

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St. Mary's CE Primary School, Hackney

Lordship Road, Stoke Newington NI6 0JT	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	London
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Local authority	Hackney
Date/s of inspection	24 November 2016
Date of last inspection	15 November 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided Primary 100271
Headteacher	J O'Brien
Inspector's name and number	J Matthews 855

School context

St Mary's is a smaller than average, inner city, Church of England primary school in the London Borough of Hackney. Located in an area of significant deprivation, the proportion of children eligible for pupil premium funding is well above average, as is the proportion of children for whom English is an additional language. A very high proportion of children come from ethnic minority groups. The number of children with special educational needs is slightly above average. Since the last inspection, the school's leadership has undergone a time of significant change. The Headteacher, new in 2013, has since restructured the leadership team and appointed a completely new team of senior leaders. A new Early Years unit is being built and major building works are ongoing.

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

- School leaders have an uncompromising drive to ensure that every child reaches their full potential. This results in all children, including vulnerable groups, achieving well compared to their peers locally and nationally.
- A clear Christian vision shared and understood by the whole school community provides a commonality of purpose amongst all stakeholders.
- Children treat each other kindly and their exemplary behaviour and attitudes to learning mean that everyone can focus on learning.
- Positive relationships between the school and the parish church mean that support for children and their families is available from a range of sources.

Areas to improve

- Fully embed the new Diocesan Religious Education (RE) curriculum through resourcing and Continuing Professional Development and sharpen the existing assessment procedures to ensure they accurately feed into future planning.
- Ensure that spirituality permeates the life of the school through developing a common language and clear definition of spirituality that will enable all stakeholders to recognise, plan for and promote opportunities for children's spiritual development.
- Formalise a plan for strategic monitoring of collective worship in order to facilitate pupil's spiritual development.

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

The motto 'Through God's love, we strive to be the best that we can be' is clearly lived out in the daily life of the school community. School staff are described by parents as 'not just caring or kind, but loving'. This loving environment means that children feel safe and free to learn. Good teaching teamed with the leadership's high aspiration for everyone, regardless of ability or starting point, results in higher than national levels of progress and achievement. Children strive to discover their gifts and do their best because they understand that they are all unique and special to God. Pupil Premium funding is well targeted and used very effectively to raise standards and provide cultural experiences. Children from all vulnerable groups make good progress because of the school's highly effective inclusion practice.

School staff, parents, the local church and governors were all involved in developing the school's motto and in adopting the values of respect, courage, truth and hope. Children understand these values and talk easily about how they guide their decisions and can be put into practice in everyday life. They understand that these values have biblical foundations but their knowledge of this is not always secure. Limited times for quiet reflection and spiritual development are provided during collective worship and during these times, children respond very well. More work is needed to identify and plan for opportunities for spiritual development in the wider curriculum. Children enjoy their Religious Education lessons because they find them 'interesting and fun' as well as helping them to learn about 'why people believe different things' and behave in different ways.

Positive behaviour management and pastoral care are real strengths of the school. The behaviour of the children and their attitudes to learning are exemplary. They treat each other kindly, respect each other's differences and support each other. Relationships between all parts of the school community are excellent. The school, the parents and the governors talk about an open and transparent culture in which each child is nurtured as an individual to be the best that they can be. Parents of children with special educational or emotional needs are particularly positive about this and describe the school's motto as 'inclusive' and 'understanding that all children are not the same'. Because of the close relationships with the local church, school leaders are able to link families with the pastoral care they need.

Children enjoy school and, as a result, attendance is very good. Because of their stated desire to develop each child to their full potential, school leaders are proactive in improving attendance further and have implemented an effective range of measures to achieve this.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Daily worship is regarded by adults and children alike as a special part of the school day. Its impact can be seen through the kind and loving relationships; the consideration of others and the mutual respect exhibited throughout the rest of school life. Children say that they enjoy assemblies and that they try to remember what has been taught. They engage very well and are keen to join in with activities, to answer questions and to work out the meanings behind the stories. Children speak happily about how they can put into practice the lessons that they learn and about how much they enjoy the chance to 'be quiet and to think my own thoughts'. Worship follows a simple, child friendly Anglican format. Children enter quietly, sing enthusiastically and listen attentively. When children are invited to pray, they are reminded to sit quietly and respect the people around them. Children from other faiths say that they are comfortable to sit and pray to their own god.

Worship at St. Mary's, extends beyond assemblies and there are opportunities for prayer and reflection in classrooms and at governor meetings. Children use the prayer and reflection areas in their classrooms well and they are proud to show what is there and to explain how and when it is used.

