

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Stockers Farm Road, Rickmansworth, WD3 1NY

<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>St Albans</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust	N/A
Date of inspection	27 March 2018
Date of last inspection	15 January 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 117447
Headteacher	Emma Edwards
Inspector's name and number	Lilian Weatherley 42

#### School context

St Mary's Rickmansworth is a voluntary aided school with a nursery, located a short distance from the parish church. It is an average sized school with most pupils being of White, British origin. The proportions of pupils who have special needs and disabilities or for whom the school receives additional funding are below the national averages. The proportion with an education, health and care plan is above the national average. Since the previous SIAS inspection the school has had significant staff changes including five headteachers and three deputy headteachers. The current headteacher and deputy have been in post since September 2017.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's Church of England Primary School are good

- In a time of turmoil, the headteacher and governing body have ensured that the distinctive Christian character of the school has not remained constant but is rapidly improving and is having a significant impact on the whole school community
- The school's Christian values are having a noticeable impact on pupils' behaviour and achievement
- Religious education (RE) and collective worship play a key role in the daily life of the school and have a significant impact on the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development
- Pupils and staff find solace in the spiritual and prayer life of the school

#### Areas to improve

- Ensure that the tasks set have rigour and challenge and raise standards in RE
- Re-write the scheme of work for RE to ensure pupils have a deeper knowledge and understanding of other faith communities and the links with Christianity
- Revise the current arrangements for assessment in RE to take account of pupils' progress in key religious concepts
- Ensure that the school's Christian vision and values impact on every area of school life including the playground
- Make more use of the reflection spaces in each classroom to ensure that they have greater meaning and benefit for the pupils

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

Since the appointment of the current headteacher in September 2017 the school has had significant staff changes but throughout the turmoil the distinctive Christian character has been steadily improving. Linked to biblical teaching, Christian values are now in place and underpin the life of the school. They have become a key feature for moving the school forward. Each class has its own Christian value as well as additional values explored through collective worship and RE. These are having an impact on the whole school community as well as the pupils. Pupils, parents and governors are all able to talk about the values studied and parents are eager to point out how the school's values have helped the children to 'love and care about each other'. Parents feel the school has become a very safe environment for their children.

Based on a loving, caring Christian ethos pupils' personal development and wellbeing are good with attendance and pupil achievement high. However, there was a culture of coasting rather than academic rigour and challenge. This became a barrier to school improvement. Progress therefore continues to be an issue for some pupils, especially the more able. The new headteacher is working hard to address this issue and create a culture of high expectation.

All staff have recently attended training on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and this is having a significant impact on the daily routine of the school and how lessons are planned. Spiritual development is now good. There is greater creativity in lessons and each class has a reflection corner. Pupils talk about the ways in which these are used on a daily basis but several pupils interviewed felt that these could be used even more in some classes.

The Christian values have a clear impact on pupils' moral and social development. Behaviour in classes and around the school is excellent. Pupils are happy, confident and articulate and relationships are generally good. Pupils are polite and well-mannered to each other and adults. However, some of the older pupils explain that more could be done to 'reinforce the religious values in the playground'.

The new ethos council are proud of their work, especially their prayer garden created with the school's eco council. They explain how they are currently planning for a statue or a cross in the centre as a focus for prayer. They feel, however, that more could be done to improve it and prevent pupils 'running around' in what they want to be a quiet, reflective space.

RE has a high profile across the school and makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. As religions other than Christianity are only studied in the summer term, the subject currently offers little contribution to pupils' cultural development and their understanding of faith communities. The school does, however, hold a global diversity week and charitable giving is high. Christian Aid week is an important event in the school calendar. Pupils have a clear biblical understanding of the values of thankfulness and compassion resulting in an empathy and support for those less fortunate.

The governors say how they aim to show the pupils, parents and whole community how being a Christian makes a difference. All pupils benefit from wrap-around care and a wide range of cross-curricular activities and after-school and holiday clubs. The school's vision 'to provide an education that is inspiring, nurturing and meaningful, founded on Christian principles' is also reflected in the way in which music has a high profile in the school. Pupils are able to learn a range of instruments as well as be part of a very successful choir which regularly performs in church and more recently at the O2 arena.

## **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

Pupils enjoy worship and see the relevance in their daily lives. Prayer and worship now play a central role in the life of the school. Based on the school's Christian values, biblical teachings and the 'Roots and Fruits' programme, worship plays a key part in setting the tone for the day. Pupils are able to respond to a range of different creative experiences, including the use of silence, prayer and reflection. A recent visit from a paralympic swimmer enabled the pupils to see what can be achieved despite adversity. The Bible has a key focus in the school. Each class has its own version for use in the prayer spaces and the King James Version is kept in the hall. Pupils say how they find Bible stories and biblical references thought-provoking. On the day of the inspection the worship was led by the pupils from the ethos council. It was their first attempt at planning and leading a whole school worship. The Christian greeting, lighting of candles and excellent slide presentation indicated a clear understanding of liturgical practice and signs and symbols of Easter. All pupils and staff present watched and listened with interest and gave honest feedback about the lack of voice projection at the end.

The school has a strong choir and the energy with which all of the pupils sang 'Shine Jesus Shine' at the end of the worship is a credit to the school and the music teachers.

