

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's CofE Primary School, Northchurch

Address	New Road, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, HP4 3QZ		
Date of inspection	02 May 2019	Status of school	Voluntary Aided
Diocese	St Albans	URN	117424

Overall Judgement	Grade	Good
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?		
Additional Judgements		
The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good
The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Good

School context

St Mary's CofE Primary School, Northchurch is a primary school with 223 pupils on roll, including nursery. The school has a low level of religious and cultural diversity and very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages. Since the last inspection, there has been a change in headteacher and the subject leader for religious education (RE) is new to the role.

The school's Christian vision

Mission statement: 'Excellence together, learning through faith'

Vision: To be a caring, inclusive, Christian environment, nurturing a life-long love of learning where we can work together to learn, to grow, to serve. We are proud to support the whole community and by collaborating will enable all children and adults within it to live fully, whilst 'shining brighter and brighter' *Proverbs 4:18*

Key findings

- The Christian vision shines through in the highly positive relationships between all members of the school community. Children and adults flourish in an atmosphere of genuine compassion and respect for each other.
- Vulnerable pupils are very well supported through tailored programmes of learning so that their individual needs are met, enabling them to 'shine brighter and brighter'.
- School leaders and governors know the school well through an ongoing cycle of evaluation, which ensures the continual development of the school as a church school.
- The knowledgeable, talented subject leader has introduced very positive developments to drive further improvements in teaching and learning in RE.
- Provision for spiritual development is strong through worship, prayer and reflection, which weave across the curriculum effectively.

Areas for development

- Continue to improve standards in RE through innovative approaches to teaching and learning.
- Deepen children's understanding and experience of the significance of Eucharist in Christian worship.
- Widen pupils' global and cultural awareness so that they have a greater understanding of the different worldviews within Britain.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

There is a clear sense of community at St Mary's with a genuine, tangible warmth between staff and pupils. The school's long established vision has recently been revised to ensure clarity of its biblical roots; this has led to a greater understanding amongst staff and pupils. The drive to be a 'caring, inclusive environment' underpins all that the school does in ensuring all pupils and families are welcomed and supported to 'be the best you can be'. Senior leaders and the governing body have developed an Ethos Group over recent years to ensure the school's Christian vision underpins and shapes the school's practice and policies. Leaders and governors have embedded a robust cycle of monitoring and evaluation to shape school improvement planning. One clear example of this is the recent change to ensure that RE is taught by all class teachers as a core subject, which has resulted in raising standards.

Staff endeavour to provide an exciting curriculum to inspire a love of learning in pupils. Children enjoy a wide range of trips, visits, sporting events and creative activities. Because of the school's commitment to meeting each child's individual needs, pupils attain well in national assessments and have done so over time. Leaders ensure that tailored programmes of support are designed for vulnerable pupils and those with additional needs, enabling them to flourish in an environment where they feel nurtured. The 'in the moment planning' approach for children in the early years enables staff to respond to pupils' interests and questions which has led to a high standard of enquiry and discussion amongst the children.

Spiritual development is well established through regular opportunities for reflection and prayer. Moments of stillness are built into lessons and collective worship which allow children the time to reflect. Mindfulness and meditation approaches enhance children's spiritual development further. There are regular opportunities to consider 'big questions' such as 'Who made God?' and 'Where can we find God?' Pupils give very well-reasoned suggestions for their age. One child explained, 'I think God is all around us in nature; he is so enormous, he is just everywhere.' This focus on spiritual development gives children the space and time to 'just be' and as described by the rector, enables children 'to bring to God what is happening'.

The school benefits from strong relationships with the local church, clergy and the diocese. Leaders and governors regularly attend diocesan training and the subject leader for RE has implemented an ongoing programme of training for teaching staff to develop teaching and learning approaches. As a result of this training, teachers are growing in confidence to teach RE to a very good standard. Staff are encouraged to develop professionally through training and this is apparent in the school's current priority to develop middle leadership roles. The mental health and wellbeing of staff and children is a high priority. The headteacher is very highly regarded for her care of staff and their work-life balance; they describe how they feel supported and cared for and as a result, they feel happy in their work.

Collective worship provides the opportunity for pupils and adults to grow spiritually with one child explaining its importance as 'It's the only time we all get together as a whole school to think and pray.' Pupils show very good behaviour in worship, listening attentively and being keen to contribute. Pupils speak highly of the weekly worship and monthly services led by the rector who provides substantial and effective support to the school. Children are invited to lead the whole school in prayer during worship, which they do spontaneously and with impressive confidence. Worship includes some aspects of Anglican practice such as lighting a candle, and covers key Christian festivals and the seasons of the church year. Pupils know a wide range of Bible stories and can relate the message of these to their daily lives. The pupil worship group is playing an increasing role in leading worship independently and suggesting areas they would like to develop. Pupils know the story of the Last Supper in some detail and can describe the meaning of the bread and wine. However, they have little experience of how this relates to the Eucharist and its relevance in Christian worship.

The behaviour of pupils is very good and they enjoy coming to school; as a result, attendance is above average and exclusions are very rare. Children feel well cared for and speak very positively about their friendships and about the way in which the adults support them if they disagree. 'Everyone makes you feel safe here' and 'if we fall out it never gets as far as bullying' explained two of the children. Children know the school's values well, describing them as 'important, because they tell us how to live.' Parents speak highly of the values underpinning the daily life

of the school describing them as ‘guidance for life’. As a result of the school’s vision, there is a strong sense of respect for all throughout St Mary’s where everyone feels included and valued. One child explained that ‘We are all treated the same at this school. It makes me feel happy because I know I belong here.’

Pupils talk readily of helping others through charity support such as Children in Need, Red Nose Day and poppies for remembrance. They have some understanding of overseas connections through the e-twinning project and the school is currently in the early stages of investigating an international school link.

The RE curriculum has undergone significant changes since the previous inspection with a new scheme of work, a change in subject leader and new teaching arrangements. Planning shows a good balance between Christianity and other worldviews. Children’s learning is enhanced with trips to a range of different places of worship and through themed opportunities such as RE Week. However, pupils do not fully recognize Britain as a multi-faith society. Previously taught by one teacher across the school, class teachers have responded positively to teaching RE to their own classes. They have embraced this new challenge, undertaken regular training and utilised support from the subject leader. Through regular monitoring and evaluation, school leaders have a clear picture of the current strengths and areas for development in RE. Together they have a shared ambition and capacity to drive standards on towards excellent practice.



The effectiveness of RE is Good

Standards of teaching and learning in RE are consistently good as evidenced by the school’s own monitoring. Assessment shows that pupils achieve in line with the age related expectations of the school’s RE syllabus and make good progress over time. Recent changes in the teaching arrangements have raised the profile of RE as an academic, core subject. The subject leader has a clear plan of action to further raise standards in RE through ensuring that all pupils, including the most able and those with special educational needs, are challenged appropriately in their learning.

Headteacher

Vanessa Hunt

Inspector’s name and number

Rachel Peddie 934