

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ponsbourne St Mary's Church of England Primary School			
Address	Newgate Street Village, Hertford, Hertfordshire, SG13 8RA		
Date of inspection	08 October 2019	Status of school	Voluntary Controlled
Diocese	St Albans	URN	117396

Overall Judgement	Grade	Good
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?		
Additional Judgements		
The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good

School context

Ponsbourne St Mary's is a primary school with 103 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages. The school's admission number has recently increased and as a result, a growing number of children have joined the school as in-year admissions. The vicar is very new to post.

The school's Christian vision

Mission statement: 'Learn to love, love to learn'

Vision: ...that every member of our school community reaches their full potential as individuals, in a school where we are living God's love through our Christian values and by serving others, respecting and celebrating differences and becoming life-long learners.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16

Key findings

- Leaders and governors have worked hard to establish a clear vision and set of Christian values to underpin the school's welcoming, inclusive ethos.
- As a result of the school's vision and values, positive relationships exist between all members of the school community. There is a genuine culture of care and compassion which enables pupils to flourish.
- The relationship between the church and school provides an effective working partnership through which children gain a good understanding of Christian worship.
- Through their learning in religious education (RE), children develop a good knowledge of a number of bible stories and key events in the Christian calendar. However the written activities pupils are asked to do in their books do not provide them with sufficient challenge to develop deeper thinking skills.
- Governors have been fully committed to improving their understanding of church school effectiveness since the last inspection through monitoring and training.

Areas for development

- Continue to embed and promote the school's Christian vision and theological basis across the school's work, so that all stakeholders fully understand how it drives policies and practice.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to plan and lead their own independent acts of collective worship so that they may fully demonstrate their understanding of the role of Christian worship.
- Build the collaboration with other schools to share good practice in religious education (RE) and implement innovative, imaginative learning experiences for pupils.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

Under the leadership of a committed and passionate headteacher, school leaders and governors of Ponsbourne St Mary's are committed to promoting and embedding the school's vision through provision of learning experiences in which pupils can 'let their light shine'. Since the last inspection, the vision has been at the forefront of school development; governors have ensured a continual cycle of evaluating and monitoring church school effectiveness through regular reviews, diocesan training and their involvement with school life. Senior leaders and governors have a very clear understanding of how the vision drives the work of the school. However, not all stakeholders can articulate this link with the same depth.

The drive to be a caring, inclusive environment underpins all that the school does in ensuring all pupils and families are welcomed and supported. There is a clear sense of 'family' with a genuine warmth between staff and pupils; this is particularly evident in the way new children joining the school are fully embraced. Parents value the school's welcoming ethos and describe how they felt 'welcomed with open arms'. Pupils can recite the school's chosen biblical passage with confidence but are not yet able to fully articulate how this relates to their own lives or learning.

The school's long-established mission statement 'Learn to Love, Love to Learn' forms the foundation for curriculum choices; teachers provide learning opportunities that are exciting and interesting for children. As a result, pupils are positive towards their learning and are well supported to achieve their best. Over time, outcomes for pupils in national assessments are good due to the school's commitment to meeting their individual needs.

Leaders ensure that tailored programmes of support are designed for vulnerable pupils enabling them to flourish in an environment where they feel nurtured. This is strengthened by the school's 'lesson study' approach where teaching staff work collaboratively to evaluate and further develop their provision. The school is committed to identifying barriers to learning early, and works closely with external agencies for advice and training. This includes significant work to support emotional and mental health needs. One parent described, 'The school helps my child see that they have talents and that they have a little light that can shine.' Governors explain how the support for disadvantaged pupils drives financial decisions, such as providing high levels of support staff in school.

Pupils' spiritual development is well-supported at Ponsbourne St Mary's, especially through the weekly worship at church. Opportunities for stillness and reflection are provided and many children have a good understanding of prayer, with some explaining how they 'pray to say thank you to God'. Classroom prayer areas enable pupils to have moments of quiet and give consideration to life's big questions. Spiritual development is enhanced across the curriculum, for example considering the wonder of God's world through Forest School lessons and considering the miracle of birth in science.

Children are given opportunities to look beyond themselves and think about the wider world through worship, RE and across the curriculum. Pupils talk readily of the importance of helping others through charity support such as the current Bishop's Harvest Appeal, 'We brought money for Tanzania because they don't have electricity and we could help them get solar panels.' Children have identified and supported social action projects as a result of their learning in RE, for example by raising enough money to build a well for a village in Myanmar. They are given opportunities to share their views and ideas on their school through the 'Family Forum' which includes every child in school. As a result, pupils are confident to share their opinions and can recognize examples of global injustice.

Behaviour and relationships are good as a result of the school's focus on values education, which is embedded in the life of the school. Pupils can clearly describe why values are important for life. Values form the basis for discussions around behaviour choices and, when things go wrong, forgiveness lies at the heart of moving on. Parents report how children are taught to 'take responsibility for their actions' and how they discuss values at home regularly. Older pupils take good care of younger children and initiatives such as 'The Ponsbourne Partner' enable all pupils to feel they have someone to turn to readily. Pupils are respectful of diversity, explaining how 'everyone is included here'.

Collective worship provides the opportunity for pupils and adults to grow spiritually and experience Anglican practice. The school has overcome the restrictions created by the size of the school building by introducing classroom based worship throughout the week. The whole school community, including parents, is able to come together in worship once a week in church as a result of the school's strong relationship with the church. This is seen as an important feature of the school with parents reporting that it 'provides a calmness to start the week' and can also describe the impact on their lives as adults: 'Through going to school worship I have got used to having God in my life.'

Children are invited to lead the whole school in prayer during worship, which they do so with confidence. They are keen to participate in worship through readings and drama. However, worship is predominantly led by adults and pupils have not yet had the opportunity to plan and lead acts of worship independently. Teachers receive support, planning and training from the headteacher and as a result, feel confident to lead acts of worship.

Worship is meticulously planned by the headteacher and vicar; it includes aspects of Anglican practice such as the use of a 3 flamed candle, greetings, the Lord's Prayer and a termly Eucharist service. Through worship, pupils have some understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God. Children can name a number of key Bible stories and show some understanding of the underlying messages in them.

A system of assessment is in place to track pupils' attainment and progress in RE. Learning is enriched with trips, visits and themed weeks; these are especially effective in helping children explore, debate and question. However, written work in pupils' books does not fully reflect the same level of challenge that is provided in discussion activities. Collaborative links have been made with other local church schools to begin to explore and share ideas for innovative teaching and learning in RE.

There are frequent opportunities for staff to develop professionally through on-going training and participation in projects. The school has an effective relationship with the Diocese of St Albans, with senior staff and governors accessing training on church school effectiveness, RE and worship. Staff speak highly of how school leaders care for their wellbeing and workload, making them feel respected and valued. As one summed up, 'This school gives you a hug every day.'

Headteacher	Dorothy Marlow
Inspector's name and number	Rachel Peddie 934