach, offer appropriate choices and rehearse.	Coach, question and gradually release responsibility.	Facilitate, challenge rationale and safeguard liturgical norms.
Pupil voice	"I noticed... / I liked... / I felt..."	"This helped us pray because..."	"We chose this because..."	"This was appropriate because... Next time we would..."
Evidence of progression	Engagement and simple responses.	Confident participation and simple explanation.	Increasing rationale, shared leadership and evaluation.	Independent discernment, purposeful leadership, spiritual impact and mission.

4. Detailed progression framework

The statements below describe the intended direction of travel. They are not a checklist to be completed at a fixed age. Staff should use professional judgement and the principle of age and capacity.

Strand	EYFS	KS1	Lower KS2 Years 3–4	Upper KS2 Years 5–6
1. Disposition and participation	Join in through stillness, gesture, song, simple responses and attentive listening for short periods. Begin to recognise that prayer is a special time with God.	Participate reverently in familiar prayers, responses, songs, silence and gestures. Know that people can pray in different ways and that prayer is speaking and listening to God.	Participate with increasing attentiveness and self-regulation. Explain how silence, posture, gesture, response and song help a community pray together.	Participate consciously and confidently across varied forms of prayer and liturgy. Model reverence for younger pupils and explain that active participation includes interior attention as well as visible ministry.
2. Understanding prayer and liturgy	Know that we pray together and by ourselves; recognise prayer as a special time to be with and speak to God.	Recognise common forms of school prayer and know that Mass is a special celebration of the Church. Begin to distinguish a Celebration of the Word from an ordinary assembly.	Explain in simple terms the difference between personal prayer, communal prayer, a Celebration of the Word and Mass. Recognise that liturgy belongs to the worship of the Church.	Explain with increasing precision the relationship and distinction between prayer, Celebrations of the Word and liturgy. Understand that Mass and sacramental liturgies follow the Church's prescribed rites and are not freely redesigned.

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Strand	EYFS	KS1	Lower KS2 Years 3–4	Upper KS2 Years 5–6
3. Gather	Help prepare a simple prayer focus by placing a cloth, cross, Bible or candle with adult support. Join the Sign of the Cross and familiar gathering song or action.	Choose from a small number of appropriate symbols, colours, songs or gathering actions. Explain a simple reason for a choice, e.g. “purple because it is Advent.”	Plan a purposeful gathering which helps people become ready to pray. Link colour, symbol, music and opening words to the season, Scripture or theme.	Design a coherent gathering which creates the right disposition for prayer. Justify choices in relation to liturgical season, purpose and community, avoiding unnecessary or decorative elements.
4. Word / Scripture	Listen to a short passage from Scripture, respond through word, action, image or symbol, and recognise the Bible as God’s Word.	Listen reverently and begin to proclaim short passages. Choose from adult-selected Scripture and make a simple link between the reading and the prayer theme.	Locate and select suitable Scripture with guidance. Proclaim with clarity and reverence. Explain why the chosen passage is appropriate and distinguish Scripture from other reflective texts.	Select suitable Scripture with increasing independence, informed by season and purpose. Proclaim confidently and explain the theological/pastoral rationale. Know that non-biblical material may enrich reflection but does not replace Scripture at the heart of a Celebration of the Word.

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Strand	EYFS	KS1	Lower KS2 Years 3–4	Upper KS2 Years 5–6
5. Response	Respond through a simple prayer, silence, song, movement, drawing, placing an object or repeating a response.	Choose an appropriate response from familiar forms: silence, intercession, song, traditional prayer, simple symbolic action or personal prayer.	Plan varied but purposeful responses to Scripture. Use silence, intercession, traditional prayer, music, symbol or creative response and explain how the response grows from the Word.	Discern the most fitting response rather than using activity for its own sake. Draw confidently on Catholic prayer tradition, silence, intercession, meditation, music and symbol while maintaining coherence and prayerfulness.
6. Mission / Send	Identify one simple way to show love, kindness, forgiveness or helpfulness after prayer.	Say what Jesus or the Scripture may be asking us to do and identify a realistic action at home or school.	Connect the Word and prayer to a concrete mission in school, family, parish or community. Begin to link mission to Catholic Social Teaching.	Articulate how prayer calls Christians to conversion, service, justice and the common good. Formulate meaningful mission which flows directly from Scripture and can be revisited/evaluated.
7. Liturgical year	Notice changing colours and symbols and recognise key celebrations such as Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter.	Name the principal liturgical seasons and associate key colours, symbols and simple meanings with them.	Explain the meaning of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and Ordinary Time and use this understanding when planning prayer.	Use the liturgical calendar confidently to shape Scripture, music, environment and prayer. Explain concepts such as preparation, repentance, Paschal joy, discipleship and the Holy Spirit's mission.

