



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Northchurch St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Northchurch
Berkhamsted
HP4 3QZ

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 25th June 2014

Date of last inspection: 4th June 2009

School's unique reference number: 117424

Headteacher: Eloise Haezewindt

Inspector's name and number: Lindsay Fraser 107

School context

St Mary's First School, a one form entry school, is in the process of converting to a primary school, its first cohort of Year 5 pupils remaining in the school in September 2014. At the time of the inspection the school was undergoing considerable building work in order to accommodate two extra year groups. Most pupils are of white British heritage. The proportion of pupils in receipt of pupil premium is well below the national average, whilst the proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are also below the national average.

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

- Underpinned by strong Christian values the leadership of the school is totally committed to the best outcomes for every pupil.
- The relentless drive of governors through rigorous monitoring and evaluation enables a constant flow of school improvement in all aspects of the school as a church school.
- The vision, energy and expertise of the religious education co-ordinator ensures that standards are steadily rising across the school in religious education.
- The inspired input of the local clergy and the senior leadership of the school ensures that collective worship is considered by pupils to be a vital part of their education and development.

Areas to improve

- Improve standards in religious education further, particularly in Key Stage I and Early Years through increasing the amount of good and outstanding teaching.
- As the school becomes a primary school, increase the impact of collective worship by involving pupils in leadership and ensuring that exciting and engaging activities have a very clear Christian message.

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

The school is outstanding at meeting the needs of all pupils because governors and staff are relentless in their desire to meet the needs of the whole child. All pupils understand that they are valued and therefore are developing high self-esteem. All decisions and policies are based on the strong Christian ethos. The Christian ethos has greatly increased in profile since the previous inspection and is now evident in displays, biblical quotes and stimuli for reflection which serve as a constant reminder of the values and their biblical inspiration for all pupils. The commitment to supporting families is evident from the school's involvement in FAST (Families and Schools Together) during this past year, which has seen a measurable impact. Behaviour and relationships are excellent, pupils reporting that any disagreements are quickly addressed amongst themselves as a result of their Christian values. Pupils are all confident that any worries they have will be quickly addressed through the use of the 'worry box' in each classroom. The behaviour policy, incorporating John 13v34 'Love one another' is noticeable in relationships throughout the school. Attitudes to learning are also guided by the strong values and pupils are able to articulate the importance of such values as endurance. The curriculum is well planned and monitored to ensure provision for the development of social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC), the impact of this observed in a Key Stage 1 literacy lesson where pupils ably demonstrated empathy for a story character. SMSC is also well developed through the school's commitment to participation in sporting, cultural and arts events in a variety of venues together with a rich creative curriculum. Whilst there is a very strong Christian ethos the ethos is such that pupils feel safe to express their own opinions, to proclaim their different beliefs or to question a Christian concept. They are eager to learn about other faiths; parents believe this to be the result of having a strong understanding of the Christian faith which inspires them to learn about and from other faiths. Visiting places of worship of the major faiths in each of the year groups gives pupils good exposure to other faiths and ensures that they are not growing up 'in a bubble', as stated by one parent. Parents are extremely supportive of the strong Christian ethos and are very knowledgeable of the school values.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is central to the life of the school and is perceived by pupils as a vital part of their own development. Staff attend collective worship regularly, participating willingly and enthusiastically. Parent and carer surveys also demonstrate appreciation of the special festivals to which they are invited. Pupils have an excellent understanding of Anglican practice as a result of the monthly service and key church festivals held in St Mary's Church and led by Rev Jonathan. The celebration of Christian festivals now places a greater emphasis on Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. The headteacher and RE co-ordinator have substantially enriched pupil's worship experience; pupils can now identify features of Anglican tradition such as the representation of the candle as Christ the light of the world, the use of liturgical colours on the collective worship table and they are learning standard Christian prayers. An understanding of the Trinity and the impact of Pentecost was also ably explained by pupils of all ages. Older pupils participate in collective worship through prayers and reading. As yet there is little pupil led collective worship. Planning is thorough and takes account of age range and interests of all pupils. As a result pupils are readily engaged. An act of worship based on the text of Matthew 9v36 referring to the compassion of Jesus was observed during the inspection. Having been shown an extract from a recent facebook page and typical school scenarios to develop this theme pupils were able to understand the relevance to themselves. Whilst activities are underpinned by biblical texts pupils can sometimes remember the activity rather than the message; this has been recognised by leaders of collective worship. Enthusiastic participation by all pupils in singing sets a worshipful tone. Pupils readily volunteer to participate in spontaneous prayer which is often observed to reflect depth and feeling. Prayer is an important aspect of life at St Mary's; following the theme of prayer during RE Week pupils were led to participate in a national spirited arts competition. Prayer areas have been created and are well used in all classrooms. Reflection is a developing strength in the school and is used effectively in collective worship, RE and in lesson times with an

