



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

### **Ponsbourne St Mary's Church of England (VC) Primary School**

Newgate Street Village  
Hertford  
SG13 8RA

#### **Diocese: St Albans**

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 25<sup>th</sup> September 2014

Date of last inspection: 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009

School's unique reference number: 117396

Headteacher: Mrs Dorothy Marlow

Inspector's name and number: Lindsay Fraser NS107

#### **School context**

Ponsbourne St Mary's is a smaller than average village primary school. Most pupils are from white British families and none speaks English as a second language. Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds. The proportion of pupils in receipt of pupil premium is well below the national average, whilst the proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is broadly average. The headteacher took up her post at the beginning of the current term.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ponsbourne St Mary's as a Church of England school are outstanding**

- Pupils are developing an excellent understanding of their Anglican heritage and the Christian faith as a result of the weekly morning worship in church and the termly communion service led by the rector together with her spiritual support for the school.
- The quality of the curriculum, especially religious education, contributes substantially to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development (SMSC) and the Christian character.
- The commitment and dedication of the staff, based on strong Christian values, ensure that the needs of all pupils are fully addressed, especially in times of change.

#### **Areas to improve**

- Strengthen the knowledge and understanding of the governing body with regard to the school as a church school in order to support the new headteacher in her vision to further develop the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- Incorporate pupils' suggestions, based on their evaluations, for further improving the quality of collective worship.

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

This is a school in which excellent behaviour and relationships, based on strong Christian values, are paramount. Pupils continually display independence and responsibility; they explain that their excellent behaviour is enhanced by their understanding and use of forgiveness and reconciliation. Pupils have been encouraged to conduct their own research into ways in which behaviour and attitudes to learning could be further improved; a positive impact in both areas has been seen throughout the school. Praise plays a major part throughout the school. A detailed policy for social, moral, spiritual and cultural development (SMSC) is in place, again rooted in Christian doctrine. SMSC development is implicit and explicit within the Christian ethos. Spiritual development in particular is a strong feature, based on an effective use of reflection throughout the curriculum. The school grounds provide an excellent resource for spiritual development, both in the woodland area and in the recently established quiet area. Pupils in the early years are gaining an excellent knowledge, awareness and appreciation of their natural environment. All pupils demonstrate a mature awareness of relationships, the importance of their families and an appreciation for the natural world. Pupils make very good progress and where pupils have learning needs and disabilities they are very well supported. This is enhanced by the excellent relationships staff have developed with all families, enabling parents to put their trust in the teaching and learning strategies used in school. Following a recent survey the parents report that their concerns have been well addressed by the new headteacher who has also shared her vision and school development plan with the parent body. Advice from the staff on helping their children to protect themselves from bullying has been particularly helpful. The school is strongly inclusive; pupils learn to respect and value their own faith, be it Christian or other faith, and to have the confidence to express their own opinions. Parents of other faiths and of no faith feel they and their children are fully included and have the confidence to attend school services. As one parent stated, 'The school sets an example of how to combine quality education with quality Christian values and leadership in a modern mixed society'. The school has identified the need for a greater awareness and experience of differing aspects of cultural life both nationally and internationally. However, a high degree of empathy is encouraged through the support of a range of charities and for the local community itself, the inspiration being the love of Jesus. The school works hard to achieve the above through encouraging an understanding of and a respect for diversity. This has also been achieved through the involvement of families from different backgrounds in religious education; children of different faiths are keen to share aspects of their own faith. The Christian character of the school is further enhanced through high standards in religious education including focus religious education weeks, based on a deeper learning about and from major faiths together with the Christian festivals. Visits to places of worship and visits from faith leaders further develop understanding.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective Worship is regarded by pupils and parents as an extremely positive, relevant and fulfilling aspect in the life of the school and an influence upon the attitudes and actions of the school community. Worship is perceived as a vital part of the school week beginning with a Monday morning church service. This is a time in which pupils can experience the practices and traditions of the Anglican church and gain an understanding of the Trinitarian nature of Christianity, which is then replicated and celebrated through school and class worship. Pupils receive a Trinitarian blessing, a blessing which is understood by the older pupils. Parents and governors are invited to attend this service, thus bringing the whole community together. Families of other faiths and those of none attend the Monday morning worship because they feel that it is totally inclusive. The many parents who attend report that the service is relevant to their own lives and they are then able to discuss and reflect upon the values and their relevance within the home. Pupils are also given the opportunity to remain in the church after

the service on a Monday morning to pray with the rector if they wish and this has been of emotional and spiritual support to a number of them. Prayer boxes are used in all classrooms and time for reflection is also a feature of each class. Planning for collective worship is undertaken by the headteacher and the rector; cohesive planning ensures that pupils are developing their understanding of values within the Christian context based on stories from the Bible. Pupils can describe in detail the fundamental concepts within their school values and can retell stories from the old and new testament, explaining what values they exemplify. Pupils take an active part in collective worship through leading reflection and sharing their own prayers. Opportunities to evaluate collective worship are given to pupils who are keen to make their collective worship even better, ideas which the headteacher is keen to incorporate. 'Worship is special because I can reflect on my day and learn from my actions so if I have done something wrong I can forgive myself and I won't do it again' was a quote made in a pupil's evaluation which reflects similar views expressed by many pupils. Whilst pupil and parental evaluation of collective worship is now in place, governor evaluation of collective worship is in its early stages.

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

The Christian vision is clearly articulated in the school aims and through the headteacher's introductory letter on the website. The headteacher and members of staff clearly live out and promote a vision rooted in distinctively Christian values, through which individuals are loved and valued. The headteacher is very new to the school. However, she has already met with parents with whom she has shared her vision for the future and parents speak highly of her willingness to listen and to address their concerns. Effective use is being made of diocesan support for the headteacher who is clearly benefiting from this provision. The school has been very well led during the interim headship and, together with the staff support for the school and the new headteacher, parents are able to report that the transition of leadership has been seamless. The rector plays a very important part in the life of the school, from leading services and sharing good practice from other schools, to providing huge pastoral support for the school and monitoring the development of SMSC and the school as a church school. Reports are produced for the governing body. Currently, discussion regarding the Christian distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school is not a regular feature of governing body meetings, although foundation governors continue to be active in their support of the school as a church school. The school has very close links with the local church, Ponsbourne St Mary's. The school newsletter, The Ponsbourne Post, includes information for parents of relevant activities within the church reflecting the integral aspect of the church to the school. Extensive training is given to the staff in the teaching of religious education and the subject has a high priority within the school. As a result religious education contributes significantly to the Christian character. 'Friends of The School' (FTS) supports this teaching and learning through the provision of financial resources for visits to places of worship of other faiths. . The school has quite rightly identified that even more involvement in the local community is an area for discussion and the school continues to seek ways in which links can be made with schools in other countries.

SIAMS report September 2014 Ponsbourne St Mary's Church of England (VC) Primary School, Newgate Street Village, Hertford SG13 8RA