



**Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report**  
**Diocese of St Albans**



**St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School,  
London Road, Welwyn AL6 9DJ**

**LA:** Hertfordshire  
**SIAS Inspection:** 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009  
**Previous SIAS Inspection:** 12<sup>th</sup> December 2005  
**URN:** 117490  
**Headteacher:** Alison Witchell  
**SIAS Inspector:** Lindsay Fraser

**School context**

St Mary's is a larger than average primary school situated in the village of Welwyn. A large majority of pupils are of white British heritage with a few pupils from other ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

**Summary Judgement**

The strong Christian ethos of the school ensures that all children and members of the school community are highly valued and supported. The Headteacher, governors, clergy and staff work hard together to ensure that Christian values are not only firmly established and upheld, but also demonstrated in a practical manner in all aspects of school life.

**Established strengths**

- The respect for the Christian distinctiveness of the school by the children, staff and parents because of the leadership of the Headteacher and Rector in promoting the Christian vision
- The impact upon personal development and attitudes of the children because Christian values underpin all aspects of the school life
- The positive attitudes and quality of learning in Religious Education because of the thorough planning and preparation.

**Focus for development**

- To continue the development of whole school assessment in Religious Education to ensure greater confidence in recognising standards.

**The school is outstanding in meeting the needs of all learners through its distinctive Christian ethos.**

'Our Christian values underpin every aspect of our school life': this excerpt from the school's Aims and Ethos statement is evident in all aspects of school life. Children feel valued and special because their achievements are celebrated and their concerns are listened to. Members of staff also are valued by the children who like to nominate adults as well as children for kindness awards. The governors also demonstrate their appreciation of the efforts of the staff. Parents speak of how their children are treated as individuals and appreciate that the Headteacher knows each child despite the large number of children in the school. Respect is a value continually referred to and understood by children who give this as a reason for their good behaviour and the purpose of their learning in Religious Education. They are very sensitive to the beliefs and the feelings of others; spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. Children are very happy and parents report that their children who are new to Reception settle 'joyfully'. Although a large school there is a family atmosphere with a great sense of belonging and care for one another. Children refer to the fact that any issues are dealt with swiftly and fairly as a whole school with decisions respected by all children. The environment is used effectively to promote the Christian ethos of the school including Christian artefacts, especially the link to Mary, evident in the school hall.

**The impact of Collective Worship on learners is outstanding.**

Worship is of vital importance within the school as can be seen from the thorough planning, preparation and effective use of technology to enhance the children's knowledge, understanding and spiritual growth. Children speak of Collective Worship as a time to learn more about God and Christianity and its relevance to their own lives and the school community. The children enjoy the many opportunities to participate in Collective Worship where they are able to draw on other areas of the curriculum. In an observed Act of Worship children were totally engaged with the subject matter and enjoyed the confident input of a group of volunteers. They were later able to talk about the content, relate the words of the Headteacher and what it meant to them. Attendance at services in Church and some Acts of Worship in school by a number of governors, and the willingness of staff to lead worship add value to this special time. Children speak enthusiastically about the input of the Rev. Canon Alan Winton and the termly visits of Act 4. Children value the time of reflection as a time for thinking back over the content of Collective Worship and the words of hymns which add further meaning to the theme of their Worship. Collective Worship has taken account of the feedback from children in their evaluations such as altering the content of Friday Worship. Eucharist is celebrated once a year, giving staff and children a valued opportunity to participate in and witness this important aspect of Anglican faith and practice. Parents appreciate their children participating in services which take place in the Church and understand that space is too limited to allow parental attendance.

**The impact of Religious Education on learners is outstanding.**

Achievement in RE is at least in line with, and sometimes above, achievement in other subjects and national expectations. For example, some children are able to articulate concepts which are beyond their usual performance in some subjects because of the opportunities and guidance given to the exploration of important and challenging questions. Provision for RE is of a high quality and ensures a good balance of learning objectives for both attainment targets. A lesson observed in Y6 was outstanding because of the progress made by the children in their knowledge and understanding of the Jewish Shema. Because the class are also learning about the Second World War the children are making clear links and developing a greater understanding of the plight of the Jews. Children see RE as relevant to their own lives and were aware that the study of other religions enables them to respect the beliefs and practices of other faiths. Lessons are further enhanced by the involvement of visitors, such as parents sharing their personal experiences of their faith, and visits. In a Y2 lesson the children finished their lesson with an enthusiastic rendering of an action song, 'Jesus' Love' to further develop their understanding of Signs and Symbols. The subject is well led by the RE subject leader who understands well where the school is in terms of standards and whole school assessment and has a clear vision for the next steps in this subject.

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

Stakeholders speak confidently about the leadership and role models of the Rector and the Headteacher, the support and direction of the Governing Body and the leadership team in terms of the school as a Church school. Children make clear links between their personal experiences, their experiences in school and a Christian faith because of the prominent role taken by the Rector, both in their school and in their community. The Headteacher articulates a clear vision which underpins the excellent Christian ethos of the school. It is because of this example and the overriding desire of the staff to put the children first that enables the children to express and demonstrate their understanding of Christian values. Very close links exist between the school, the Church and the local community and this is valued by the parents who speak of their gratefulness for their children's education. The contribution of many parents within the school leads to an effective involvement, linking home and school.