



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School

Heath Drive
Ware
Hertfordshire
SG12 0RL

Previous SIAMS grade: Satisfactory

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Date of inspection: 31 March 2015

Date of last inspection: November 2010

School's unique reference number: 117409

Headteacher: Andy Cosslett

Inspector's name and number: Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

St Mary's Junior School shares a site with a community infant school in the market town of Ware. There are 233 pupils on roll, who are mainly from a White British background. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with additional needs is below average. St Mary's Church is situated in the town centre, a good walking distance from the school.

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

- This is a welcoming and accepting family community, rooted in Christian values, where children enjoy learning together.
- The staff work together as a team to ensure a nurturing transition within a Christian framework for all Year 3 pupils. The focus on building independence enables this to happen and prepares pupils for junior school life and beyond.
- The importance of prayer in the life of this church school enhances pupils' spiritual development and enriches their daily lives.

Areas to improve

- Ensure pupils develop a good understanding of Christianity as a worldwide faith and meet people of other faiths to enhance their learning and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [SMSC].
- Ensure the regular evaluation of collective worship, involving pupils and governors, is used to continually develop the integrity and quality of worship.
- Ensure the governing body evaluates the impact of aspects of Christian distinctiveness on teaching and learning and responds to the findings.

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

St Mary's Junior School is a welcoming and inclusive family community, whose pupils enjoy a strong sense of belonging and identity. Its foundation is built upon its chosen core Christian values, which include love, trust and respect. There have been no exclusions and attendance is good. This is attributed to the fact that St Mary's pupils want to come to school and are engaged and motivated by the ethos of the Christian values which are lived out. Consequently, behaviour and relationships are good, and children grow in their self-esteem because they are able to draw upon Christian values, such as endurance and perseverance. Parents testify to children's confidence improving. They go on to say how this school 'builds independence, makes them grow up more and helps them here and in their transition to secondary school'. St Mary's shows a Christian understanding of the value of each individual, and goes the extra mile in supporting any vulnerable pupils. Firstly, if any child is in need, requiring uniform or football kit, these are provided so all children can feel they belong and are part of the family. Secondly, intervention is put in place for those making slow or low progress, by funding extra teacher support. Thirdly, enrichment experiences, which include theatre groups and sports facilities in school, enhance pupil learning, chances to succeed and growth in self-worth. Good examples include residential visits to Dorset, which help prepare these junior pupils for life. Here they can develop new skills, and teach and lead other children, which enable them to become confident learners. Achievement is therefore good because standards of attainment and progress for most pupils are above the national average, with a significant improvement in English last year. Pupils at St Mary's show respect for different cultures and beliefs through their religious education [RE] and worship. These make a good contribution to the school's Christian character and to pupils' SMSC development. Moreover, RE has its own certificate for achievement, motivating children and encouraging them to see the subject as important. Pupils enjoy RE and show a good level of religious literacy, relating the Christian narrative well and showing good knowledge of the Jewish Passover. They speak of the Bishop of St Albans as the 'head of the churches in our area' and of Mary, 'the mother of Jesus who trusted God'. However, they are less secure in their knowledge of the Ascension and Pentecost. Pupils say they 'learn a lot about how to extend our learning into Christianity and other religions. In the future we can understand them and not be judgemental and know what's right. We can stick to our own opinions if we want to'. An important part of RE for pupils is asking questions. Good examples include asking their vicar 'about the gospel and how Veronica and others carried on the story of Jesus' when discussing the stations of the cross in school. However, pupils welcome visiting 'more places of worship and meeting a few more visitors of different religions' in order to deepen their learning.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship at St Mary's involves pupils and is rooted in Christian values, such as acceptance, friendship, kindness and linked to Jesus' teaching in the Bible. As a result pupils cite endurance as 'keep on pushing yourself to do it because you want to so you succeed and accomplish more in your daily life'. A recent series on the miracles of Jesus encouraged pupils to have faith in Jesus' care for those in need. Some pupils went on to say that learning from biblical stories in worship means 'we can trust people like parents, friends, teachers, God and Jesus'. Pupils say they enjoy 'going to our church in town' and would like to go more as they value their link with St Mary's Church where the Christmas and Easter services take place annually. Parents too, enjoy church services, saying the children speak highly of their vicar. They especially praise the Mothering Sunday service, when the school choir sung part of The Messiah. Prayer features strongly in the life of this school, which pupils willingly contribute to in writing and reading their prayers. Good examples include, 'Our Father Almighty, thank you for the education you have given us and my trustworthy friends I have'. Class prayer books are well used. Pupils speak of the importance of saying sorry and being friends again when they use the Lord's Prayer in worship. In addition, the school creed is said at the end of worship, which brings 'the whole school together'. Consequently, prayer makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development. A hallmark now of St Mary's is the addition of the 'cross on the hill', entirely the idea and design of the

school council. Pupils speak highly of the Easter service last year which took place outside when pupils and staff gathered at the foot of the newly built cross 'which represents Jesus', and received a blessing from the vicar. Consequently, St Mary's pupils are immensely proud of their 'cross on the hill' as it visibly reminds them they belong to a church school, recalling the part of the Easter story 'where Jesus died on the hill'. Together with the school mosaics at the entrance to the school, designed by pupils to reflect core Christian values, this cross especially demonstrates how the school has moved on since the last inspection. Pupils are growing in their understanding of The Holy Trinity, saying, 'God is in heaven. God's gaze is always watching us. He is the Father of Jesus'. Pupils lead class worship weekly, praised by parents. They contribute to worship evaluation through pupil surveys, which are then shared with staff and governors. However, pupils welcome being able to share their viewpoints with staff and governors more often.

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

St Mary's governors and senior leaders clearly state their Christian vision and key values of love, friendship, creativity and peace for this community, where the wellbeing of pupils is of great importance. St Mary's pupils thrive in an environment where the Christian values of love, acceptance and respect make a difference. St Mary's Church and the 'cross on the hill' are of great importance to pupils who speak eloquently of their personal value. They depict these two strong Christian symbols centrally in their four mosaics at the school's entrance, which they designed and reflect their school's core values. Parents, pupils and staff value the way they are included and involved in school life. Of particular significance is the work this junior school undertakes with regard to transition. As a result of effective partnerships with parents and good partnerships with the local infant and secondary schools, St Mary's is able to support the children beyond transition arrangements in place for Year 3 pupils. This is because all staff work together as a team, with governors providing support for a tuition service every Tuesday and Friday. This includes enrichment in mathematics and English. Spanish is taught in Year 3, German in Year 4 and French in Year 5 and 6 which helps to broaden pupils' cultural awareness. This is quite unique for a junior school to offer such breadth in modern foreign languages. Consequently, children succeed and achieve well. Home/school and church links are making a difference in family life, with parents saying the school creed is in evidence on their fridge at home. Governors ensure Christian ethos and values are discussed at every full governing body meeting. They work to a robust and rigorous school development and improvement plan, with realistic target setting. As a result, all areas for development have been addressed and there are clear priorities for action to make stronger links with the church. RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements and are well led. Progress and attainment is part of their core interest. However, they are aware that they do not currently specifically evaluate the impact of Christian distinctiveness on teaching and learning. They engage in a comprehensive monitoring system and support staff professional development and succession planning. The RE subject leader is relatively new in post, but is valued by the head and governors. Training and support is welcomed from the diocese. However, currently the school has not put this in place for her to fulfil her role effectively.

SIAMS report March 2015 St Mary's CE VC Junior School, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 0RL