

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

Kendal Road, Carnforth. LA6 2DN	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Carlisle
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Cumbria
Date/s of inspection	5 July 2018
Date of last inspection	19 June 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 112323
Headteacher	Brian Jones
Inspector's name and number	Revd Simone Bennett
Quality assurance	Lyn Field 151

School context

This is an average sized, rural primary school with 232 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium grant is well below the national average. Whilst the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is broadly average, the school has a higher than national number of pupils with an education health care plan. There have been a number of staff changes since the last inspection including the headteacher, who has been in post since September 2015.

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

- Relationships between all members of the school community are rooted in the school's Christian ethos. As a result, behaviour is exemplary and pupils and adults show care and compassion for each other.
- Christian values are deeply embedded, informing all aspects of school life and driving a culture of continuous improvement.
- School leaders, including governors, are aspirational for all pupils. They monitor with care which enables pupils to thrive.
- Pupils feel happy and safe in school and this creates a productive learning environment where everyone is valued.
- Strong and mutually supportive partnerships between the school, church and community make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of pupils and families.

Areas to improve

- Develop the school's reflection spaces both inside and out, to further support a coherent approach to spiritual development across the curriculum.
- Extend opportunities for pupils to lead and evaluate collective worship, in order to develop a broader understanding of prayer and reflection and make deeper links with biblical passages and stories.
- Ensure teaching and learning in religious education has consistent academic rigour, enabling pupils to apply an enquiry approach in lessons and confidently articulate their independent learning.

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

Distinctive and explicit Christian values underpin St Mary's commitment to being an inclusive and effective church school. They are deeply embedded in school life, demonstrated in the pride shown by the headteacher, staff and governors. They are ambitious for every pupil to thrive academically as well as through their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. The school's 8 strand vision and 5 core values of honesty, trust, perseverance, respect and responsibility passionately drive both the core curriculum and the wider opportunities in and out of the classroom. This includes outdoor learning, which enables pupils to 'seize the moment' and make connections with God's world. One pupil explained how the school's values help 'make every moment memorable' and these memorable opportunities are visible throughout school. There is a tangible culture of trust with impressive relationships between adults and pupils. Significant emphasis is placed on the school's rewards systems including merit points and the prestigious values awards, which explicitly identify Christian values in action. The VIP system, which celebrates individual pupils by their peers, enhances pupils' wellbeing and self-esteem. A pupil commented how, in being chosen, 'People really appreciate you and what you do.' As such, pupils celebrate the uniqueness in each other and themselves as children of God. Attainment at the end of key stage 2 is above average and school is relentless in its drive to replicate this attainment for all groups. Leaders analyse outcomes with precision and their responsive approach goes beyond the academic. The school's Christian vision underpins leaders' focus on personalised nurturing of pupils and families. This has significant impact on wellbeing and pupils and parents recognise the school as a place where 'everyone is accepted for who they are'. The school effectively extends pupils' understanding of diversity through meaningful learning opportunities. A link with a school in Rochdale, visitors from the Muslim learning centre and reviewing the resources and images used in the curriculum have all enhanced pupils' growth in understanding. These opportunities are valued by parents who recognise the need for pupils to see 'the world beyond their community is a much bigger place.' Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning but spiritual reflection areas inside and out are less developed. They do not currently offer experiential opportunities seen in other aspects of the curriculum, to enable pupils to reflect more confidently on themselves and questions of faith and belief. The school actively supports a number of charities and projects, including Mary's Meals, the Noah Initiative and others suggested by pupils. These links are motivating and inspiring pupils to be courageous advocates for change, rather than just raising money for good causes. Religious education (RE) plays a significant role in promoting the Christian character of the school. Pupils are clear about the inclusivity of their RE lessons and this is summed up by one pupil's comment that, 'You have to respect that other people may think different things and look at everyone's point of view.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is inspirational and has a high profile in school. It is inclusive and invitational and challenges pupils to think about things in new ways. The impact of a regular rhythm of gathering, engaging, responding and sending, enables pupils to participate confidently and make meaningful connections with their wider lives and learning. This was exemplified during collective worship, when pupils were encouraged to make links between the story of Moses' journey to the promised land and pupils moving on to other classes and schools. Pupils' expertly share connections with other stories, including Peter and never telling lies and the Good Samaritan as a lesson in treating everyone with care, no matter who they are. Pupils' excellent conduct in worship demonstrates their appreciation of this time and reflects the school's core Christian value of respect. Pupils are motivated and keen to participate when invited to do so. They are enthusiastically supported by a range of staff and visitors, including the vicar, who leads worship on a regular basis. The role of pupils as leaders of worship is underdeveloped and this is limiting an opportunity for deeper personal and spiritual growth. The regular use of reflection journals and their prominence in classrooms, supports pupils' views that their thinking and ideas are valued in school. Pupils talk confidently about Anglican practice, which is well integrated through services, greetings and coloured cloths for the different seasons of the church year. They have an age-appropriate understanding of the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through regularly using a 3 wick 'trinity' candle. The well-formed pupils' worship committee say that lighting candles 'reminds us what we're doing and that God is here'. Staff and visitors consistently model prayer and this inspires pupils to explore prayer for themselves. This includes through the light up prayer cross, of which pupils are particularly proud. Consequently, pupils' openness in offering spontaneous prayers in collective worship is impressive. The use of different kinds of prayer such as saying sorry or giving thanks and praise, also reflects their excellent understanding of the range of reasons why people pray. Pupils' deepening understanding of Christian celebrations, including harvest and Candlemas, is supported by the long-standing partnership with the church. Experiential opportunities, such as 'walk through Easter' engage and inspire pupils to reflect on different people's views and ideas and have confidence in their own. The evaluation of collective worship is rigorous. It informs future planning and enables space for pupils to suggest and respond to current issues. A recent example was seen in the pupils suggesting a theme to raise awareness of plastics pollution, linked to care of God's world.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The school has made significant progress in religious education (RE) since the last inspection and has successfully raised the profile of the subject in school. The development of an RE skills ladder, which has then driven other areas of the curriculum, is a particular strength and is developing pupils language when talking about their views and ideas. Pupils talk about their work and progress with greater confidence through the use of targeted assessment stickers linked to skills, such as 'justify opinions', 'talk about' or 'apply ideas'.

