

**STATUTORY
INSPECTION OF
ANGLICAN SCHOOLS**



Name & address of school: St Mary's Church of England High School
Downage, Hendon, London NW4 1AB

Diocese of London

Date of inspection: 24-25 November 2009

Type of School: Voluntary Aided Secondary

Name of Headteacher: Kate Roskell

Local authority: Barnet

Date of last inspection: January 2007

School's unique reference number: 101360

SIAS Inspector: John Ross (N.S.476)

Context

St Mary's High School opened in 1958 and is situated on two sites a five-minute walk apart. It has specialist status in humanities. The buildings are not fully fit for purpose and are due for replacement under Building Schools for the Future. Around 80% of students are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Over half have English as an additional language. There are more boys than girls. The school is undersubscribed. It draws its students from a wide area of North London. The school has Sportsmark Award.

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

St Mary's High School is a good Church school. It has improved significantly since the last denominational inspection. The vision and drive of the school's leadership and governors have transformed the school in recent years. Students feel safe and happy in the school. Christian ethos is once again becoming embedded in the daily life of the school. This is work in progress, as much more can yet be achieved. The capacity for further improvement is good.

Established strengths

- Inspiring and visionary Christian leadership of the headteacher, well supported by the senior leadership team and governing body
- Involvement and support of clergy from the deanery
- The quality of Christian care and support within the school, including students' care for one another
- The impact of specialist school status, exemplified by the quality of display around the school and its contribution to the Christian ethos

Focus for development

- Build on existing links with the local Christian community including Church primary schools
- Consult all stakeholders, but especially students, on their preferred styles of Collective Worship so that relevance and quality are assured
- Reintroduce Religious Education at A level
- Ensure that clearly articulated Christian values feature in development planning at all levels and across the school

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

St Mary's is an inclusive, happy and welcoming Christian community. Students from many cultures and backgrounds work together in an atmosphere of tolerance, trust and respect. One said, 'We fit well together.' The prospectus makes explicit the school's Christian foundation and ethos: 'Christian values are at the heart of all that we do.' Standards of attainment rose significantly in 2009. Not all groups achieve equally well and the school has strategies to address this. The vulnerable are cared for and often achieve well. Students feel happy and safe at school. There are good relationships between different faith and ethnic groups. Bullying and racism incidents are rare. Care and support are strengths of the school. 'There is always an adult figure to turn to, someone to look out for you,' commented one older student. Peer support is strong and after careful selection and training students have the opportunity to act as peer mentors. All students in the school community are valued. There is a strong Christian ethos but those of other faiths and none feel welcomed and are accorded respect. There is special care for the vulnerable and disaffected. An inclusion facility known as 'The Bridge' provides intensive and often individual support for students, including emotional and pastoral support and assistance with course work.

Students are in the main cheerful, friendly and articulate. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. As a consequence of the specialist humanities school status there are attractive displays in classrooms and around the school, many based on the school motto 'Believe and Achieve'. These reinforce the school's Christian ethos and Church school distinctiveness. The school is also creating an outside quiet space which will be available for use as an area for spiritual reflection and development. Students make a positive contribution to the local and global community. There is a strong resolve to tackle discrimination and remove barriers to learning. The History of Black Origin conference and exhibition staged at the school was successful and drew in students and staff from other London schools. There are some strong international links. Staff and students from a South African school have been hosted by St Mary's on their visit to England. There is also an exchange link with a Christian school in Berlin. Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education is good. Students show concern for others in the local and global communities. Charitable fundraising is strong. Christian values such as forgiveness are becoming embedded in the life of the school, although are not always explicit in all policies, plans and documentation.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective Worship has an important place in the life of the school. It is recognisably Christian and makes a good contribution to students' spiritual development. The Anglican tradition plays a central role. There are regular Eucharistic services for each year group at St Mary's Church and Anglican clergy are regular visitors to lead worship at the school. The greeting, Lord's Prayer and the Grace are all in regular use. Each year group has a local member of clergy attached. Students have considerable involvement in Collective Worship through reading and assisting the worship leader and sometimes worship is led by a tutor group. There is a daily act of worship for each student. This necessitates some worship taking place in tutor bases during form time. Here, students have the opportunity to read the thought for the day, lead prayers and even provide music. In one act of Collective Worship observed the tutor group was led in prayer by a student, then the whole class sang with enthusiasm 'This is the day,' accompanied by a student on the guitar.