Daily collective worship is planned with members of the school and St. Mary's church together and it is distinctively Christian in nature. The nature of God as Father, Son and Spirit is explored in both assemblies and in RE lessons and children have an age appropriate understanding of the concept. There has been an increasing focus on grounding the school's values in their Christian character but children are not always confident with these links. Governors work alongside school leaders to evaluate the impact of collective worship and adapt plans accordingly. More work is needed in this area. The fact that the collective worship leader is a member of the senior leadership team demonstrates its high priority in the life of the school.

Leaders ensure that children see the whole school community as being involved in the worshipping life of the school. The chair of governors, local clergy and all teaching staff lead worship at different times. Children experience different Christian traditions and see taking time out to think about God as being a natural part of a day for both adults and children.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Children achieve well in Religious Education. This is because teaching is lively, engaging and, in the words of the children, 'very fun'. Learners enjoy the opportunity to reflect and think about how they can apply their lessons to their own lives. One boy commented 'I love RE because I can think my own thoughts and make my own ideas. It doesn't matter if other people think different. They respect me and I respect them!' This sentiment was voiced several times in different ways in different year groups. Because children enjoy their RE lessons so much, they are keen to work hard; they present the work in their books very well and they make good progress. Through discussion, marking and verbal feedback, teachers encourage children to think beyond the obvious and the literal and most children respond well to this. Children speak easily about how religion can guide their morals and actions. The RE curriculum used at St. Mary's is in a state of flux. A new curriculum from the Diocese is being phased in a study unit at a time. During this time, the RE leader is providing highly effective mentoring and support for teachers in getting to grips with both the new curriculum and new assessment methods. Teachers speak positively about the new scheme, particularly the clear, helpful assessment criteria. Because of the school's ethos of providing for the individual needs of each child, some lessons are clearly differentiated. Assessment is beginning to be used as a tool to differentiate for future lessons but this is not yet fully embedded.

It is clear from children's books that they are making good progress in both their knowledge of religion and their ability to learn from religion. Learners have a good understanding of Christianity and other world faiths. The older children have a clear understanding that, as the adults and community leaders of tomorrow, they will need to understand religion and how it affects its followers. Opportunities to stop and reflect are used well when they arise. However, there are limited opportunities for children to use their knowledge and skills to ponder questions of meaning and purpose. RE has a high profile within the curriculum and meets requirements for dedicated RE curriculum time. The subject is led by a senior member of staff and has high priority with school leaders and governors. Governors are working with the RE lead to support routine monitoring and evaluation procedures. The subject leader is proactive in seeking out training, advice and support and has a clear vision for developing the subject further. Expertise from the Diocese has been accessed to support development.

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

The school's leaders are passionate about valuing each child as a unique and special child who matters to God. The resulting investment in pastoral care for children, and often for their families, means that children feel secure in their place and identity at school and are free to focus on their learning. This, in turn, results in the children of St. Mary's, regardless of ability, background or disadvantage, achieving better than the national standards. Attendance is excellent, behaviour is exemplary and exclusions very rare.

The close partnership with St. Mary's Church enriches life at both school and church. Local clergy effectually support the delivery of the RE curriculum in a range of ways, for example, leading sessions or accompanying classes on visits to the mosque. Children very much enjoy clergy led assemblies and many families in need benefit from pastoral support. In their turn, families from the school support a range of parish events and, in the words of the curate, '... the parish would be a much poorer place without the school'. An example of this close working relationship is the way in which governors, clergy and parents worked together to develop the school's motto. The views of different stakeholders are gathered by school leaders and together with monitoring and evaluation cycles feed into the school's effective improvement planning.

The school fulfils statutory requirements for RE and collective worship and both areas command high priority for timetable space and resources. Both are very well led by the deputy head with staff speaking highly of the support they are given to improve their practice. There have been significant improvements in these areas.

After the last inspection, staff turnover was very high but is now more settled. This can be attributed to the effective measures taken to ensure that the school is a welcoming and inclusive place to work. There is a focus on professional development for both teachers and support staff and staff say that they feel well supported by the Head and Deputy. Since the establishment of a stable leadership team, the school is beginning to make good use of local authority and Diocesan support to train and develop its own leaders for the future but activities have not yet had time to embed and take effect.

School leaders at all levels have a clear, Christian vision for the future of the school as a church school. This is shared with the whole community and borne out in the strapline 'Through God's love, we strive to be the best that we can be.'