

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England Primary School

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| Normandy, Horsham RH12 1JL | |
| Current SIAMS inspection grade | Outstanding |
| Diocese | Chichester |
| Previous SIAMS inspection grade | Outstanding |
| Local authority | West Sussex |
| Date of inspection | 27 March 2018 |
| Date of last inspection | October 2012 |
| Type of school and unique reference number | Voluntary aided 126029 |
| Headteacher | Alexander Bird |
| Inspector's name and number | Angela Smith 925 |

School context

St Mary's CE Primary School is one form entry with 208 pupils on roll. It is oversubscribed with pupils coming from across the Horsham area. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is just below national average, with a small number who are bilingual or speak English as an additional language (EAL). There have been significant changes to the leadership and staffing of the school, including the appointment of a new headteacher in September 2017. The school has a close partnership with St Mary's Church and other churches in the Horsham Team Parish.

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

- Christian values underpin school life and are dynamically communicated through all aspects of its work and lived out on a daily basis through its staff and children.
- A rigorous focus on self-evaluation underpins continuous improvement that fully recognises all pupils as God-given individuals and puts them at the centre of all the school does.
- The centrality of prayer and reflection shown through a diverse range of pupil experiences through the school year.
- Shared ownership and high priority given to the teaching of religious education (RE) shown in the passionate articulation of pupils about their learning.

Areas to improve

- Fully embed the renewed approach to formalising and tracking progress in RE, so that it has a clear impact on future improvements and pupil progress in learning about other world faiths.
- To ensure that the school's self-evaluation processes and honest reflection on more recent changes, motivated by seeking to always be the best it can within the context of Christian love, leads to effective and sustained improvement for all pupils.

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

The work of St Mary's School is underpinned by the words from John's gospel to have 'Life in all its fullness', as an outworking of its vision for every child to have a 'real childhood'. Pupils enjoy their learning and flourish through its broad curriculum, including Forest School approaches, which ensure they have the time, resources and the learning support they need.

There is highly professional and mutually supportive Christian leadership across the staff, with clear and caring communication and regular reviews of progress. Insightful use of data analysis and close working with other schools is ensuring that approaches which are used are seeking to help pupils 'To be the best I can within the love of Christ', the school motto. An individual child focus is evident in the effective support given for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). Pupils express care and support for each other across the year groups, with a strong sense of being a Christian community in action. Individualised learning and progress is monitored through regular reviews, necessary in this one-form entry school, where staff are fully aware that percentage based analysis is not always helpful with a limited opportunity to establish meaningful trends.

The recently redeveloped behavioural support system has an impact on greater consistency in expressing school values of love and respect. It is appreciated by teaching and support staff and commended for its fairness by pupils. Visitors and staff recognise the calm and supportive school atmosphere and comment on the Christian ethos that permeates the school and enables everyone to feel appreciated. School values being promoted including, for example courage and independence, within a Christian framework, means pupils are willing to try new things and the whole community supports each other through challenges.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural values are prioritised and have a strong impact on pupil behaviour and their attitudes to others. The changing half-termly focus on a different aspect of United Nations' 'Rights of the Child' manifesto is ensuring rights and values are part of the regular vocabulary of staff and pupils and enable them to understand their importance. Parents recognise the way the school is supporting pupils in developing their self-esteem, noting the joint emphasis on the academic and recreational. The varied discussions in RE are enjoyed by pupils of all backgrounds and equips them to consider different world faiths. The ideas explored at school often naturally overflow into further discussion at home.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Pupils are eager to share how much they value opportunities for worship and its central priority within school and for many, their home life. Pupils appreciate the many opportunities to lead, evaluate and shape worship. Pupils and staff, including those without a personal faith, identify how worship underpins their school experience. Local Anglican churches in Horsham Team Parish take an active part in the school community, alongside links with other local churches. Pupils appreciate the breadth of Anglican and non-conformist traditions, including a local puppet ministry, 'Open the Book' assemblies and a lunchtime Christian club for pupils called Explorers. There is a clear, dynamic and accessible emphasis on central Christian teachings, with staff and pupils regularly joining in together in worship, sharing laughter and fun with different activities, music, games and quizzes along with times of reflection and prayer. Staff and pupils enthusiastically contribute and enjoy opportunities to meet together in different forms of collective worship, for example in the classroom, whole school or house assemblies as well as in the local church. Songs used from different church backgrounds help everyone feel 'part of a wider Christian community'. Parents enjoy and are keen to join in with the services they attend. Pupils and governors are involved together in supportive approaches to the monitoring and development of worship, with pupils able to see that their suggestions are valued and make a difference to the way worship is organised. The structures behind worship planning are carefully reviewed, and the cycle of themes draws on the full range of school Christian values. Staff greatly value the advice they gain from peer feedback on their assemblies and use it to develop their approaches.

