



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### North Mymms St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Dellsome Lane, Welham Green, Hatfield, AL9 7NE

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Good**

**Diocese: St Albans**

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Date of inspection: 26 February 2015

Date of last inspection: 03 December 2009

School's unique reference number: 117497

Headteacher: Vicky Humbles

Inspector's name and number: Judith Ruff 528

#### School context

St Mary's is a smaller than average primary school with 145 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils who have special educational needs is below average. The headteacher, who was appointed in 2013, was on maternity leave during the inspection. The deputy headteacher has become the interim headteacher, with an interim deputy headteacher also internally promoted. Staffing within the school has seen a number of changes recently. The church is a distance from the school, with coaches used to transport children to services there.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's as a Church of England school are good.

- The partnership with the local church community is strong, resulting in children and adults having a clear understanding of Christian life and worship
- The high quality of relationships within the school, which demonstrate daily that each child is valued and nurtured as a unique and special child, made in the image of God
- The well-developed pupil voice opportunities, which enable a deeper understanding of the values and principles of a church school, providing a clear framework for life

#### Areas to improve

- The Christian values to be made more explicit, so that all members of the school community and visitors are clear about these as a basis for school life and work
- Strengthen the teaching of Christianity within RE, so that key Christian theological beliefs are built upon in an age appropriate and incremental way across the school
- Develop a robust tracking system for RE, so that staff, school leaders and governors are clear about standards and progress rates achieved

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

At St Mary's each child is valued and nurtured as special and precious as a child of God. The Christian values that the school has adopted, together with the '5 Rs' which guide pupils in their learning behaviours, have clearly supported the improving profile of academic achievement. For example, a number of initiatives such as 'booster' and 'nurture' groups are provided for vulnerable pupils and these are successfully closing attainment and progress gaps and supporting those pupils with emotional and social needs. Work on values such as 'hope' has encouraged pupils to set themselves academic targets which are aspirational, together with 'courage' to persevere when work becomes challenging or difficult. Although the values are in place, they are yet to be made fully explicit to both the school community and to visitors. Despite a number of staff changes, the caring ethos of the school shines through. Parents speak of their children becoming more compassionate in their appreciation of people in need. The charitable giving of the school is impressive, together with good levels of community involvement, such as local carol singing and harvest gifts. Levels of pupil responsibility are good, with 'play leaders' from Year 6 leading activities and encouraging socialisation at lunchtimes. There is a strong school council and a recently formed 'learning committee' whereby pupil leaders' feedback from learning walks around classrooms. The importance of good attendance is rigorously promoted through a range of successful initiatives and incentive schemes. There have been no recent exclusions with the school working in a totally committed way to integrate all pupils, particularly those who arrive at in-year points. Behaviour across the school is good and pupils recognise that friendship involves appreciation and forgiveness. As yet pupils have not explored Christianity as a multi-cultural faith. They do understand and respect diversity and difference within other faith communities. Opportunities for spiritual development are evident across the curriculum and RE contributes to this positively.

**The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.**

Collective worship is an important part of the school day. Pupils and staff recognise the opportunities provided through worship to reflect, praise and learn more about the chosen school values. Worship impacts the pupils' behaviours. As one pupil said, 'I have learned that to be a good friend you have to think about the feelings of others and be prepared to forgive.'

