



## Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

**St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior Mixed School**  
**St Mary's Way, Baldock SG7 6HY**

**Diocese of St Albans**

**LA:** Hertfordshire  
**SIAS Inspection:** 11<sup>th</sup> September 2008  
**Previous S23 Inspection:** September 2003  
**URN:** 117385  
**Headteacher:** Pat Jenkins  
**SIAS Inspector Name:** Lyn Field  
**SIAS Inspector No:** NS 151

### School Context

The school serves families in its immediate locality and most pupils are from White British backgrounds. When pupils start school their attainment is broadly average and the proportion with learning difficulties is similar to that in other schools. The headteacher took up her post in January 2008.

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

The headteacher has refocused the school on its Christian identity and this means that Christian values are evident at all levels of its work. The active involvement of the church supports the school's leaders and engages pupils in questions of faith. This is a 'school on the move' and has the proven capacity to be highly effective.

### Established strengths

- The headteacher gives clear and challenging direction to the school
- The clergy and church members make a strong contribution to the curriculum
- Pupils have positive attitudes to the importance of faith

### Focus for development

- To make use of pupils' views in setting priorities for development
- To draw links between worship and creative activities in order to provide pupils with more resources for spiritual development

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

Pupils feel valued for their personal as well as their academic talents and this motivates them to do their best. They work hard to make a difference to the lives of others through charity work and taking responsibility in school. For example, candidates for school council positions talked about the need to listen to the views of their classmates and have the courage to make difficult decisions about what would be best for the whole school. The staff have taken a fresh look at behaviour and are placing more emphasis on recognising what pupils do when they behave well. Pupils have a good knowledge of Christianity and illustrate the core values of the school, such as fairness and justice, from Bible stories. However, they are less sure how the management of poor behaviour is based on these values and so pupils do not make enough use of them in making their own decisions. Pupils are agreed about the practical importance of learning about other faiths in religious education lessons. A typical comment was 'no-one gets left out when you understand what they believe'. In some classes RE topics extend into lessons on personal development and occasionally circle time. Where this happens, the spiritual and moral development of pupils is good because discussions focus on the pupils' own experiences and ideas. Practice is inconsistent, however, because there is not an agreed approach to classroom resources for spiritual development that enables pupils to access them independently.

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

The headteacher has made changes to the pattern of worship that have raised its importance in the school day. All members of staff now attend and are good role models for pupils. It means that the issues raised are often followed through in lessons so that worship has more relevance to pupils' lives. Songs are now distinctively Christian and pupils know more traditional prayers. Whole school worship has a calm and reflective atmosphere and the questions posed are challenging. For example, in discussing the Paralympics, pupils were asked to consider how prayer might work for those athletes who held a strong faith. However, worship does not consistently include a period of quiet that pupils can use for their own spiritual reflections. Prayer now has a place at the end of every assembly and pupils say that they like this as it draws all their thoughts together. They draw on their knowledge of Christianity from lessons and the special sessions led by the rector. This ensures that they have an accurate understanding of the key beliefs underpinning Bible stories and so they make better use of them in relating them to contemporary themes used in worship. Pupils understand the distinctive features of worship but feel that some, such as the lighting of candles, are restricted to being in church. Services for special occasions in church are being reviewed in order to increase the spiritual content. For example, worship for Ascension day made greater use of symbolism but these opportunities have still to be developed in school worship.

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

The new headteacher is giving clear and challenging direction to the school. This has prompted changes to ensure that the organisation of the school fully reflects its Christian ethos. For example, the allocation of teaching time is now balanced to meet the needs of the whole child rather than having a narrow focus on basic skills. The school's evaluation of its own effectiveness as a church school is accurate. It shows insight into exactly where improvement is needed and these areas are included in the school's overall development plan. However, it does not take sufficient account of pupils' views in deciding what the first steps should be or in measuring the impact of any changes made.

The partnership between church and school is outstanding because it is focused on the needs of pupils. The church takes its responsibility for the school very seriously. This is evident in its prayer life and in the care taken to appoint appropriate foundation governors. Members of the church provide regular support in school and respond in practical ways to needs as they arise. This has resulted in a review of bereavement resources, the funding of Bibles and a lunchtime Bible study club that supports pupils who wish to explore faith in more depth. The rector, as well as being a familiar figure, works in every classroom to make a direct impact on pupils' learning. He has developed units of work on the communion service and the big questions in life that help pupils see the relevance of faith in their lives. He keeps abreast of changes in the way the subject is taught through regular meetings with the co-ordinator. The survey of parents' views shows they have positive attitudes to the school's Christian ethos and feel the headteacher has responded to their concerns. The re-siting of her office is indicative of the more open and welcoming atmosphere in the school.