Staff are positive about RE and their confidence has been raised through carefully selected training, including the on-going implementation of the Understanding Christianity resource. Pupils understand the core concepts of Christianity, supported by an impressive frieze in the hall. This enables them to draw connections and use accurate language such as creation, incarnation and kingdom of God back in the classroom. Well thought through examples were seen in both the nursery and reception classes where pupils were learning about creation and what is precious in both God's creation and to them.

Pupils engage with a range of learning opportunities, including art, visits and debating their ideas. A skilful example of the latter was seen in year 6, where pupils were exploring questions that science and religion can both answer and offered well-informed reasons for their decisions.

Assessment in RE is effective, informed by higher expectations of pupils and a breadth of questioning being used more consistently. As a result, staff have an increasingly accurate picture of pupils' progress in RE. Written work and pupils' reflections, questions and opinions captured in class show that standards in RE are at least in line with national expectations and, for some older pupils, higher. However, sometimes the tasks set do not mirror the academic rigour and enquiry approach seen in other curriculum areas.

Pupils understand RE is important because it helps them develop an understanding of Christianity, respect for other people's beliefs in line with the school's values, and encourages them to think for themselves. Pupils challenge stereotypes and have a deep acceptance of each other. Visitors from the church, community and other faith groups, along with the now well-established link with a school in Rochdale, enable pupils to appreciate the 'living faith' of different communities, including Christianity as a global faith.

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

Leaders' robust Christian vision for the school is deeply rooted in Christian values. There is a shared purpose that permeates the school, through establishing a renewed vision together with all members of the school community. Leaders' skilful bringing together of the views and values of different groups has added strength and clarity to the school's Christian purpose and informs day to day decision making.

Pupils are aspirational for themselves and the headteacher works relentlessly with governors and other leaders to drive continuous improvement and provide high quality learning experiences. A relentless focus on the school's Christian vision as the core of everything that is done, inspires the schoolwide culture of self-belief.

Leaders welcome advice from beyond the school to establish best practice, such as the review of marking and feedback in RE which has enabled pupils to respond more fully to their work and ask deeper questions. The outward looking perspective of the school, as seen through a range of well-established, mutually beneficial partnerships with the local church, diocese and area cluster of schools, further enhances the breadth of pupils' learning across the curriculum.

There is detailed understanding of pupil performance and leaders are thorough in identifying and addressing the needs of all learners, so that attainment over time meets or exceeds national expectations. Governors recognise that, 'School is more than just trying to educate the pupils', and their commitment to being a Christian community keeps the wellbeing of pupils and staff at the forefront of decision making and planning. They know staff and pupils well through the class governor system, regular monitoring and the annual governor day. As a result, all curriculum subjects are valued and gifts and talents beyond the academic are celebrated. Arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. High parental engagement is a distinctive feature of the school.

Communication is effective because leaders are proactive in seeking and responding to feedback and everyone's views are valued. Nurturing relationships, focusing on care for the individual, have a direct impact upon the wellbeing of everyone and are enabling pupils and adults to flourish. The potential of current leaders as future leaders of church schools has been recognised and is supported through training and development opportunities. Members of staff work as a tightly-knit team and morale is high. As a result, there is a tangible family feel in school, of which leaders, staff and parents are proud. The long-standing relationship with the church is especially valued and church and school are complementary in their engagement with families. The vicar is a positive presence in school and he, along with the shared family worker, are highly effective in supporting the school and the wellbeing of vulnerable pupils and families. This initiative exemplifies leaders' commitment to actively seek and find ways to 'go the extra mile' and reflects the view of a parent who said, 'St Mary's is a school that 'celebrates all pupils, always.'