Prayer and worship are experienced beyond assemblies in pre-lunch time classroom based prayer times which model diverse approaches to prayer through action songs or a selection from a class made prayer book. Meaningful reflective spaces are in all classrooms and each offer different approaches. Pupils enthusiastically participate in 'Prayer Spaces', provided thanks to the dedication of local church members and school staff, with age appropriate and accessible activities. For example, the use of the church building alongside the school for an Easter themed prayer space, enabled pupils to see the dynamic relationship that exists between their school and the local church. It is natural for the school to offer this for the benefit of the local community outside of school hours. The development of prayer suggestions each week have enhanced and supported pupils in being more active in their participation in prayer, through use of the prayer box. Its contents are offered regularly in worship and this is shown symbolically by presenting the box in assembly time.

Worship at St Mary's School has an outward looking emphasis and seeks to be enriching for all in the community. For example, regular pupil participation in performances and commemorations in the Horsham Carfax zone.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The RE curriculum recognises the requirements of the local West Sussex agreed syllabus as well as the implementation of the Understanding Christianity resource. Since the previous inspection, several assessment and tracking approaches have been trialled. A clearer more robust system was introduced this academic year, alongside the introduction of the new Understanding Christianity materials, which is now being embedded with staff gaining confidence in its use. With this there has been a priority for staff training and quality resourcing and there is a clear sense of excitement and staff enthusiasm for their introduction. There is a strong partnership between the RE subject lead teacher and teaching staff, which results in staff confidently taking responsibility for the delivery of RE in their class and engaging in highly reflective practice. Pupil voice feedback is part of the process of continual improvement and reveals high levels of enjoyment. Pupils readily articulate how enriching they find their learning and discussion in RE.

Regular classroom 'drop-ins' provide an accurate understanding of the effectiveness of RE teaching that identifies ways to support staff in moving forward further. Therefore, staff are willing to try a range of approaches and the varied learning activities in RE give pupils the chance to experiment. Younger pupils enjoy bringing their fellow pupils to share a task or activity they have just enjoyed, as they wish them to gain from it too.

Work scrutiny shows that standards are similar to other core subjects and resources are used well. Reporting in RE is prioritised through a dedicated section on pupil reports. Lessons reveal clear progress and differentiation, with the same rigour and variety evident across the different years. Pupils gain a depth of biblical understanding and talk knowledgeably about their growing insights. Parents recognise that their children gain a deepening understanding from a spiral based curriculum where pupils revisit key concepts.

Pupils recognise the importance of exploring different religions and encountering non-Christian world faiths. They readily talk about the different world faiths they have studied; Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. They also value the ways RE is being experienced in wider opportunities outside the classroom, for example many have the opportunity to visit a synagogue. They explore significant issues of life through religious ideas and clearly show a breadth of understanding across different Christian traditions, reflecting the strong ecumenical work in the town. There is an emerging understanding of Christianity as a world faith, which builds on the breadth that pupils encounter at a local level.

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

This is a school that continues to grow and develop as it embodies its motto to 'Be the best I can in the love of Christ'. Parental feedback is encouraged, and proactively used for improvement. It identifies the deep appreciation of parents for the accessibility of new headteacher and his team, valuing their open partnership and transparency. There is a dedicated staff team, recognised by parents and pupils, where any concerns raised are listened to and swiftly dealt with. Leaders recognise their responsibility to live out the Christian values of the school and model this in their interactions with each other, parents and pupils, in the everyday conversations on the gate and in wider school communications and website. There is a focus on strong partnership and parents describe themselves to be on a journey with the school, moving forward together.

Change in school leadership has been an opportunity for open and honest reflection. Self-evaluation, spiritual development and detailed improvement planning are high priorities. The approach of the school for all to live out Christian values and know children well, where key leaders are also classroom based practitioners, means changes are practical, pupil centred and sensitively trialled. The school works effectively with local churches, the wider community and nearby schools to support and grow alongside each other, sharing approaches and thus implementing its vision more widely.

Governors work strategically, making regular visits, prioritising RE and collective worship and working in partnership with the headteacher. They check provision meets the needs of all learners and is based on a broad and holistic curriculum. School leadership makes a priority of having a realistic school calendar, that gives staff and children opportunities to flourish and have time and space for spiritual growth alongside academic progress. The 'Worship groups', comprising staff, governors and pupils, ensures worship remains meaningful and accessible to all pupils. Governors can clearly validate that statutory requirements are met for both RE and collective worship. Strong partnerships are evident between the school, local church and the community, for example half termly links with the nursery school. This is appreciated by all parties involved and supports a smooth transition into children beginning primary school. Regular special events including fair trade breakfasts, where pupils help, and visits to a local elderly residential home, are aspects of the school and embody the school's outward looking approach.