

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Stockers Farm Road
Rickmansworth
Hertfordshire
WD3 1NY

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire
Date of inspection: 15 January 2013
Date of last inspection: 30 June 2008
School's unique reference number: 117447
Headteacher: Mrs Helen Gill
Inspector's name and number: Mrs Lizzie McWhirter MA 244

School context

St Mary's Primary serves the community on the outskirts of Rickmansworth. Currently there are 235 pupils on roll who are mainly from a White British background. The school enjoys close links with the parish church of St Mary's which shares its building with the local Methodist community. The headteacher has been in post for four years and has built up a strong team around her.

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

This is a welcoming community where everyone is encouraged to achieve their best. It is a place where there is a real sense of belonging and where prayer is an important part of school life.

Established strengths

- The strong sense of community and belonging which exists, based on Christian values, modelled and embraced by everyone.
- The experiences offered to pupils in collective worship and religious education [RE], nurturing their spiritual development.
- The pupils' love of learning and life.

Focus for development

- Enhance the evaluation of collective worship, involving pupils and governors.
- Put in place a systematic method for the governors to monitor church school distinctiveness.
- Provide a forum for pupils and clergy to discuss the deep questions of life together.

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

St Mary's provides a very nurturing environment and is an inclusive, cohesive community which is much loved by its pupils and much appreciated by its parent body. Pupils speak highly of their teachers and friends and have very positive attitudes to each other, life and learning. They say, 'all the teachers give you very good lessons and help you in your education to go onto secondary school'. Parents praise the excellent education here which values 'the whole child and the whole family' and where it is possible 'to achieve all without being stuffy and with a smile on your face'. Parents speak highly of how welcoming the school is and how, 'right from nursery the children are taught to be kind and friendly with a strong sense of belonging and family and belonging to the church'. The choir's singing and giving of harvest parcels to the elderly in the local community is valued and enables pupils to experience the Christian values of service and gratitude. A wide range of extra curricular activities, including music, sport and care for God's earth, ensures a broad variety of achievement is valued. Bright, prominent displays also support pupils' learning and contribute to their spiritual development. Prayer or holy areas are used and valued in classrooms. There is a quiet area in the school grounds and pupils welcome developing outdoor spaces for reflection. Pupils recently interviewed their parents on their expectations of a church school. One view was that it has 'all the values of Christianity at its core, helping me to become a good Christian by worshipping God, being respectful, being honest, nice, helpful, loyal, caring and kind. Parents put great emphasis on pupils 'leaving St Mary's with a solid education, having achieved my potential'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship enjoys a special place in this church school where links with the parish church ensure the Anglican tradition is upheld. Worship clearly engages pupils and is making a difference in their lives. Parents want their children to 'enjoy going to church and appreciate how lucky they are to have such a lovely church linked to their school'. Pupils say they enjoy going to church to worship where they are blessed by the vicar, making them feel 'really happy'. Parents value pupils learning stories from The Bible and prayer which encourages their spiritual development. Pupils say they like hearing Bible stories such as 'Joseph and the rainbow coat which helps you to love each other and care for each other'. They enjoy prayer, especially praying for 'people to be cared for by God who looks down on them if they are unwell'. The Lord's Prayer is prayed every day in worship. Pupils speak of the reality of forgiveness as 'you forgive as you've done many wrong things as well', acknowledging that the 'person who sins against you can change their own ways and be a nice person who follows God'. Pupils encounter what it means to be part of the wider Anglican communion through visits to St Albans Abbey and by meeting the Bishop. Year 2 make a pilgrimage to the Abbey each year, celebrating the life and martyrdom of St Alban. Pupils are keen to contribute their own thoughts and reflections on worship, beginning with the ethos group which pupils see as 'a religious version of the school council'. This has recently been established and is still in its infancy. Pupils, for example, welcome more opportunity to have leadership roles in worship, which extends beyond the older pupils. Governors recognise the need to evaluate worship, involving pupils. They gave every pupil and teacher a Diamond Jubilee Bible last year. In these ways, the profile of worship is being raised.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils clearly enjoy their RE lessons, which contribute greatly to pupils' spiritual development. They say they enjoy learning about Christianity as well as Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. A programme for visits and visitors is developing and pupils welcome visiting other places of worship, saying 'that would be lovely'. RE has a high profile in this school and is led enthusiastically by the RE subject leader. Teaching and learning are good and standards are as high as in other core subjects. A systematic method of assessment and tracking is in place in order to inform planning and demonstrate achievement. This shows how the school has progressed since the last inspection. Excellent relationships ensure pupils collaborate well, think independently and are encouraged to think deeply. For example, Year 2 pupils know Alban 'sacrificed himself to someone else as he wanted to show people can learn about Jesus and God'. They have the opportunity to design banners to inspire Christian worship. Year 5 pupils contemplate The Annunciation when considering why Christmas is important to Christians. They use I pads in lessons to research the Anglican Church's liturgical calendar and consider questions such as 'Where did The Bible come from?' A number of pupils show high levels of achievement. To this end, the school welcomes establishing a forum for clergy and pupils to discuss together the deep questions of faith. The link governor for RE is the vicar who monitors the subject regularly and feeds back to the whole governing body.

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

Much has been achieved by the hard work of the headteacher, who together with her governors and staff, model Christian values. They ensure all school policy and practice makes a difference in the lives of pupils. There is an excellent partnership between school and church. The school regularly features in 'Link', the parish magazine and pupils' work is displayed in church. In these ways church/school links are seen and valued. Parents find staff very approachable where 'all teachers give any support you need'. Pupils are clear that St Mary's is a church school. Foundation governors are very supportive of the school and make a difference through their active involvement. They appoint effective teachers and provide them with leadership opportunities. Governors acknowledge there is work to be done. The school has identified clear areas for development, such as establishing a systematic way to monitor church school distinctiveness. The school values support from the diocese so that the school's Church of England foundation can be upheld and celebrated by everyone.