

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mark's Church of England Primary			
Address	School Lane, Hadlow Down, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 4HY		
Date of inspection	09 October 2019	Status of school	VA primary
Diocese	Chichester	URN	114552

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Excellent
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Excellent
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Good

School context

St Mark's Church of England is a primary school with 91 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The school has a very low level of religious and cultural diversity and very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above national averages. The school is part of the St Mark's Teaching School and had a co-headteacher structure with the Director of the Teaching School until July 2019.

The school's Christian vision

'St Mark's, with the love of Jesus, will give us wings to fly.'

To have a love of learning and respect for one another; create together an outstanding learning environment; grow together as a family founded on God's love through Christ; respect and enjoy the people and places in our world.

Key findings

- The cohesive and deeply rooted Christian vision is integral to all aspects of the school's life and work. It profoundly influences decision making and practice at all levels. The biblical roots cannot be clearly articulated by all.
- Extremely strong, mutually beneficial links with other schools, the church, the village and the diocese underpin the deep moral purpose held by all leaders and contributes to the inclusive Christian culture.
- Nurturing relationships, based on Christian compassion and service, inspire and support all members of the community. This has a positive impact that extends beyond the school to the village and other local schools.
- The breadth of curriculum includes meaningful links to religious education (RE) and effectively links to the vision and values whilst meeting the needs of learners, including the most vulnerable. In RE pupil's ability to link or compare and contrast religious beliefs and practices is under-developed.
- Spiritual development opportunities are at the heart of the school. These are offered in a variety of ways in collective worship, through RE and across the wider curriculum. They impact positively on all members of the school family. Pupils are starting to be involved in evaluation of collective worship on a regular basis.

Areas for development

- Enable pupils to readily make links between religious beliefs and practice in order to deepen their learning.
- Embed pupil led evaluation of collective worship to inform future planning and support all in making clear biblical links to the school vision and values.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

The deeply embedded Christian vision of inclusion and equipping all to flourish is rooted in the school's foundation. As staff say, 'it is plaited through the school'. Springing from Isaiah 40:31 'Those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles' is expressed and experienced as giving pupils 'wings to fly'. Pupils say their wings will support successful transition to secondary school. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem is built through the extensive support and wide-ranging opportunities provided. Parents observe that by Year 6 even the most nervous pupil can perform confidently, 'they leave here with more than education'. The longstanding vision is a consistent driver of robust and effective improvement planning, involving all the school community.

The vision and associated values fully uphold the dignity and value of all as children of God. Support and challenge are rooted in highly effective pastoral care enabling all to flourish, academically and personally. Excellent examples include older pupils showing compassion to younger ones. Additional support for mental health and wellbeing, including yoga sessions for pupils and staff, impact positively. Innovative use of contacts ensures wide ranging expertise benefits the community, such as employing staff to run 'Talk Space'. This support has been invaluable, helping children, families and staff in challenging circumstances. One parent said, 'it has given us our son back', whilst another reflected that the pastoral care expresses, 'love your neighbour as yourself'.

Character development and British values are deeply embedded within the curriculum. Consequently, pupils enthusiastically take on leadership roles, such as librarians, school parliament representatives and writing the newspaper. The pupil who originated this wrote in the first publication in February 2019, 'When you place your hopes in God, you will gain new strength. This can be a really uplifting feeling like flying'. Every class is involved in charity fundraising arising from respect and the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The value of creation is emboldening pupils to challenge the use of plastics and in addition, they wrote to the school catering company to encourage responsible use of palm oil. Key Stage One pupils can link learning to how they can make a difference to the world. When asked why we should look after the world pupils responded, 'God made it and you wouldn't like it if something you'd made was destroyed'.

The school is exemplary as the lead school in its Teaching School Alliance. They are outward facing, share best practice, reflecting the school's vision to support all. Effective and varied training programmes facilitate staff development strongly. This is shared with other schools who take part in the innovative opportunities provided. Underpinned by a love of learning and desire to develop expertise, leaders are alert to specific staff talents and forge roles to build on identified strengths. One teacher became the leader for the Early Years hub leading to outstanding learning being shared within and beyond the school. The Teaching School Director has worked extensively within the local group of schools, the local authority and nationally to develop leaders, particularly women in leadership. This work is underpinned by a strong moral purpose and desire for all to flourish.

Pupils and staff express Christian values of service and compassion, for example through collecting for the local foodbank or hosting community teas. Opportunities to link with others nationally and international are well used. This enables pupils to consider empathetically the lives and faiths of others and make links to themselves. All have opportunities to develop Christian leadership virtues in a range of contexts. Coherent and wide ranging spiritual development opportunities are embraced throughout the curriculum. These give pupils extensive opportunities to ask big questions and experience creativity and wonder, particularly about nature. Excellent connections across the curriculum include growing plants in different types of soil, linked to science and RE learning about the Parable of the Sower. Pupils link this learning to how they are trying to be 'good soil'.

Inclusive and extremely engaging collective worship inspires a sense of joy. Whilst pupils make noteworthy contributions to leading aspects of collective worship, opportunities for them to evaluate the provision are at an early stage of development. Pupils have a very secure understanding of the Christian teaching of Father, Son and Holy Spirit which 'is inside everyone'. Strong links between the school and church remain, despite a clergy vacancy in the parish. Strategic planning prior to the vacancy led to training a team of parents to lead collective worship using biblical materials based on a programme called Open the Book. The pupils are highly engaged and can accurately recall the Bible stories and relate to their meaning. One pupil reflected, the story of Noah teaches us, 'to do what God tells you to do'. Extremely high quality entrance hall displays are rotated each week. They strongly

support the focus. Pupils articulate they can connect with God through singing and prayer. Staff are empowered to build on collective worship plans to individualise them. They greatly value the time when the community comes together for reflection and connection with each other and God. The weekly Friends and Family Celebration has a massive impact on the whole school community. It embodies the vision by giving opportunities to celebrate talents and achievements both inside and outside school.

The wide variety offered in RE is valued, including the use of an enquiry approach to learning based on asking questions. Pupils rightly recognise that learning about and meeting people from a range of world religions helps in developing understanding and respect. Curriculum planning is supported by exemplification materials to ensure accurate assessments which are moderated in meetings. Staff training in the Understanding Christianity materials is prioritised, resulting in a deep understanding of central Christian ideas. This has developed pupil knowledge, for example, Year 2 talked about learning about the death of Jesus last year. Governor monitoring identified gaps in understanding about Christianity as a global faith. Consequently the vicar spoke to upper Key Stage Two about his international work. The RE subject leader, who is also the Director of the Teaching School, has effectively supported other schools. An RE focused parent forum was conducted to ensure parents are well informed about the purpose and content of RE. Demonstrating effective succession planning, the long standing subject leader is supporting the new subject lead to undertake the role. The pupils are confident in articulating learning in RE but do so less successfully when talking about the wider range of religions they encounter or when making comparisons between faiths. Provision reflects the Church of England Statement of Entitlement and statutory requirements for RE are met.



The effectiveness of RE is Good

Consistently high quality teaching challenges and supports pupils’ exploration of Christianity. RE results are in-line with literacy expectations, including outcomes for groups vulnerable to underachievement. Where outcomes are lower leaders are aware of other cohort factors affecting attainment and offer appropriate support to the pupils. All pupils are making good progress and report they know how to improve their learning in RE. Tasks offer challenge and encourage engagement with deep questions. Monitoring last year showed when this did not happen; the swift action taken resulted in rapid improvements in quality of learning.

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