

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England Combined Primary School

Keen Close Fairford Leys Aylesbury Buckinghamshire HP19 7WF

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| Current SIAMS inspection grade | Good |
| Diocese | Oxford |
| Previous SIAMS inspection grade | Good |
| Local authority | Buckinghamshire |
| Date of inspection | 19 March 2018 |
| Date of last inspection | March 2013 |
| Type of school and unique reference number | Voluntary Controlled Primary 110416 |
| Headteacher | Pat Gurton |
| Inspector's name and number | Lizzie McWhirter 244 |

School context

Currently there are 450 pupils on roll with 42 pupils in the nursery who are mainly White British and from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. This includes a growing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language has risen over recent years and is now just below average. There have been some staffing changes since the previous denominational inspection, including the deputy headteacher as well as the lead teacher for the distinctive ethos. Close links have developed with the church community and vicar in Fairford Leys.

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

- Effective Christian leadership and governance ensures the Christian ethos of this school is foundational to its policy and practice, enabling its pupils to succeed and achieve well.
- The strong partnership between church and school enriches the worshipping life of this church school and what it means to live well together in community.
- Christian teaching about the pattern of the church year enables pupils to articulate the Christmas and Easter story very well, supporting their spiritual and personal development. This makes a strong contribution to the school's distinctive Christian character.
- This is a kind, caring, nurturing and friendly community which lives out its core Christian values, such as compassion and hope.

Areas to improve

- Ensure the regular and robust monitoring of religious education [RE] takes place to support the Distinctive Christian Ethos leader, with appropriate training to carry out her role.

- Extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity as a worldwide faith to nurture their spiritual and cultural development.
- Deepen pupils' and adults' understanding of the shared Christian belief of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as an integral part of their worshipping life at St Mary's as this community grows in its journey together.

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

First and foremost, St Mary's school vision and mission to 'Shine as lights in the world' helps inspire all to embark on a lifelong journey to develop knowledge, faith and skills. In addition, Christian values, such as love, hope, forgiveness, truth, compassion and respect help enable all to learn, grow and flourish. Relationships and behaviour are very good. Pupils confirm their friends and teachers are very important to them. This is because St Mary's is a kind, caring, friendly and above all, nurturing Christian community. Progress and attainment is good as all pupils, including those who are vulnerable, are making good progress and thrive and succeed within the Christian ethos and environment which St Mary's provides. The school recognises this is cohort specific. For example, Year 2 boys did very well in reading last year. The use of learning approaches, such as 'Growth Mind-set' helps to identify specific learning powers for individuals. Pupils are inspired by excellent role models such as Her Majesty The Queen, sporting heroes, such as Sir Mo Farah and Ronaldo as well as figures from history, such as civil rights campaigner, Martin Luther King. Whilst attendance is good, staff go the give extra mile and work closely with parents so that they and their children understand why attendance at school is important. For example, growing in wisdom comes from being in school to learn. The school is also inclusive of challenging pupils, drawing on 'patience and especially hope, which is what you have in the darkest time'. There is a natural focus on the whole child, with the emphasis on helping pupils not just to understand what they are learning, such as fractions, but also understand the importance of wellbeing. A good example is the young carers group for older family members which is really valued. St Mary's pupils wear a gender neutral uniform within a context where values are real, and forgiveness is talked about a great deal. As the leadership endorses, 'We don't judge here, that is not our job'. Pupils confirm that, 'respect is part of our values and the golden rules'. As one pupil put it, 'We know how to live well with God and try not to be mean'. Instead, there is a drive to take the mottos, 'Shine as lights in the world' further. One pupil explained this as, 'It's like a lighthouse, and it can guide you to the right path and links to another value which is love. It means we always need to be kind to other people.'

Worship and RE appear to make very good contributions to pupils' spiritual and personal development. This is enriched by activities such as the weekly Jaffa club, run by the minister of Fairford Leys Church. In addition, Year 6 pupils can still recall the work they did producing a mosaic to remember one of their classmates who died.

RE has a high profile, using the 'Discovery RE' scheme of work. This is also supported by a programme of visits and visitors, such as inviting a Rabbi into school and a recent visit to the local mosque.

