



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School

St Mary's Way, Baldock SG7 6HY

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 24 February 2016

Date of last inspection: 21 September 2010

School's unique reference number: 117384

Headteacher: Claire Gunn

Inspector's name and number: Chris Westgarth 44

School context

St Mary's is a smaller than average school with 180 on roll. A higher than average number have a special educational need or disability (SEND). The headteacher has been in post since 2012. The school experienced extensive flooding in July 2015 and repairs were completed by January 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's Infant School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- The vision, inspiration and commitment of the headteacher, senior leaders and governors creates the best opportunities of all children within a Christian learning environment.
- Excellent levels of pastoral care and concern result in pupils knowing they are loved and valued as unique individuals in the sight of God.
- The behaviour of pupils is underpinned by a clear set of Christian values which pupils all know and understand well.
- Pupils are equipped with the personal skills and Christian understanding to contribute to life in a diverse society.

Areas to improve

- Develop the role of the ethos team to ensure the involvement of pupils in the regular planning, evaluation and leading of collective worship.
- Ensure the changes to the quiet garden provide an area for reflection that enhances spiritual development.

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

There is strong and robust evidence of Christian values and the Christian character being embedded in the life of the school. Relationships at all levels are inclusive and grounded in distinctly Christian values. This is reinforced by the school vision statement '*Sharing, caring, learning and loving with God*. As a result all pupils are valued and loved, therefore they are in a good place to learn and self-esteem is high. This makes St Mary's an inclusive school and all pupils including those with special educational needs are well supported and make good progress because they are valued as unique individuals. This also influences attendance which is rising above the national average because of the excellent and enthusiastic attitudes to learning instilled by the school.

Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development (SMSC) is well integrated into the Christian values programme. As a result of the previous SIAS inspection a '*calm room*' was created. This room is well used by pupils to reflect on God, explore faith or just sit quietly. Religious education (RE) is a high profile subject, valued by all. Children achieve well in RE. They are able to talk enthusiastically about Bible passages and stories, for example what they would like to give Jesus as a gift if they were a wise man in the Christmas story.

Pupils readily talk about worship and God, they think deeply and they enjoy the opportunity to question and respond in worship. Pupils have a good awareness of their school as a Christian school. Learning about Christianity as a world faith encourages a strong commitment to charitable giving and a desire to help those in need locally, nationally and internationally. An example of this is *Enterprise week*, when pupils form a mini business to fund-raise. They set up market stalls in the hall; this raises the profile of charitable giving and the needs of those who are not so well provided for. Consequently Christian values, such as love and compassion, are demonstrated through generous levels of charitable giving. As a result there are developing links with the charity '*just be a child*' and helping to resource a school in Africa.

Several initiatives reinforce the Christian values programme and behaviour strategies including '*Good to be green*' and '*Top Table Dining*'. As a result, behaviour is very good and pupils are kind, caring and polite. Their understanding of right and wrong and forgiveness is strong, often linking forgiveness with Bible passages and Jesus forgiving others. Therefore pupils think carefully how they treat each other. The impact of this is there is no bullying. '*Values slips*' encourage pupils, parents and staff to spot understanding of the value in other pupils for example a year 2 pupil wrote that his friend '*persevered with his maths and he got it in the end*'. The extensive grounds are well cared for and reinforce the respect and care for God's creation. The ethos group is consulting on and planning to redevelop the quiet garden.

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

Worship makes a strong contribution to the life of the school. The involvement by Father Andrew sets high expectations for pupils' spiritual and moral development and biblical knowledge. Pupils talk with growing confidence about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit but not all are able to do this and the school is at an early stage of helping them understand this. They understand bible stories and can link these effectively to the current value being explored and past values. Members of the Christian choir take their role of worship leading very seriously and their enjoyment and enthusiasm is infectious. They meet as a lunchtime club to plan the singing for worship. Pupils participate well in prayers in class before lunch and in collective worship. They know and understand the Lord's Prayer and the signs that accompany it. They comment that prayer helps them and they also understand that prayer involves being thankful and saying thank you to God.

Reflective areas in each classroom are well used and pupils comment that they can go there to stop and think, to be calm and to pray. Worship is well planned and evaluated. However, governors and senior leaders evaluate the provision of worship, but do not currently evaluate the impact of worship on the whole school community. Pupils comment that they would like to be more involved in worship, through leading, praying and drama. The emerging role of the

ethos team is already having benefits although their role in evaluating collective worship is not sufficiently embedded. The church is used regularly for services and special events and as a result parents comment that they feel the church and school are intrinsically linked. Staff and pupils readily talk about the benefits of worshipping either in the church or school. They know the key Christian festivals and are beginning to understand the church colours that go with these. Simple liturgical greetings are used in worship, such as 'The Lord be with you - and also with you'.

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

The leadership of St Mary's is highly effective because its Christian character directly informs the strategic vision and planning at all levels. This arises from a belief that every individual should have opportunities to flourish and achieve their God-given potential. The headteacher and leadership team play a pivotal role in making sure that everyone is clear about what this means. The whole school community is involved in overt discussions of Christian values. Therefore, there is a secure understanding of the impact within the school and how those same values impact the wider world. The relationship with St Mary's church is beneficial and strong. This is reciprocal with the church regularly praying for the school and with members being involved in school. Improving links with the adjacent junior school are strengthening the continuing sense of Christian community; a first this year is the joint school Easter service in the church. Parents also have a strong relationship with the school. They recognise the Christian character of the school and comment that it reinforces Christian values at home.

The areas for development from the last inspection have been addressed and embedded in the life of the school. The reflective area is in the process of being 'reinvented' to create a greater ownership of the area by pupils and encourage deeper reflection and spiritual development. Governors speak with pride about the school, they visit regularly, are actively involved in the life of the school and as a result are well informed and have high expectations for the school. They provide rigorous and robust challenge and support for all areas. They place great emphasis through their visits and monitoring on ensuring pupils with special educational needs make the best possible start and progress with their learning. Foundation governors carry out their roles very effectively. The statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are well met as a result of strong support for these areas by senior leaders. This is demonstrated by the fact that RE, worship and the distinctive Christian character of the school are included in the school improvement plan and regularly discussed at senior leadership and governor meetings. This has resulted in staff and governors being able to articulate how it has benefited the school and pupils. Links with the diocese are strong and training opportunities are having a positive influence. These have strengthened strategic planning and prepared some staff for leadership roles in ways that enable them to help this church school achieve its aims. The headteacher and senior leadership team effectively oversee and evaluate the provision of RE and collective worship; evidence shows this has a strong impact on learners and staff. The Christian ethos and values are shared with new families joining the school. This is also effectively promoted via the prospectus and school website. Senior leaders and governors know their school well; they regularly seek the views of parents, pupils and staff. These consultations fully inform the accurate self-assessment and this is a strength of the school. Parents recognise and appreciate the values and Christian character of the school. The impact of this and the school as a whole is clearly expressed in the comment by a parent, '*There is a visible benefit at home and school. We know the values because our children talk about them and the school clearly communicates them*'. The current Christian value is well communicated through newsletters and displays in the school. The vast majority of parents overwhelmingly recognise and respect the distinctive Christian character of the school and comment positively about the impact and benefits.

SIAMS report February 2016 St Mary's Infant School, Baldock Herts SG7 6HY