Special services are held in church from time to time. The carol service is an important event and one is provided for each year group. This is another opportunity for students to take a leading role. Worship is well planned with themes for each week. A worship planning group consisting of the worship coordinator, the headteacher, senior staff and local clergy meets regularly to evaluate and plan. The school has plans to improve the quality of worship further through active participation of students and staff and greater creativity and variety including the use of music. Following the recommendation for development from the previous inspection, the school has reviewed worship policy and practice. It has yet to take full account of students' views and needs through a formal system of evaluation, although students are sometimes consulted informally.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Religious Education (RE) makes an important contribution to the life of the school. It is taught by specialist teachers who are passionate for their subject. They have worked hard to make the subject interesting and accessible to all. The department is well led and managed and it enjoys strong support from the senior leadership team and governing body. Teaching and learning are good. The best lessons include a range of learning activities which keep students motivated and focused. In one lesson observed students were able to work collaboratively and then share their views. Students were able to talk about personal issues without fear of shame or embarrassment. There are detailed schemes of work and suitable differentiation and challenge is provided according to students' ability. The department has responded well to the comment in the previous inspection report that there were insufficient opportunities to encounter faith communities or visit local places of worship. Students now visit Neasden Temple, Finchley Reformed Synagogue and Hendon Orthodox Synagogue as well as various local Christian places of worship.

Standards in RE are usually high and students make good progress. The department responded to a dip in GCSE results in 2008 and in 2009 70% of students achieved A*-C for full course RE. 27% of those entered achieved A*-A. Entries at A level have diminished in recent years, from 10 down to two. There are currently no students studying for RE at A level and the department has plans to reintroduce this course at the earliest opportunity. Conferences for sixth formers have been held in school and have been much appreciated. Specialist school status has had a positive effect on the department, including additional funding which provides extra support for students. It has also given back to the department a degree of confidence and helped to reinforce its status.

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

The Christian leadership of the headteacher is strong and visionary. Well supported by the senior leadership team and governing body, she has led the school out of a period of instability and turbulence into calmer waters. Issues for development from the last inspection have been addressed successfully. Governors act as critical friends to the school and are regular visitors. They are holding the school to account for its work and supporting the school's leadership in its quest to drive up standards further. Foundation governors make a significant contribution to Christian ethos. Parents are pleased with the school: they particularly like the good communication between school and home, and appreciate receiving a letter, postcard or phone call from the school, especially when it conveys good news! They also like being told by admissions staff that the school is unambiguously Christian. Community cohesion is good, not least because the school's students and staff from many cultures and backgrounds are able to work harmoniously together. Succession planning for both middle and senior leadership has been given due consideration and the school has a good record of nurturing and developing staff. Links with local clergy, deanery and diocese are strong and the school enjoys good support. The school has also participated in cross-faith groups involving Christians, Hindus, Jews and Muslims.

The school's leadership and governors have a clear and accurate picture of the school's effectiveness as a Church school. Areas for development have been identified and plans made to address them. The school improvement plan includes three priorities, one of which is to strengthen ethos and community. The school has plans to revisit and clarify the school vision which will include a more explicit reference to Christian values. There are plans to increase the applicants for foundation places through working in partnership with local Anglican and other churches as well as Church primary schools. The school has been successful in a bid for completely new buildings under 'Building Schools for the Future'. When complete these will transform the learning environment into one appropriate for the 21st century. The story of St Mary's in recent years has been one of transformation and improvement. The unwritten story of St Mary's in the future promises to be even more exciting. The school is now well positioned to improve further so that all in its community can truly measure up to its motto, 'Believe and Achieve'.