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Strand	EYFS	KS1	Lower KS2 Years 3–4	Upper KS2 Years 5–6
8. Common prayer and Catholic tradition	Join in the Sign of the Cross, simple Morning Offering, grace and familiar parts of the Our Father and Hail Mary.	Know and use the Sign of the Cross, Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Glory be, Grace before meals and Grace after meals with growing understanding.	Secure earlier prayers and encounter/use the Apostles' Creed, Act of Contrition, Angel of God, Come Holy Spirit, Prayer of St Richard of Chichester, Morning Offering and Rosary.	Secure earlier repertoire and encounter/use the Magnificat, Acts of Faith/Hope/Love, Benedictus, Angelus, Hail Holy Queen, Memorare, Jesus Mary and Joseph, and Eternal Rest. Select familiar prayers appropriately rather than mechanically.
9. Silence, music, symbol and gesture	Experience short moments of silence and respond to candles, cross, Bible, music, images and simple gestures.	Maintain short prayerful silence and explain simple meanings of familiar symbols and gestures. Join communal singing confidently.	Use silence with increasing maturity. Select music, symbol and gesture for a clear purpose and explain their meaning in relation to prayer.	Use silence, music, symbol and gesture with restraint and theological purpose. Evaluate whether they deepened participation or distracted from the Word and prayer.
10. Planning	Make one or two choices with an adult using pictures/objects.	Use a visual planner with adult support to make choices within Gather–Word–Response–Mission.	Plan collaboratively using a structured format. Allocate roles, choose Scripture and responses, and give reasons for key choices.	Plan collaboratively and increasingly independently, considering context, season, Scripture, participation, accessibility, ministries, response and mission. Work within liturgical norms and seek guidance where needed.

Strand	EYFS	KS1	Lower KS2 Years 3–4	Upper KS2 Years 5–6
11. Leadership and ministry	Lead a repeated response, carry/place an object, make the Sign of the Cross or offer a simple prayer with support.	Lead familiar elements, read a short prayer or Scripture passage, introduce a response, or help prepare sacred space with rehearsal.	Share defined ministries and lead substantial parts of a Celebration of the Word. Support peers and younger pupils. Understand that leadership serves the prayer of the whole community.	Lead Celebrations of the Word confidently, sensitively and prayerfully; coordinate peers and adapt appropriately to those gathered. Understand boundaries between lay leadership and roles reserved to ordained ministers.
12. Evaluation and mystagogy	Say or show what they noticed, how they felt, or what helped them be still/pray.	Identify what helped people pray and one thing they might do differently next time. Recall the message or mission.	Evaluate participation, Scripture, prayerfulness and impact. Identify a strength and a specific improvement. Begin to “go deeper” by reflecting on what the experience means for life.	Evaluate quality and impact with depth: participation, fidelity to Scripture/Catholic tradition, use of silence/music/symbol, accessibility, spiritual impact and mission. Use mystagogical reflection to identify how prayer has shaped thinking and action.
13. Impact on life and Catholic Social Teaching	Recognise that prayer can help us be loving, kind, thankful and sorry.	Give examples of how prayer may change what we do and link familiar Gospel messages to kindness, forgiveness, sharing and care for creation.	Explain how prayer and Scripture influence choices and relationships. Make explicit links to themes such as dignity, solidarity, care for creation and the common good.	Explain how prayer and liturgy shape discipleship and inspire action. Connect Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching and mission; evaluate whether intended

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Strand	EYFS	KS1	Lower KS2 Years 3–4	Upper KS2 Years 5–6
				action has made a difference.
14. Inclusion and supporting others	Participate through preferred communication, sensory and relational approaches; recognise that everyone belongs in prayer.	Respect different ways people participate and help create a welcoming prayer environment.	Plan with awareness of different needs, including communication, sensory and physical access. Support peers without taking over their participation.	Anticipate accessibility and inclusion when planning; adapt participation so pupils of differing capacity can exercise genuine agency and ministry while preserving the integrity of the celebration.

5. What progression should look like in practice

EYFS – encounter and imitation

Prayer is relational, sensory, brief and repetitive. Adults model reverence and language, give pupils real but limited choices, and help them recognise Scripture, sacred objects, silence and simple responses. Evidence is primarily observed participation, not paperwork.

