



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Junior School
Heath Drive, Ware SG12 0RL

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 7th July 2010
Previous S48 Inspection: 23 November 2006
URN: 117409
Headteacher: Andrew Cosslett
SIAS Inspector Name: Alan Thornsby
SIAS Inspector No: 137

School context

St Mary's is an average sized school which shares its site with an infant school. The majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or difficulties is just above average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average.

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

St Mary's is a satisfactory church school where implicit Christian values underpin an enjoyable learning environment where care and respect are key factors. Relationships are good because everyone is seen as an individual whose achievements are supported, recognised and celebrated.

Established strengths

- The high profile of Christian values (care respect and love) displayed in the daily lives of the school community that result in good relationships and the personal development of pupils
- The quality of Spiritual Moral Social and Cultural development of pupils
- The enthusiasm of the worship coordinator in raising the profile of faith in the school

Focus for development

- Staff and governors to explore the distinctive nature of a church school to affirm the school's Christian character and use this to celebrate and make more explicit the Christian ethos of the school
- Foundation governors to have a higher profile in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the Christian ethos of the school
- Maintain the focus on raising the profile of worship in school, giving pupils a greater involvement in planning and delivering acts of worship

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

The school has welcoming ethos for everyone, securely based on love and care for each other. This creates good relationships between everyone, with pupils taking responsibility for each other in the daily life of the school. The school name board symbolises the Christian mission of the school that is crucial to the life of the school and recognised in the school creed. Pupils are well behaved and respectful of other people and their beliefs because 'we have values that a good person should have because we follow God's wishes.' Teachers support and challenge all groups of pupils. There is positive encouragement because the achievement of each individual, no matter how small, is recognised and celebrated. There are good systems for rewards and sanctions that have a high profile of forgiveness and fresh start. This results in pupils knowing they are safe and allowing them to develop independence and confidence to speak to other people in an appropriate manner. Pupils are responsible because they are involved in the daily organisation of the school, such as playground monitors and selling fruit. The school elected council is an effective body in school giving pupils an opportunity to share their views, The increasing profile of religious education (RE), the impact of worship and Christian values give pupils a good spiritual awareness because of opportunities for reflection and discussion to inform their thinking. Focus curriculum weeks and the learning of French and Spanish give pupils a good understanding of other cultures and faiths. The school creed, the cross and Christian values displayed in the entrance reflect the school's foundation. Although displays throughout school reinforce learning and achievement, the school does not make explicit or celebrate in displays the high quality Christian ethos seen in the daily routines of the school.

The worshipping experience provided by the school is satisfactory.

Collective worship has a high profile within the life of the school. The enthusiastic coordinator and a foundation governor have recently revised the policy. They have introduced a number of developments in practice that have yet to be fully embedded in the worshipping life of the school. Themes based on the diocesan guideline are well planned to reinforce Christian values and moral decisions of pupils. Presently, informal evaluation through discussion and observation inform developments. Pupils experience a range of formats and leaders, having a good rapport with staff and the vicar all of whom lead worship. Children are involved in organising resources for worship, in role-play and preparing for half termly presentation of work to parents to share their achievements in learning. The weekly achievement assembly celebrates the practical examples of Christian service performed by pupils. They enjoy worship because 'you listen and then have the time to work out things for yourself.' Reflection and discussion in circle time, religious education and Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) are also linked to worship themes to further challenge pupils thinking. This enables pupils to articulate the similarities and differences between reflection and prayer. They have a good understanding of the purpose of prayer as 'a time to talk to God and ask for help.' They also recognise the importance of the school creed because 'it reminds us what is important in school and how to behave.' Pupils' behaviour in worship is good and they sing meaningfully because of the profile of music in school. Some of the pupils understand Christian symbolism, especially of the candle and the central place of the church in the school logo. The school makes use of St Mary's church for Christmas and Easter services and is joined by the vicar in school for harvest festival. The school has identified the need to further develop these links.

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

The vision of the head, in developing a school with 'enjoyment in learning together' results in a distinctive church school character that is understood and shared by everyone. In working with the coordinator, a foundation governor has revised RE and worship policies. This has also provided opportunities for informal monitoring and evaluation and feedback to the governing body. The implicit Christian character of the school allows governors to use Christian values in decision-making and policy review. However, changes in the governing body and a lack of opportunities to fully explore the nature of a church school means the issues from the previous inspection have not been fully addressed. Although some elements of the school improvement plan relate to a church school, the lack of specific developments limits the role of the governing body and the explicit profile of a church school.

Parents acknowledge the leadership and accessibility of the school with its strong Christian based values. They recognise the school logo, with the church in the centre as an illustration of the work of the school, commenting 'Christianity is at the heart of the school to give our children a good moral understanding'. They recognise the efforts of the school in praising the achievement of pupils and sense of self-esteem this gives. The school has established links with the other schools, especially the infant school sharing the site and the local community.