increasing use of pupil reflection booklets.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Since the previous inspection a new subject leader has been appointed whose commitment and drive have led to the subject becoming a core area of the curriculum. Standards of teaching in RE are now good in the older years and clearly improving in the younger year groups. Pupils enjoy their lessons, finding the subject matter challenging, interesting and engaging, as a result of quality planning. An increase in the resources available for the teaching of RE enables teachers to make their teaching more effective. In line with the whole school focus on writing more opportunities to write and to be taught how to write in RE give pupils the tools to enable them to express their thoughts and understanding more clearly. During the inspection shared writing, based on a description of an object seen during the visit to a mosque, was observed in a key stage 2 lesson. Regular and substantial professional development has led to some inspirational planning, both for RE lessons and for the special RE Week and RE Day. Activities and ideas to enable pupils to understand the Trinity were particularly creative, the impact of which was apparent when pupils, including very young pupils, enthusiastically and impressively described God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Visits to places of worship for each year group contribute significantly to pupils' understanding of the major faiths in the world. Assessment is rigorous with data to enable tracking and comparison with other core subjects. Each pupil is regularly and appropriately assessed and this data is used both to inform future planning and to inform senior leadership and governors of standards. Together with lesson observations governors and senior staff now have a very clear understanding of standards, provision and future development. Governors have been rigorous in their monitoring of the National Society statement of entitlement to RE. The quality of provision within the subject, outstanding in some areas, and the commitment of the RE co-ordinator are clearly having an impact on the improving standards throughout the school.

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

Commitment to ensuring the best outcomes for all pupils, taking steps to address under achievement, planning for succession at all levels and decision making based on strong Christian values reflect the outstanding leadership of the governors and senior management of the school. In challenging times of change in terms of age range, building works and staff recruitment the Christian values are clearly governing attitudes, actions and relationships. The RE co-ordinator meets with all staff to discuss and ensure a shared understanding of the half termly value. Values can therefore be embedded in order to raise impact on pupils' achievements, behaviour and SMSC. The headteacher and groups of governors meet half termly with a parent forum enabling parents to contribute to the future direction of the school. The ethos group meets termly to evaluate the Christian character with an annual schedule of evaluation, reporting to the governing body which then enables actions to be fed into the school development plan. Questionnaires to parents, staff and pupils and resulting feedback enable the governing body to reinforce the school's vision of the Christian character of the school; for example, foundation governors identified that there was an insufficient and inconsistent visual promotion of the Christian character within the school. This resulted in the development of a current high quality in the display of pupils' work in RE, interactive thought provoking reflections and inspiring representations of the school's Christian values, including the use of biblical quotes. Governors are extremely supportive of professional development at all levels and participate themselves in diocesan training. Relationships with the local community are very strong. A very close partnership with Rev Jonathan and the local church enables visits to the church, displays in the church and prayers for the school within the church. The school has made provision for parents to attend the church led Alpha course and this is much appreciated by parents. The school choir sings at the AGM of the parish council, the parish council also supporting school swimming. Whilst extremely strong links exist within the local community the school has rightly identified, and is now addressing, the need to develop links with the wider national and international community.

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