



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Castle Street  
Saffron Walden  
CB10 1BQ

**Diocese: Chelmsford**

Local authority: Essex

Date of inspection: 5 December 2013

Date of last inspection: 8 February 2010

School's unique reference number: 115155

Headteacher: Ms Surge Dhandu

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Rosemary Privett 321

#### School context

St Mary's is a relatively small primary school in the town of Saffron Walden. It is located close to the parish church. Since the last inspection the school has grown in size from five to six classes. There is a high level of pupil mobility with many new pupils entering the school across all year groups. Although the majority of pupils are White British, there is a growing percentage of pupils who have English as an additional language. The current headteacher has been in post since 2008.

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

- The impact of the school ethos statement which is shared and understood by all members of the school community.
- The strong and supportive partnership between the church and the school which is enabling the school's Christian character to grow and develop.
- The focused leadership which ensures that Christian values now underpin school life and strives for the continuous improvement of all.

#### Areas to improve

- Develop consistency in marking procedures in religious education [RE] across all classes so that pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their work.
- Develop the involvement of pupils in the planning leading and evaluating of collective worship.

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

The Christian love and care extended to all children make a positive impact on their academic

and personal development. The school's mission statement 'we aspire for excellence in a Christian learning environment', is understood by all members of the school community. It underpins all the school does and enables St Mary's to provide a learning environment which is highly inclusive and supports pupils to succeed. Since the last inspection, the progress seen in both the academic achievement and behaviour of pupils is a testimony to the good quality of teaching, pastoral care and the Christ-like compassion and care given to all. Attainment is in line with national expectations and many vulnerable groups of pupils make good progress. Attendance levels have also improved and the school's strong focus on its core values means that exclusions are almost none existent. Relationships in school are warm, open and respectful. