



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

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

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: Tuesday 30th June 2009
Previous S48 Inspection: 26th April 2006
URN: 117396
Headteacher: Mrs Tracey Gaiteri
SIAS Inspector Name: Revd Vanessa Cato
SIAS Inspector No:

School Context

Ponsbourne St Mary's is a small, four class village primary school. Pupils come from a variety of social backgrounds, with a below average number entitled to free school meals. Most pupils are from white British families and none speaks English as a second language. However, the school has a higher than average number of children with statements of special educational needs, embracing a wide range of difficulties.

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

There is a strong Christian ethos underpinning the life of the school and its Christian character and values lie at the heart of all it does. The commitment and leadership of the Headteacher, staff and governors and its strong partnership with the church enable the school to be a place where all children have the opportunity and encouragement to flourish.

Established strengths

- Core Christian values which contribute effectively to the whole curriculum
- Strong links with the local church and community which nourish and support the school.
- The personal development of the pupils, spiritual, moral, social, cultural and academic and the strong pastoral care shown and encouraged.
- The commitment, leadership and management skills at all levels.

Focus for development

- Develop global links especially with other churches in the wider Anglican Communion.
- Continue to develop an effective reflection on and evaluation of Collective Worship
- Turn the dream of a Quiet area into a reality

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

Core Christian values, including those of care, respect, love, forgiveness, responsibility and a sense of being “a big family”, have a real impact on the school, lie at the heart of the school’s ethos and contribute effectively to the whole curriculum. This is reflected in pupils’ positive attitudes to their teachers, to one another, to school and work and to their self-esteem and excellent behaviour. Pupils are confident participators in the life of the school. Staff model Christian qualities of care and support through their professional relationships with one another and with the children, and the children say they are able to share concerns with staff. This supports the excellent development in spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) areas, also noted by the recent Ofsted report. The enthusiasm for teaching and for the progress of the individual, alongside the many opportunities for exploring and engaging with the world, generates awe and wonder, curiosity and a desire to learn. The natural environment of woodland, pond and garden developed by the school and local community enhances this experience and, alongside the curriculum, makes a key contribution to the pupils’ spiritual development. Strong links with the local church and community help pupils to develop an understanding of their place locally. The curriculum encourages an understanding of national and cultural issues, though the school has identified a need to forge wider global links to enable children to understand differing communities better. Areas for development identified in the previous Section 48 inspection report have been addressed.

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

Most pupils enjoy worship and respond to it positively. The school worships once a week at St Mary’s Church and at the end of each term, the latter being a Eucharist. Families are encouraged to attend these and some other acts of Collective Worship. All staff attend the weekly service in Church. The school, with support from the Vicar, is developing ways of greater inclusion of children in the Communion service. Encouragement to attend the church’s Family Service and for parents to explore aspects of the Christian faith seems to have had a positive effect on the faith development of a number of families. There is a strong commitment to develop the pupils’ spiritual and religious understanding. Collective Worship complements the rest of the curriculum well, enhancing pupils’ understanding of a range of social, moral and spiritual issues. Pupils and parents are positive about the impact Collective Worship has on pupils’ everyday lives. Regardless of religious background or of no faith pupils seem to find inspiration in school worship. Opportunities for prayer at other times during the school day vary. The school hopes to create a Quiet Area in the small courtyard. Evidence indicates that pupils are familiar with a range of Anglican tradition and practice, and appear to have a good knowledge and understanding of the Christian Year and significant aspects of the Christian faith. No children are withdrawn from worship by their parents. There are many opportunities for active engagement and participation in worship and groups of children are regularly invited to discuss their experience of particular acts of Worship. Worship will be further enhanced as the school continues to develop a more rigorous evaluation and reflection.

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

Evidence indicates that the school's status as a Church school is central to its ethos and that, through the strong leadership of the Headteacher and support of staff, governors and Vicar, this has a key impact on those who work and learn at Ponsbourne St Mary's. Strong links with the local church nourish and support the school well. As a result, leadership and management of the school as a church school are outstanding, in line with the overall leadership and management judgement in the recent Ofsted report. The Headteacher plays a key role in promoting and maintaining the school's strong commitment to its Christian ethos and character as a Church school. In this, she is well supported by staff and governors. As a result, St Mary's School provides a compassionate, caring and stimulating environment in which to work and grow. Self evaluation as a Church school, notably through the use of the Toolkit, is robust, accurate and detailed and is linked well to school improvement planning. The school is inclusive in its evidence base for self evaluation, notably through the gathering of information from parents and pupils. The Governing Body is committed to the school and rigorous in their commitment to their roles. The school makes good use of Continuing Professional Development for both staff and governors and ensures that staff and parents are aware of the school's Christian character and the importance of this aspect in the life of the school. Particularly good use seems to be made of training offered by the diocese.

SIAS report June 2009. Ponsbourne St Mary's, Newgate Street, SG13 8RA