

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mark's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Brantridge Lane, Staplefield, West Sussex, RH17 6EN

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Chichester

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

West Sussex

Date of inspection

15 February 2017

Date of last inspection

16 May 2011

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Controlled 126015

Headteacher

Penelope Kennedy

Inspector's name and number

Richard Dyer 513

School context

St Mark's is a rural four class primary school with 84 pupils from Staplefield and other local rural and urban communities. It is adjacent to the church which has a new vicar. Pupils are predominantly White British. A small number of pupils have special educational needs. The head teacher has been in post since the previous inspection and is assisted by a more recently appointed assistant headteacher. The school has recently acquired adjacent woodland to create a Forest School area and gained the International Schools Award and Values Based Education Quality Mark.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mark's CE Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- The school has a very strong and distinctive Christian character based on a clearly defined Christian vision and values that are known and understood by all stakeholders. They are securely embedded in all aspects of the school and impact very positively on the school's provision and outcomes for the pupils.
- Collective worship plays a highly significant and central role in the life of the school in promoting the school's Christian values and ethos.
- The strong Christian vision and leadership of the headteacher solidly underpins the school's Christian distinctiveness.

Areas to improve

- Develop the learning opportunities of the Forest School area to further enhance spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC).
- Develop the pupils' Worship Committee to extend their involvement in the planning and delivery of worship.
- Develop the shared leadership of religious education (RE) to enhance the school's RE teaching as the new national 'Understanding Christianity' materials are implemented.

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

St Mark's has a very strong Christian ethos based on an explicit Christian vision and five core values underpinned by love. These are clearly expressed visually in displays throughout the school and are deeply embedded in the life of the school. The values are regularly reviewed by the whole school community who share and feel ownership of them. All members of the school community confidently articulate these values and their positive impact on the daily life of the school. Pupils confidently talk about the link between the school's Christian characteristics and biblical teaching and how this impacts positively on their lives. For example, pupils are openly honest and own up to any wrongdoing and explicitly forgive each other. Parents talk passionately about how care and respect are nurtured and promoted through an ethos of love and positive relationships, and how the values of the school permeate through all aspects of school life such that they 'are caught, not taught'.

The impact of the school's strong Christian character and values is evident in the high quality of care and relationships between members of the school community. Teachers clearly model the school's values in their interaction with the pupils and each other and pupils display exemplary behaviour, care and respect for each other. It is also evident in the quality provision of creative learning opportunities provided by the school that impact positively on pupils' good achievement and preparation for later life. Parents talk proudly of how the values strongly influence pupils' lives at secondary school, e.g. supporting pupils with disabilities.

The school's strong Christian character and values significantly impact on spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. This is promoted through RE and collective worship, pupil responsibilities (e.g. playground leaders, Worship Committee membership), varied extra-curricular activities including a Christian after school book club, and strong partnerships with the local church, community and network of neighbouring schools. Pupils have a high degree of understanding and respect for diversity promoted through visits to other places of worship, other faith visitors coming into school and award winning links with the international community. SMSC is also promoted through creative use of the recently acquired adjacent forest area as an outdoor learning environment. The potential for this area to provide opportunities to further enhance SMSC provision has not yet been fully developed. Religious education effectively promotes the school's Christian values and characteristics as well as understanding and respect of cultural diversity. Pupils clearly articulate stories from the Bible, the life of Jesus and the Christian message.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is an integral and important part of school life. It strongly promotes the school's Christian values and ethos, and has a significant impact on pupils' outstanding relationships and behaviour, and the daily life of the school community. One parent emphasised how 'what happens in 15 minutes carries forward into school life'. Worship is carefully planned to be rooted in the Christian faith, and promote the school's values. This strengthens the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the values making them 'real' and meaningful to the pupils. It includes key Christian festivals which take place in the local church. Parents are invited to these occasions and to the regular class led 'Praise and Celebration' worship in school which they keenly appreciate and support.

