

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Junior School

St Mary's CE (VC) Junior School, St Mary's Way, Baldock, Herts SG7 6HY

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	St Albans Diocese
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust/ federation	n/a
Date of inspection	5 th May 2017
Date of last inspection	19 th June 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 117385
Headteacher	Samantha Britton
Inspector's name and number	Juliet Lyal, 829

School context

St Mary's Church of England (VC) Junior School is a two form entry school with 240 pupils from Year 3 to Year 6. The current head teacher took up her role on 18th April 2017 following the retirement of the previous head on 17th April 2017. At the time of the inspection she had been in school for thirteen days. The senior leadership team comprises the head, the deputy and both leaders of upper and lower key stages. The school serves families from its immediate locality and most pupils transfer directly from the Infant school next door. Pupils are mainly White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs support is broadly average. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding by the pupil premium is significantly above the national average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's C of E (VC) Junior School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The commitment, drive and vision of leaders and managers along with staff, pupils and parents have energised the distinctive Christian character of the school. The impact on behaviour, attitudes to learning and pupils' enjoyment of school is significantly strong.
- The impact of the Christian character and values on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all learners is very strong.
- The strong partnership with the local church benefits the whole school community and impacts families who are traditionally non church attenders.

Areas to improve

- Deepen learners' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith, their understanding of global communities and of denominations other than Anglican.
- Develop pupil led worship in order to embed it into whole school worship planning, delivery and evaluation.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners

The school's bedrock is the distinctive Christian ethos, which is engrained in how everyone lives and works. Its impact on the school and local community is now very strong. The broad and creative curriculum, ethos and links between the school's Christian values, religious education (RE) and worship impact significantly on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of all learners. The school's eight Christian values, which include 'integrity', 'responsibility' and 'grace' also have a strong impact on pupils' behaviour, progress and attainment because they instil habits of mind that specifically encourage good attitudes to learning. The 2016 end of Key Stage 2 attainment was well above national and county expected standards and the majority of disadvantaged pupils achieve well. Since September 2016 a re-modelling of the reading scheme, to support the well-established robust intervention programme, has strongly impacted all learners' progress. Pupils are confident, extremely polite and articulate and know that they belong to a church school saying 'We do well because we are a church school.' They can explain how the Christian values help them to think about their own beliefs and actions. The values also result in an ethos of inclusivity and a high degree of respect shown towards everyone. The impact of this is clearly seen in the number of non-church-going families who attend the school's termly church service. Many also encourage their children to participate as acolytes or church choir members. Reflecting on the school's aims, pupils stress that 'everyone gets on really well' adding 'we don't feel judged by others'. They can explain the relevance of the school's Christian values to their lives, giving daily examples of how these are acted upon. They are proud of the superhero's book where they can nominate each other, or staff members, who they see 'living out' the values, and many pupils can articulate a link to stories about God and the life of Jesus. All learners are exceptionally well cared for and offer care to others, including adults because they respect and trust each other. Notably, pupils have checked with the head teacher that she is 'settling in'. Pupils with learning or physical disabilities are supported by their peers as well as staff. Pupils say that 'we trust in God' and are confident that God listens to their prayers. Because pupils 'want to understand it better', the school focuses on one Christian value each half term. This has had an impact within and beyond the school. Pupils, parents and grandparents comment on discussions and actions at home related to the Christian values. The school council pupils take their elected role very seriously and understand how the school's Christian values impact this. They make decisions on 'behalf of others' and say that they are 'part of making the school better'. Pupils understand the term 'spiritual' and say they enjoy the library reflection space as a place to 'think about God'. Their theological understanding is deepening, although explicit Christian vocabulary is not always used in discussion. Outdoor spaces, dens and the reflective garden contribute to spiritual development. Pupils feel inspired by the displays around the school, currently about key Christian concepts, biblical texts and words of wisdom, and are confident when explaining them. Some of the displays were created during an 'RE and Art' week planned to enhance pupils' biblical knowledge. Learners show respect and an increasing understanding of other faith communities but understanding of diversity within Christianity is under-developed. Likewise full awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith. Year 6 pupils display good subject knowledge, responding enthusiastically to deeper questioning and challenging tasks. In the lesson observed, they enjoyed discussing the behaviour of Adam and Eve and the implications for Christian responsibility for the world, linking this to the current school value focus on 'faithfulness'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The school community values and expresses the importance of collective worship. Held in the school hall, classrooms or church, worship is attended by pupils with, on most days, all staff members. Pupils say that this time 'all together' is important to them and that they like the pattern of their Anglican worship. They show understanding of the meaning and significance of what they do by explaining, for example, why the Trinity candle comprises three small candles, why a greeting, a prayer and the grace are said or worship songs sung. They understand the links between the Bible readings and the school's value focus and how the coloured ribbon tied around the candle represents the church year. The Lord's Prayer is shared weekly whilst on other days prayer is led by a senior leader or spontaneously by pupils. Pupils help as technicians and hall monitors. During worship, pupils are attentive and well behaved; answering questions enthusiastically and appropriately, 'doing more than just remembering'. Whole school pupil-led worship is in its infancy; a pupil worship group met in November with the incumbent and subsequently planned, delivered and evaluated an act of worship during Advent. The school is committed to developing this and has plans in place. A preparation course led by the incumbent means that 30 pupils in Years 5 and 6 currently receive communion at their twice termly service. Others prefer to receive a blessing. The immediate impact of this service is noted through the 'noise of the silence' during distribution. The experience has prompted some pupils who are now in secondary school to be confirmed. All stakeholders value the end of term church services, which many parents attend, and services in school for the major Christian festivals. These are led by the incumbent with pupil participation and described by pupils, parents and staff as an 'important time together'.