KS1 – familiarity and supported choice

Pupils become secure in common prayers and routines and begin to explain simple choices. Adults continue to curate appropriate options. Planning should be visual and concise, with children taking responsibility for selected elements rather than the whole celebration at once.

Lower KS2 – explanation and shared responsibility

Pupils move from choosing to explaining. They begin to locate Scripture, allocate ministries, plan coherent responses and evaluate impact. Adults coach through questioning: “Why is this appropriate?” “How will this help everyone pray?”

Upper KS2 – discernment, leadership and impact

Pupils should demonstrate growing independence without being left unsupported. They justify choices, understand liturgical boundaries, lead others sensitively, evaluate spiritual impact and connect prayer explicitly to mission, Catholic Social Teaching and service.

6. Expectations for pupil-led Celebrations of the Word

- Pupil-led does not mean adult-free. The adult’s role changes from director to teacher, coach and guardian of good liturgical practice.
- Children should not be expected to create prayer from a blank sheet. Appropriate Scripture, prayers, music and resources should be taught and made accessible before pupils are asked to select from them.
- Independence should be evident in the quality of rationale and discernment, not in the quantity of written planning.
- Roles should be distributed so that leadership is not limited to confident readers. Singing, symbol, welcome, silence, signing, technology, movement, intercession and preparation of space can all provide meaningful participation where appropriate.
- Pupils should understand that leading prayer is ministry: the purpose is to help the community encounter God, not to perform.

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7. SEND and age/capacity adaptations

Need / barrier	Possible access strategy	Progression principle
Communication	Objects of reference, symbols, signing/AAC, repeated responses, recorded contribution, partner-supported communication.	Increase agency and intentional choice; do not equate speech or reading with spiritual participation.
Sensory regulation	Predictable structure, reduced visual clutter, appropriate lighting/sound, seating choice, movement break before prayer, sensory-safe alternatives.	Support regulation so the pupil can attend and participate meaningfully.
Cognition / processing	Shorter Scripture, pre-teaching, visual sequence, one-step roles, repetition and concrete symbolism.	Deepen understanding over time through familiar forms rather than continually adding complexity.
Physical access	Accessible positioning, adapted objects, alternative processional/ministerial roles, technology where useful.	Enable genuine ministry and belonging without tokenism.
Emotional / relational need	Trusted adult, clear expectations, opt-in forms of visible leadership, opportunities for quiet/private response.	Participation may be interior or relational; build confidence gradually.

8. Monitoring progression

Leaders should monitor whether pupils are becoming more prayerfully confident and theologically informed, rather than collecting excessive evidence. A balanced evidence base may include:

- pupil voice: what pupils understand about prayer, liturgy, Scripture, liturgical seasons, planning, evaluation and mission;
- observation across phases: the quality of participation, silence, responses, singing, leadership and use of sacred space;
- planning/evaluation samples where naturally produced, showing increasing rationale rather than increasing paperwork;
- conversations with staff about how responsibility is being transferred to pupils;
- evidence that pupils can explain how prayer has influenced thinking, relationships or action;
- evidence that pupils with SEND participate according to age and capacity and have meaningful opportunities for agency and leadership.

9. Phase-leader / teacher review prompts

- Are pupils in this phase doing something genuinely more developed than pupils in the phase below?
- Can pupils explain why they have made particular choices, or are they simply choosing from a menu?
- Does Scripture remain central?
- Are pupils learning a widening repertoire of Catholic prayer while securing the prayers expected for their age phase?
- Is silence becoming more mature and purposeful?
- Are pupils increasingly able to evaluate impact and identify a precise improvement?
- Can pupils articulate a mission which flows from the Word rather than being added at the end?
- Are pupils with SEND exercising meaningful choice and participation according to capacity?
- Are adults coaching and forming pupils, or either controlling everything or withdrawing too soon?

10. Relationship to other Sacred Heart documents

This framework should be read and used alongside:

- Prayer and Liturgy Policy 2026–27
- Annual Plan of Provision for Prayer and Liturgy
- EYFS visual planning prompts
- KS1 pupil planning format
- Lower KS2 pupil planning and evaluation format
- Upper KS2 pupil planning and mystagogical evaluation format
- Staff Celebration of the Word planning format
- Prayer and Liturgy monitoring and pupil voice materials

11. Reference points

- Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, To Love You More Dearly: The Prayer & Liturgy Directory for Catholic Schools, Academies and Colleges in England and Wales.
- Catholic Schools Inspectorate, National Framework / Comparative Evaluation Schedule and Judgement Descriptors (September 2025).
- Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School Prayer and Liturgy Policy 2026–27.

Working document for implementation, staff formation and review during 2026–27