The key Christian symbols and elements of worship are present and include biblical material and prayer. Worship involves pupils' participation such as lighting the candle, saying the school vision statement with hand actions, involvement with the Bible story by acting or adding sound effects, and leading prayers. Pupils participate enthusiastically and understand, and can articulate, the central position of Jesus in the Christian faith. For example, that Jesus is the light of the world. Some pupils can also articulate an age-appropriate understanding of the Trinity. Worship is led by various members of the school and local community including pupils, staff, the local clergy and visitors from local Christian organisations which pupils particularly enjoy. Worship includes a variety of media and resources making it relevant and engaging. Pupils are very positive about worship. One child stated worship 'makes you think' and another that it was 'fabulous'.

Prayer is an integral part of worship which extends to other times of the school day (e.g. lunchtime, home time), and to reflective areas in classrooms and the outside garden and forest area. Opportunities are provided for pupils to write and post prayers in a Prayer Box for inclusion in the worship and to experience Prayer Space opportunities in the school hall. Pupils appreciate the opportunities for prayer and readily engage in both prepared prayers and in extemporaneous prayer. They talk about the value of prayer in asking God to help them and others live their lives as Jesus and the Bible tells us to. Parents report how the prayer 'habit' carries forward to home with pupils wanting to say prayers before meals, at bedtime and special prayers when they have visitors.

There are securely embedded systems for the monitoring and evaluation of collective worship by staff, governors and pupils. The pupils' 'Worship Committee' is a significant development since the previous inspection. Their evaluations and feedback have led to greater pupil participation in the planning and delivery of worship including taking part in drama and leading prayers. The potential for the Worship Committee to be involved more regularly in the innovative and creative planning and leading worship has not yet been fully developed.

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

The headteacher has a strong commitment to the school's Christian ethos and firmly believes that 'if the pupils have not met Jesus during their time at the school we have not been doing our job properly'. She ensures there is a clear Christian vision for the school rooted in distinctively Christian values, shared by the whole school community, that is central to the life of the school, its creative curriculum, and high quality pastoral provision. Staff and governors strongly support the vision and values and promote its significant impact on the daily life of the school and pupils academic and personal development. The impact is seen in the pupils' positive achievements and well-being, and exemplary behaviour and relationships.

Regular and effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's vision, values and effectiveness are in place and involve all stakeholders through questionnaires, the governors' Church & Ethos Committee and 'Pupil Voice'. This has strongly impacted on the school's choice of values, its quality links with the international community resulting in high levels of pupils respect and understanding for diversity, greater pupil involvement in planning and leading collective worship, and Pupil Voice reflecting on topics such as 'Does God watch us all the time?', 'What is Heaven like?' and contributing to displays on these subjects.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and development needs. They create effective plans and strategies for improvement that focus on meeting the needs of the learners and improving the effectiveness of the school as a church school. For example, purchasing the adjacent forest area to develop SMSC provision. Governors clearly know the school well and both challenge and support the headteacher.

Effective use is made of opportunities for staff and governor development including those offered by the diocese, local authority and local school networks. Consequently governors are highly effective in their role and significantly involved in the life of the school. Shared leadership within the school provide effective opportunities for support and development in curriculum leadership. This is currently happening with RE to promote effective RE practices within the school. The potential for the shared leadership to further enhance the school's RE teaching of the new national 'Understanding Christianity' materials is not yet fully developed.

Governors regularly consider succession planning to ensure the continued effectiveness of the school's Christian distinctiveness. The impact of this can be seen in staff appointments and the local curate supporting the school while they waited for the appointment of the new vicar.

There are also strong links with parents, the local community, local school networks, and the wider international community which all contribute fully to school life, promote the school's values and give clear benefits to the pupils. The school has gained the International Schools Award and Values Based Education Quality Mark in recognition of this. The school meets statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.

SIAMS report February 2017 St. Mark's CE Primary School, Staplefield, West Sussex, RH17 6EN