Pupils have a keen understanding of the purpose and value of prayer in their lives and those of others. They know the Lord's Prayer and have an age-appropriate understanding of the Trinity. Pupils have benefitted from the assistant clergy visiting weekly to lead worship and help with their knowledge and understanding of the school's Anglican heritage. Pupils also say how much they enjoy the regular visits to the parish church for worship and how much it helps their understanding of Christian prayer and worship.

The worship is carefully planned and pupils benefit from additional class worship. The staff interviewed say how much they appreciate being able to attend worship and the impact that this has had on them during the upheavals.

Links with the parish church are growing. There is the recently-formed prayer group and a 'J Club' run by ladies in the congregation. Two church members have also been assigned to be a link to the school. Pupils and their families say how they feel this has been a significant improvement and how much they enjoy the half-termly services in the parish church.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory**

Standards in RE vary across the school. Where teaching is good, pupils are challenged and progress is good. However, progress is too often hampered by inadequate task setting. In some lessons, what has been an excellent and challenging lesson is hampered by a low-level task which impedes pupil progress. An over-emphasis on tasks related to Christian values is used at the expense of tasks that continue the challenge for pupils to explore deeper Christian concepts. For example; pupils know a great deal about the feelings related to the Easter story but have only a basic, superficial knowledge of the story itself. The depth of understanding is missing. Likewise, their knowledge and understanding of other faiths is very limited. Studying these faiths only in the summer term hampers the pupils' ability to make links and understand key events such as Passover and the Last Supper. Although there are many books on the Christian tradition in the library, books on other faith traditions are limited to two or three.

Pupils enjoy RE. Most of those interviewed said it was one of their favourite subjects. The subject offers significant support to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development with opportunities for pause and reflection during lessons. Teachers use the interactive white boards well to engage pupils with their learning but insufficient use is made of art, music and artefacts to enhance the lessons and provide for deeper thinking and reflection.

Assessment is in place but the school currently follows the Bedfordshire RE syllabus and its level descriptors. As level descriptors are no longer used in other subjects and RE this poses an issue for accurate assessment. Fortunately, the syllabus is to be renewed in September and so plans are in place to revise the school's scheme of work and assessment.

The new subject leader is enthusiastic and has worked hard to provide detailed plans and resources for other teachers and to raise the profile of the subject. As a non-specialist, she has attended several diocesan courses to improve her own knowledge and understanding, including the 'Understanding Christianity' training. She regularly monitors progress alongside the headteacher and has been instrumental in adding more creativity and opportunities for enquiry to lesson planning, as well as wider use of biblical texts. This has had an impact on pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Bible, for example, the Year 6 lesson observed where pupils were making links between the Parable of the Tenants and the Kingdom of God.

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

The new headteacher has had a significant impact in moving the school's distinctive Christian character forward, despite a legacy of five headteachers and three deputy headteachers as well as constant staff changes. There have been three staff resignations since the recent Ofsted inspection in February 2018 and the vicar has been on sick leave since September. This has put pressure on retaining the distinctive Christian character of the school. All of the issues from the previous report have been met but the leadership team recognise that this is ongoing and a regular pattern of monitoring and evaluation is now in place. With the support of the deputy headteacher, head of RE and governing body, the headteacher has managed to create an oasis amongst the turmoil. Parents are naturally concerned about their children's education but feel able to put their trust in the headteacher and her decisions. Parents are eager to explain how issues about their children that had not been dealt with effectively in the past are now being addressed and that every child is known and their individual needs met: 'Things have massively, massively changed'.

The school's self-evaluation paints an accurate picture and the senior leadership and governors have detailed knowledge of the school's performance. Effective strategies are in place for improvement. However, with temporary staff and no full-time vicar, retaining the ethos of the school and providing pastoral support has been challenging. In spite of the upheavals, the newly formed ethos council made up of governors, staff and pupils has worked hard to ensure that the distinctive character of the school is retained and still moving forward. Indeed, pupils on the ethos council are full of ideas and eager to share their new ideas for a statue in the prayer garden.

All stakeholders are fully aware of the school's current Christian vision and values but the headteacher and governors accept that when there is a full complement of staff in September the school needs a fresh start. This means revisiting its Christian vision, values, aims and objectives to enter a new and exciting phase of its development. The drab exterior of school buildings, especially the block in the playground, does not help the pupils to feel valued and aim high. This environment does not reflect a school that has an exciting future. One parent said, 'they are the same as when I was here'.

Links with the parish church have improved and during the vicar's absence there has been strong support for the school from the parish and the assistant clergy. Both RE and worship meet statutory requirements and the appointment of a new and dynamic head of RE is raising the profile of the subject. Her work with the choir is exemplary. Parents, pupils and governors speak highly of the recent young voices event that the choir took part in at the O2 arena. Links with the diocese have also grown and governors and staff have received regular training on aspects of the distinctive Christian ethos, including pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and 'Understanding Christianity'. Unfortunately, many of these staff have now left the school. This instability in staffing has also had an impact on future leadership training. However, in the words of the chair of governors, 'we aim to make it obvious that our school has a distinctive Christian ethos through a deliberate attempt to link the Gospel of Christ with the daily life of the school'.