

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's CE Primary School

Dollis Park Finchley N3 IBT	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	London
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Barnet
Date/s of inspection	14 March 2017
Date of last inspection	December 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 101323
Headteacher	Stefan Roos
Inspector's name and number	John Viner NS144

School context

St Mary's Church of England Primary School is a popular, larger than average primary school, located in the centre of Finchley and serving the parishes of St Mary-at-Finchley and St Paul's Finchley. Its 480 pupils reflect the area's changing diversity of faith and background. A higher than average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. A lower than average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and the proportion of disadvantaged pupils, eligible for additional government funding is very low. More than a third of pupils attend church. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are well above national and borough averages. The school has not been inspected by Ofsted since 2011.

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

- Christian values underpin the school and are evident in every aspect of its life and work. They inspire the excellent compassionate relationships between and among adults and pupils and make real the school's motto, 'Learning together in God's love'.
- Collective worship is at the heart of the school, affirming all who attend and inspiring pupils to works of Christian compassion.
- Religious Education (RE) is afforded high importance in the school's curriculum so that it engages pupils with an understanding of faith and belief.
- The headteacher, key staff and governors share and articulate an ambitious Christian vision for the school that informs policy and practice.
- The strong threefold partnership between the school and the two parish churches makes for an effective and cohesive association that is a beacon of Christian love to the community it serves.

Areas to improve

- Review the RE curriculum to ensure that a balanced programme of study enables pupils to learn the skills of enquiry, reflection and analysis.
- Develop an assessment system that compliments the revised programme of study for RE and gives teachers accurate information about pupil achievement and aligns with assessment in other subjects.

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

The school has identified the specific Christian values of Endurance, Service, Reverence, Hope, Compassion and Thankfulness to express its Christian distinctiveness. These values are promoted consistently and purposefully so that they underpin every aspect of the school's work and define its purpose. They are articulated by staff, known by pupils and recognised by parents as a foundation for their children's lives. As a result, pupils know that they matter to the school because they matter to God. Therefore, they like coming to school; they attend regularly, behave very well and work hard. The school's values directly impact on pupils' daily lives and achievements. They make excellent progress from their starting points and achieve standards that are higher than the national average.

Because Christian values are so central to its life, the school recognises and celebrates individuals who demonstrate these characteristics. Pupils said, 'we live the values because we want to, not because of the certificates but sometimes people don't realise they've shown a value and that's why we recognise it.' The school's Christian character inspires the excellent relationships between and among adults and learners. Pupils say that this is a school where everybody gets on with each other and, because it is like a family, there is always someone to go to when they need help. There is a well-developed sense of spirituality that grows out of the school's strong Christian ethos. It is shared across the whole school community and helps pupils to engage with high quality experiences that develop their spiritual personality. As a result, they are interested in deep questions and express their thoughts with growing confidence.

Pupils enjoy the diversity of race, faiths and beliefs represented in the school and proudly refer to how much they have learnt from the faith and experience of others. They also understand that living out the values that the school promotes means showing Christian love in action and concern for the world, as exemplified by the girl who cut off her long hair to raise money for a charity and the boy who wrote to the Prime Minister about nuclear weapons. All of this has a positive impact in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and ensures that they develop constructive attitudes of tolerance and respect. It is in the context of appreciating wide faith communities that pupils recognise Christianity as a world faith; they are excited and stimulated by RE and understand that it plays a major part in affirming the school's Christian character.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship lies at the heart of the school and pupils know that it is an important part of each day. All pupils place great value on attending worship and say how much they like the variety of experience that it offers. Worship is inclusive and all who attend are strengthened and affirmed by it, irrespective of their own faith or belief. Worship is used to reinforce and develop pupils' understanding of the school's core Christian values, not in isolation but in action. As a result, they are sometimes inspired to demonstrate acts of great Christian compassion. There is a proud history of individual and collective involvement in charitable works by pupils who have learnt that this is their Christian responsibility.

