



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's CofE Voluntary Aided Primary School
Stockers Farm Road, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire WD3 1NY

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: Monday 30 June 2008
Previous S23 Inspection: 06 and 07 July 2005
URN: 117447
Headteacher: Wendy Awbery
SIAS Inspector Name: Bob Hopcraft
SIAS Inspector No: 484

School Context

St Mary's is an average sized voluntary aided primary school, set in attractive surroundings on the outskirts of Rickmansworth. Pupils come from generally favourable economic and social circumstances. Almost all pupils are of white British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities is below the national average. The school benefits from well-maintained, modern buildings and well-developed and attractive outdoor areas to support learning. The headteacher, who has been particularly influential in developing the school's Christian character, retires at the end of the summer term and a successor has been appointed.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's CofE Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

This is because of the strong commitment of the headteacher and other school leaders to the development of the school's Christian character and ethos, which is reflected in outstanding relationships and teamwork. The strong links between the Church and school are particularly effective and pupils' experience of worship has a very positive impact on their lives. As a result they feel valued and develop strong moral and spiritual values on which to base their future development.

Established strengths

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher for the school as a Church school;
- The outstanding provision for collective worship, well-matched to the needs and ages of pupils;
- The excellent relationships and teamwork at all levels;
- The very strong links with St Mary's Church and the support of both Anglican and Methodist clergy

Focus for development

- Further develop assessment procedures in RE, with a focus on identifying next steps in learning, to ensure that all pupils make even better progress;
- Develop and strengthen the role of RE co-ordinator, so that the newly-appointed co-ordinator continues to impact effectively on standards and pupil progress.

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

This is because all learners feel valued and special and are encouraged to give of and do their best, whatever their gifts or talents. Pupils are secure and happy, encouraging one parent to comment “*my children have never once not wanted to come to school*”. Values of justice, equality and respect are modelled by all staff in the most positive way and as a result, pupils show justice and respect in their relationships with one another. There is a strong sense of family, which is neatly summed up in one of the children’s favourite songs, “*The love of God is the superglue that joins us all together*”. Christian values are central to the life of the school and have a very positive impact on both pupils and staff. Pupils are encouraged to develop their independence with many opportunities to serve within the school community, for example as members of the effective School Council. Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and learners are encouraged to develop the spiritual element of their lives, particularly through the excellent outdoor environment, designed to provide many opportunities to share in the wonder of God’s creation. Pupils’ knowledge and understanding of other cultures is well developed and they are able to relate sensitively to the beliefs and feelings of others. The emphasis on team work ensures that pupils are able to work collaboratively and relationships are outstanding at all levels; no evidence of conflict of any sort was seen during the inspection, but pupils say that when this happens, it is quickly resolved and forgiveness is an important part of the solution. The signs and symbols of the Christian faith are a prominent feature throughout the school and displays are informative, bright and provide opportunities for interactive learning for all pupils.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is central to the life of the school and underpins all that it does. Acts of worship offer many opportunities for participation by pupils, who respond positively and enthusiastically. Worship is well planned and effectively evaluated. Very good use is made of prayer, with opportunities for pupils’ own spontaneous contributions and there is a developing prayer life beyond worship, as exemplified by the use of prayer boards throughout the school. Opportunities for quiet reflection are built into worship to allow pupils to think through themes and ideas. Worship is well matched to the needs and experience of learners, for example, the short daily acts of worship in the nursery, which support and nurture children’s developing sense of spirituality. As a result of high quality acts of worship, pupils have a good knowledge of a range of Bible stories and Christian festivals and are able to relate these to their everyday lives. The *Lord’s Prayer* is used as an integral part of worship and is known and understood by pupils. Worship has a strong Christian basis, but the school encourages an understanding of worship in other faiths, too. Links with St Mary’s Church are effective and have continued to grow stronger with the recent arrival of the new priest-in-charge.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

This is because pupils attain good standards in RE. They make rapid gains in understanding, enabling older pupils to discuss complex issues and make connections between Christianity and other faiths. Teaching in RE is good with some outstanding features, impacting well on pupils’ deepening understanding. The school is developing some effective systems for assessment, for example assessment statements and a portfolio of pupils’ work; however, these do not yet fully impact on pupils’ progress. Pupils enjoy RE and are very positive about the subject. The well-structured curriculum provides many opportunities for them to relate learning to their own lives and experience; as a result, behaviour and attitudes to learning are always good and sometimes exemplary. There are many opportunities to be actively involved in learning, for example, the use of drama which was seen during the inspection, relating to the story of the *Good Samaritan*. RE supports spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well and as a result, pupils have a good understanding of the Christian faith and other major world religions. The subject is monitored effectively and plans for its future development are rooted in clear evaluation. The newly-appointed subject leader is well-informed and is beginning to impact well on the development of RE throughout the school. The subject is very well resourced and this, along with the good subject knowledge of staff, enables lessons to be well planned and effective.

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

This is because the school’s strong Christian vision is shared by all and is clearly reflected in its public documentation. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership in this area and is a key figure in promoting its Christian ethos. In this she is well supported by committed staff and governors. Governors support and challenge the school effectively and have been closely involved in its self evaluation as a church school. Links with the parish are highly productive and the ecumenical nature of St. Mary’s Church ensures that the school receives support from both the Anglican and Methodist clergy and its lay population. The priest-in-charge is well known to the school community and her impact, in the short time she has been in post, has been impressive. Parents speak very highly of the school and are clear about its special character. The school’s involvement in the community and charitable giving is a key part of its ethos, with opportunities for older pupils to participate in the annual Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey and for pupils to support a hearing-impaired child from Cameroon.