Pupils are keen to participate in worship. An impact of pupil monitoring has been increased levels of pupil opportunities to write prayers, perform dramatic sketches and read from Bible passages. As yet, they have not had the experience of planning worship from start to finish. Pupils thoroughly enjoy singing as part of worship. They sing well and confidently. Periods of reflection enable pupils to think more deeply about the chosen theme and this is much valued. 'By closing my eyes, I can really concentrate on my thoughts and it shuts out things that might stop me.' Planning for collective worship involves the local vicar and includes teaching on the Trinity. Pupils are beginning to understand this concept and to explain it in simple terms. The weekly involvement of the vicar has had a good impact on the pupils' understanding of Anglican worship. Parents spoke glowingly of her ability to communicate the Christian message in an age appropriate and relevant way. Pupils understand the purposes of prayer. They are given opportunities to write prayers spontaneously and for special occasions. They know certain prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer, School Prayer and end of day prayer by heart. The vicar has been instrumental in introducing the seasons of the church year through different coloured stoles worn by teddy bears in each classroom. This has also supported the understanding of staff members too. All staff lead collective worship and good quality resources are available to help them with this. As yet no training has taken place for staff leading collective worship. The church is used well for church services, particularly considering that a coach is needed to transport the children to the church. Parents again appreciate the opportunity to join in the worship on these occasions. Special church festivals such as Pentecost are also celebrated within the school. Monitoring and evaluation of collective worship by pupils, staff and governors has led to improvements such as the increased participation of pupils in worship.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory.**

Standards of attainment for the majority of pupils are in line with national expectations. Assessment systems are in place for RE, taken from the local agreed syllabus. These are being further strengthened by a whole school approach to assessment involving a 'basic, advancing and deep' model. However, at present pupils' progress rates are not tracked across the school, so that there is a lack of understanding of standards and progress achieved over time. Differentiation is usually by outcome only, which means that higher ability pupils are not challenged with appropriate rigour. At present, Christianity is not taught to a sufficient level of depth and clarity. For example, it is too frequently taught as a comparative religion alongside other faiths, which introduces confusion into pupils' minds as to what are the key theological beliefs that are important to Christians. Pupils know about the Trinity, but are unsure as to whether this means that Christians worship three gods. Teachers work hard to make RE lessons creative and cross curricular. On the day of the inspection, teaching seen was good overall. There was an example of 'freeze framing' scenes from Palm Sunday to explore participants' thoughts and feelings. Pupils enjoy RE as shown by a recent survey outcome and through the inspection pupil interview. They enjoy learning about different faiths, particularly the first hand opportunities to visit a Hindu mandir and a Jewish synagogue as well as the local church. RE planning does include opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual understanding. As yet this aspect is not yet fully exploited. There are links with the school's Christian values, but these are presently implicit rather than explicit and are not identified in teachers' planning on a regular basis. The RE Subject Leader is new in post this term. However, she took over from an experienced RE leader, who had liaised effectively with the governor responsible for the subject. This term's joint monitoring of RE took the form of a 'learning walk' which noted the high profile of RE in classrooms and across the school through displays and RE tables. As yet, whole school staff training on RE has not taken place, mainly due to staff instability.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good.**

Governors and senior leaders promote a clear vision, recently worked into a concise statement of overarching expectation for the school. This is based and rooted in distinctively Christian values. Self-evaluation processes are collaborative and accurate. The recently established 'parent forums' have offered parents opportunities to learn about and discuss the school's journey of improvement. This is greatly valued by parents. Pupil voice is strong within the school and taken seriously by adults. The recently established 'learning committee' is honing its skills in analysing effective learning environments and how to promote high quality behaviours for learning. Priorities for the school development plan are an outcome from the self-evaluation, including good quality monitoring and evaluation involving governor representatives. The partnership with the local church community is a very real strength of the school. The vicar adds a significant and much valued contribution to the school through her weekly leadership of collective worship and role as collective worship and RE link governor. Reports are produced which show good evidence of a trusting and honest partnership between school and church. For example, as a result of recent monitoring, there has been a resource provided to strengthen staff members' understanding of the colours representing the church seasons. Although during the inspection, the substantive headteacher was on maternity leave, the interim headteacher showed a determined commitment to the school as a church school. The way in which the school had prepared and worked towards the inspection was impressive. The transition from the departing RE Subject Leader to the incoming one has been handled sensitively and effectively. The two leaders had good opportunities to liaise, share and discuss priorities in the autumn term. The RE governor has been very swift in offering her support, knowledge and understanding of the school's context. Links with the diocese are good, with the consultancy service being used well to advise and guide, particularly to support interim leaders in their new roles.