Some parents comment that they too benefit from the space to think and reflect. Pupils can explain how their worship focuses on the person of Jesus and that it helps them to develop their understanding of the Church year and key Christian festivals. Pupils link the worship to the school's Christian values and can quote relevant biblical texts. Worship is often creative and touches all senses. Pupils describe when they made a prayer paperchain to wrap around everyone in the hall to represent God's love or when glitter was sprinkled on their heads at Pentecost. Through describing the lighting of the Trinity candle, pupils try to explain the Trinitarian nature of God, although a deeper understanding of this theology is under-developed. Since the previous inspection, evaluations of the impact of collective worship on the school community have become more formal. They are recorded in the worship log by pupils and/or staff and are used to inform planning. Prayer is central to this school and talked about openly by all. Pupils appreciate the boxes, placed at the prayer stations around the school, in which to place prayers and say that they believe 'God will listen and answer'. The prayers are transferred to a prayer book, kept in the library's reflection space for anyone to read. Some prayers might be chosen to be read in collective worship but not all because, pupils say, 'some are very personal'.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is outstanding

The school has made significant progress since the last inspection. Leaders and managers have built on the Christian distinctiveness and made it a church school with a strong sense of belonging, Christian identity and involvement. Following a review in 2014, leaders met with governors and consulted with parents and pupils to create a school mission and vision statement. As a result of this all stakeholders know that the school's vision is that all should be 'supported, valued and nurtured in a stimulating environment build on a foundation of Christian values and worship.' The mission statement 'where we learn, respect each other, build friendships and trust in God' is underpinned by biblical and Christian values teaching. To ensure that all stakeholders can access the statement, it is written on every written document sent from the school, sewn into the school quilt hanging in the hall, displayed in classrooms next to a wooden cross and posted on the school website. The head teacher describes how supportive the whole school and church communities have been leading up to her appointment and since starting at the school. The smooth transition from one head teacher to another was the result of the committed driving force of all stakeholders. The governors show themselves as a solid group that brings balance and expertise to the leadership and management. They know the school well and make frequent visits, supporting trips and attending social and curriculum events as well as in their formal governor visit role. Governors also participate with teachers in school training opportunities and in diocesan training days which strengthens their involvement and support for the school. The Christian distinctiveness sub-committee of foundation governors and co-opted staff governor, chaired by the incumbent, meets termly to evaluate the school as a church school and ensure that everything in the school is underpinned by its Christian character. The full governing body responds positively to the committee's recommendations, which have contributed to strengthening the school as a church school. The school benefits from the full involvement of the incumbent. His papers, written for and shared by governors and staff including one on Christian distinctiveness, are much valued. The school's close relationship with the local church has an impact on the whole community and there is regular sharing of premises and time. Some pupils enjoy singing in the church choir whilst others attend Awesome Club, run by the church in school. One member of staff in the school is also a deputy church warden. Governors meet annually with their curriculum subject leader which contributes to their clear understanding of pupil progress and achievement, profiles and targets. All staff are given opportunities for continuing professional development. Leadership in RE and collective worship is given a high priority and pupils continue to achieve well in RE. Training for the new Understanding Christianity project was attended by all teachers in January, who have been well prepared to introduce this alongside Hertfordshire's new Agreed Syllabus for RE from September. The senior leadership team is now structured so as to enable further development of the staff as leaders in church schools.

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