Worship is exclusively Christian, rooted in the Bible and focused on the life and person of Jesus. It is also Trinitarian and even children in the youngest years confidently and simply talk about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship is carefully planned by leaders and clergy around a series of themes based on the church's year and a rotating focus on the school's Christian values. Pupils remark that the changing variety of leaders from school and local churches ensures that it is always fresh and interesting. Through the regular involvement of the two parish churches, and other visitors, pupils experience a variety of contrasting yet complementary Anglican tradition and practice. This is reflected in worship through the use of a simple liturgy and specific prayers, including the school prayer. There are many excellent opportunities for pupils to take part in leading aspects of worship and parents say that they enjoy the times when they can attend worship, both during the week and when services are held in one of the churches.

From their earliest days in the school, pupils learn about the nature and purpose of prayer and there are many good opportunities for their personal, private prayer and reflection and to contribute their own written prayers for use in school. Regardless of their own faith, pupils speak confidently about the value of prayer and quiet reflection. Worship is regularly and thoroughly evaluated by the headteacher, other school leaders and clergy through a planned schedule that enables developmental feedback to be given to those leading it. Careful attention is given to listening pupils' views so that they too are involved in planned and ongoing improvement. Governors add to their self-evaluation through effective monitoring of the way that the school's worship confirms its Christian distinctiveness.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Religious Education has a high profile in the school and is treated as a core subject. Standards of attainment are in line with national expectations and frequently judged to be higher. Pupils make good progress, whatever their starting points so that, by the time they leave the school, they have a thorough knowledge of Christianity and know the key facts of other world faiths. They understand the relevance of RE to the modern world and, universally say how much they value learning about all faiths. This makes a strong contribution to the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Pupils say that they like RE because their teachers make it fun. This is because there is always a good range of activities and discussions that engage them and make them think. There are also very good links with the school's Christian values so that they are reinforced by RE. As a result, pupils work hard, learn well and many are developing a range of important skills, including reflection, enquiry and evaluation. Teaching varies in consistency across the school but it is generally good, and some teachers do well to engage pupils in deep questions about purpose and meaning. However, written feedback is not yet universally successful in promoting pupils' thinking about the characteristics of faith or in drawing out deeper issues. This is partly because the school is moving to a new programme of study that is not yet fully embedded. However, when the school uses homework in RE, this is an opportunity for individual pupils to engage in profound thinking and research.

There is a very well-established assessment system that helps teachers to plan work that is appropriate to their pupils starting points. This system does much to secure ongoing and regular assessment, although it does not align with current approaches in the wider curriculum.

RE is led by an experienced, knowledgeable and effective coordinator whose rigorous monitoring ensures that she has a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve the subject. She is well-supported by diocesan officers and works effectively to raise colleagues' confidence and skill levels. The school has identified a further member of staff who is being trained to support the subject leader and this is successfully moving RE forward.

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

Leaders and governors, including clergy, form a formidable and effective partnership. They share and articulate a confident and ambitious Christian vision for the school that sustains its Christian distinctiveness and drives its effectiveness. This vision is rooted in living out the Christian values that the school promotes and leads to excellent self-evaluation. A governor committee acts as a vehicle for the regular and thorough review of the school's Christian character. As a result, leaders and governors have a strong understanding of the strengths of the school as a Church school and are clear about its areas for development. They have secured robust provision of collective worship and religious education and are proactive in identifying and supporting future leaders. In this they are well supported by diocesan staff.

The Christian values that the school promotes are lived out in the life of the school and are reflected in its policies. Pupils recognise this – they say that they can see Christian values in the way that adults behave and the way they are treated. Therefore, there is a significant impact on the achievement and wellbeing of all pupils and in the promotion of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life beyond school in a multicultural society. Parents say that they feel involved in the life of the school, they know the leaders, believe them and trust their judgements.

The strong and effective partnership with the two parish churches and the deep involvement of their clergy in school life adds significantly to its capacity to be a place of Christian witness and educational excellence. Regardless of their personal faith, leaders, staff, pupils and their families benefit from the pastoral care of the clergy while each church also makes a significant material contribution to the work of the school and the support of its pupils. There are some excellent links with local business interests that are of substantial and mutual benefit. The positive relationships with the churches and the frequent involvement of the clergy unite the churches and the school in a threefold partnership that makes them a beacon of Christian witness to the community they serve.