



## Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's CofE VC Lower School  
Rook Tree Lane, Stotfold, Hitchin SG5 4LD

Diocese of St Albans

**LA:** Bedfordshire  
**SIAS Inspection:** Tuesday 25 November 2008  
**Previous S48 Inspection:** 25 and 26 January 2006  
**URN:** 109606  
**Headteacher:** Mr Colin Phelps  
**SIAS Inspector Name:** Bob Hopcraft  
**SIAS Inspector No:** 484

### School Context

St Mary's is an average-sized Voluntary Controlled Lower School, set in attractive rural grounds on the outskirts of the large village of Stotfold. Most pupils come from the village and are largely of *White British* heritage. The school is popular with parents and has been oversubscribed for some years. When they enter the school, children have skills and knowledge that are close to that expected for their age and experience. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is lower than the national average, as is the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. The school provides extensive extended school provision, both before and after school, which benefits pupils from other local schools, as well as St Mary's.

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

This is because significant steps forward have been made since the last inspection in promoting the school's distinctiveness as a Church of England school. Areas for development outlined in the previous Section 48 inspection report have been considered and effectively addressed. The establishment of a school/governors' working group, with a specific remit to review the school's distinctive Christian character and provision for collective worship, has been very effective in supporting the drive towards excellence. The strong commitment to the establishment of high quality relationships and links with the local and wider community, further enhance the school's positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### Established strengths

- The outstanding relationships at all levels;
- The high quality acts of worship, which support and nourish pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
- The outstanding links with St Mary's Church and local churches of other denominations;
- The excellent links with the local community.

### Focus for development

- Develop ways to evaluate and record the quality and impact of collective worship;
- Ensure that areas for development identified in the school's self-evaluation are included in the school development plan, in order to provide a strategic view for the school's development as a Church school in the future.

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

This is because all pupils feel valued and special. They enjoy their work, attain very high standards and are encouraged to “reach for the sky”, whatever their gifts or talents. Pupils say that they are treated kindly by others and that they respect and like those around them. As a result, they display great self-confidence and are happy and secure in school. Christian values play a key part in the life of the school and lie at the heart of its ethos. Parents are clear that these play an important part in their children’s lives and impact very positively on their development, causing one parent to write: *“The Christian values, based on the gospel, are the foundation of the care and individual worth each child feels and is encouraged to show to others”*. As a result, relationships are outstanding at all levels and behaviour is exemplary. Staff say that St Mary’s is a wonderfully supportive place to work, where all are encouraged to participate and grow in every sense. Through the effective school council, pupils are encouraged to express their views and to back these up with good reasons. Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very well catered for and significant steps have been made in promoting spiritual development since the last inspection. Many opportunities for quiet reflection are now formally built into the school day and every opportunity is taken to identify and support spiritual development, as recorded in the school’s *Awe and Wonder Book*. Pupils are encouraged to relate sensitively to the views and beliefs of others – as another parent commented: *“The school fosters a caring and Christian ethos and explores other faiths with sensitivity and respect”*. Because of this sensitive and thoughtful approach to cultural development, pupils demonstrate a growing understanding of other faiths and cultures and are practically involved in this through the links with a school in Ghana. Visitors and newcomers are made to feel very welcome and pupils express great pride in their school. Displays celebrate the school’s Christian foundation wherever possible – for example the *“If God Was...”* display, which reflected pupils’ deep and thoughtful response, leading one child to write: *“If God was a drink, He would be lemonade, because He is everywhere and there are lots of bubbles in lemonade”*. Signs and symbols, celebrating the school’s Christian foundation, are present throughout the building.

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

Worship is central to the life of this school. An atmosphere of considerable serenity is created at the start of worship, through excellent use of music and time for reflection. Pupils speak articulately and knowledgeably about the values programme, which underpins the well planned programme for worship. Governors are regular visitors at collective worship times. The quality and impact of worship are discussed; however, at present no formal evaluation of this is undertaken. Pupils respond well to worship and have many opportunities to participate actively. They are particularly enthusiastic about the good range of visitors who lead and participate in worship, for example, the *“Open the Book”* team. Very good use is made of time for reflection. The school has a burgeoning prayer life, both within collective worship and at other times in the school day, with class prayer books, written by the children, in regular use to promote spiritual reflection and thought. Pupils know and use the Lord’s Prayer. As a result of the good quality acts of worship, pupils have a good understanding of the Church year and are knowledgeable about key festivals. Through worship, the school’s Anglican distinctiveness is now more evident than was the case at the time of the last inspection, for example the use of a range of coloured cloths to cover the table used during worship, which reflect the colours of the liturgical year. Links with the local church are outstanding, as are those with churches of other denominations. Very good use is made of St Mary’s Church, both for worship and as a learning resource and the vicar leads worship regularly in school.

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

This is because all who are involved with the school share in and are fully supportive of its Christian vision. The school’s Christian foundation is celebrated in all public documentation and is both explicit, and implicit, in all that the school does. The headteacher, ably supported by the vicar and governors, has worked tirelessly to ensure that the school’s Christian vision is now more evident and the joint school/governors’ working group has impacted well on the school’s development as a Church school. As a result, significant strides have been made in provision for collective worship, Religious Education and promotion of the school’s Anglican distinctiveness, since the last inspection. Effective self-evaluation as a church school has been completed, but areas for development have not yet been linked to the school’s development plan. Governors and other stakeholders have been closely involved in a review of the school’s vision, which stresses the spiritual and social aspects of development. Stakeholders speak very highly of the school and the impact it has on pupils. This reflects the outstanding relationship the school has as both part of, and a centre for, the community. St Mary’s is a school where every child – and everyone – really does matter.