Whilst the school embraces diversity, pupils' global awareness and pupils' understanding of Christianity as a worldwide faith have been identified by the school as areas for development. For example, pupils say that, 'learning about Christianity as a worldwide faith gives us a wider understanding of how they live and pray in other countries'. A shared understanding of spirituality for all staff so that it permeates all school life has also been identified for ongoing development. Pupils say they 'like learning about different religions and their points of view'. One pupil offered, 'I'm a Muslim and am interested to hear others views about my religion.' Pupils can explain the Christian story in great detail, especially the events of Christmas and Easter. Whilst they are less secure in their knowledge of Ascension-tide and Pentecost, they can still recall what happened, speaking of 'Jesus going up to his father in heaven' and for the disciples, the time 'when they could speak any language'. As one might expect in a school dedicated to the mother of Jesus, pupils confirm, 'We discuss about Mary a lot'. Some pupils express the beliefs of Christianity deeply, by saying, 'Christians believe, 'Our bodies may fade but we never die.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Inspiring collective worship at St Mary's is an integral part of school life and enjoyed by adults, including parents, and pupils alike. It is varied in its approach and has an emphasis on Christian values, key festivals in the church year and biblical teaching. Worship also motivates pupils to act in the service of others, following the example of Jesus. Importantly, there are close links with nearby Fairford Leys Church as well as links with St Mary's Church and its clergy. This means the pattern of worship includes church services at Easter, Epiphany, Candlemas and Pentecost. Pupils acknowledge that, 'in church we do all our important things'. For example, activities such as the 'Moses experience' held in Fairford Leys Church made a great impression on pupils who were able to deepen their learning about Moses. Pupils are encouraged to pray and reflect as well as lead aspects of worship. The prayer tree and numerous reflection areas around school are always well used, with pupils writing prayers on the prayer leaves and hanging them on the tree. Pupils said they wanted 'spiritual times running through the day as God is with us all day'. This led to the development of a reflection area especially for younger pupils. One of the strengths of how collective worship has journeyed on at St Mary's is the confidence the collective worship leader gives to staff. For example, she models ways of worshipping together as a community, using the 'Big Start' collective worship plan. In addition, the role of the pupil worship leaders has been a great priority, with one young worship leader saying 'It's a huge honour to do this job'. They know the importance of wearing their 'badges with the sign of the fish is the sign that the church is there'. Governors monitor worship regularly, noting the importance of Bible stories shared in worship, with pupils making connections to everyday life. For example, pupils know that the story of Ruth and Naomi focusses on 'commitment' and the story of Moses shows 'God is on our side'. They cite the example of Daniel to 'carry on praying to God and He will never leave you'. Pupils can explain the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit by speaking of, 'God in three forms, it's hard to explain, He can be everywhere at once but three different people'. One pupil went on to comment, 'God had to give up His Son but when he [Jesus] was just in the tomb he came to life and started up his life again'. St Mary's has already planned to help deepen pupils' understanding of The Trinity next term, centred around the celebration of Pentecost in the Christian liturgical year.

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

St Mary's Christian character is enshrined in its Christian values. The whole community believes in the core purpose of the school, in that every child is unique and special and loved by God. Above all, there is 'hope for all children' here who are all treated as individuals within this caring Christian community. This is because the school has high expectations and aspirations for each child to achieve the best they can within a community built on compassion and hope. Pupils work together and are spurred on to achieve in a culture of learning which is very positive. Areas from the last inspection have all been addressed. Effective leadership and governance is a hallmark of St Mary's. This extends beyond the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher to the middle leadership structure and the importance placed on phase leaders. The RE subject leader is also the Distinctive Christian Ethos Leader and attends training and feeds back to staff and governors. There is a separate RE and collective worship action plan which also feeds into the school development plan. Regular monitoring of RE takes place and RE and collective worship both meet statutory requirements. However, the school acknowledges the importance of more robust monitoring of RE by the governors alongside the RE subject leader. In addition, they see the value of appropriate training to support her in taking on this role. Valuing all God's children is always at the forefront, with governors and school leaders continually looking at their policy and practice. They focus on aspects such as anti-bullying through collective worship. For example, the story of Esther illustrates how strong principles and codes for living underpin positive attitudes in the face of adversity. Church and community links are very good, with pupils recognising 'the assembly man' when they meet the minister of Fairford Leys Church outside school. Healthy church school partnerships are evident. For example, pupils recall the Bishop of Buckingham's visit. They remember, 'the Bishop blessing the Early Years. Once when I was a junior leadership team mate, we showed him around our school. It was a privilege'. There are very positive links with the diocese, with the school benefitting from diocesan training and support. Parents too speak highly of the support given to the local community and further afield, citing the local food bank and

fundraising for charities, such as Sport Relief. Staff affirm St Mary's as a caring and friendly school where they too have an important role to play within the team on its onward journey to school improvement. They too see the value of being distinctively Christian within the context of a school where there are high expectations for everyone to succeed.

SIAMS report March 2018 St Mary's CE VC Primary School Aylesbury HP19 7WF