



## Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



**St Mary's Church of England Lower School  
High Street, Clophill, Bedford MK45 4BE**

**Diocese of St Albans**

**LA:** Bedfordshire  
**SIAS Inspection:** 13<sup>th</sup> July 2007  
**Previous S23 Inspection:** February 2002  
**URN:** 109617  
**Headteacher:** Christine Spurgeon  
**SIAS Inspector Name:** Lyn Field  
**SIAS Inspector No:** NS 151

### **School Context**

This is a smaller than average lower school. The majority of pupils are White British and come from the village of Clophill. Many families are relatively advantaged and there are few pupils entitled to free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average.

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

'Other people might leave values in the school but we take them with us into life.'  
Christian values are the guiding principles for everything the school does and make a lasting impression on pupils. They inform choices that are made about what children learn and shape their attitudes to learning and living. The united team of staff and governors are passionate about leading a Christian school where adults and children are inspired and supported to achieve their best.

### **Established strengths**

- The Christian values that underpin all that the school does
- The inspiring and reflective leadership of the headteacher
- Outstanding spiritual development that enables pupils to achieve their best
- The constant striving by governors and staff to make things even better

### **Focus for development**

There are no significant areas for development as the school demonstrates an excellent understanding of how to extend and sustain its very high standards.

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

Children are expected to live the values the school promotes and this is evident in their behaviour and the respect and support they show each other. The system of commendations recognises this as much as academic achievement. Parents believe that the attention given to values helps their children to develop an inner confidence to face difficult experiences in life. It is clear that children carry these values into family life and activities out of school. They develop a vocabulary that they use to express quite profound thoughts about how different groups in society should be treated. They are proud of their ability to explain what they call 'uncommon words' such as forgiveness and faith. Values are presented entirely within a Christian context but what is most impressive is that the children can articulate how some values – love and humility, are distinctive to this school because it is a church school. They have no difficulty understanding that being a member of the school council requires you to make decisions that are conducive to the values of the school. The Christian ethos determines that individuals are enjoyed for who they are and the school looks for ways in which they can flourish and contribute to the community. This level of respect shown to pupils inspires them to always do their best. Teachers and assistants are equally motivated to develop their professional skills and this results in exceptionally high standards in both teaching and learning.

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

Children make exceptional progress in spiritual development through worshipping together and this makes a difference to how well they learn in the classroom. They understand the distinction between prayer and reflection and the prayer tables in each classroom are well used by pupils who say that prayer is about asking for what you need, not necessarily what you want. Reflection however, one child explains, 'is what you have to do for yourself, it is the time I use to work out anything that has bothered me and I have kept at the back of my mind'. Worship is a distinctive and enjoyable part of the day and this is clear from the anticipation on the children's faces as they come into the hall. They describe this time as a two way process where 'God shares his peace and time with us' and 'we show Him respect'. Children's views are taken very seriously and changes to the seating arrangements have been made because they wanted to be able to look at the cross, made by the caretaker, as a focus for their thoughts. All members of staff are present for all acts of worship so that key messages can be followed through into the school day. The school takes every opportunity to celebrate and children learn how important it is for a community to worship and share food together. This happens for Christian festivals but also to honour significant moments, happy and sad, in the lives of individuals or the life of the school. Children are able to gain spiritually from this because they learn the language and symbolism of worship in RE and draw on the rich experiences they are given of the eucharist in church and services in St Albans Abbey. The current and previous incumbent have both had a special relationship with the school and made particular contributions to the development of worship. Their pastoral presence supports adults and children in their own spiritual journeys.

**The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.**

Pupils have an excellent understanding of how religious beliefs affect the way people live their lives. This is because they can build on their experience of living out Christian values in school. All children achieve standards in RE that are well above average. The level at which they think and reason is extremely high because they are challenged at every stage of lessons to draw on the breadth of their knowledge across all subjects. In a Year 2 class, pupils used examples from science to explain the importance of each stage of the creation story. The quality of teaching is consistently outstanding. The senior staff rightly identify the key reason for this as the sharply focused objectives that are set for each lesson. Teaching acknowledges that children learn from what they do as well as what they see and hear so lessons and theme days frequently include acting out ceremonies and times for personal reflection. In a Year 4 lesson, pupils explored parallels between a Jewish festival and the point they have reached in their own school life through sharing food and shredding paper to symbolise forgiveness. This was an example of the excellent way in which children learn about other faiths in a way that enhances their own spiritual development. The changes that have been made to assessment have given the school a clearer idea of the rate at which children are making progress. The moderation of pupils' work is a shared activity so that all teachers take responsibility for achievement across the school and jointly identify the next steps in development.

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

The way that leadership and management is delegated in the school ensures there is a shared understanding of how Christian values permeate teaching and learning at all levels. Governors take great care to appoint staff who have the potential to contribute to the ethos of the school. The headteacher's reflective and inspiring leadership empowers adults and children to grow professionally and spiritually. This is a distinctive characteristic of the school and values education, for example, is more about what it enables people to become than a set of moral guidelines. The excellent working relationships between staff, governors and clergy result in dialogue that is analytical and insightful. They constantly have in mind the current and future needs of both pupils and staff in this community. The governors have an impressive understanding of this because they have adopted a style of monitoring that brings them in close and regular touch with the real experience of pupils. They each follow a group of children through their life in school and track the impact of education in values on their ability to achieve their best. Any issues identified are immediately addressed as part of the constant drive to improve. Only issues that have financial or staffing implications find their way into a longer term strategic plan. An example is the project to revitalise the arts within an already rich curriculum and use this to express the Christian character of the school in the environment.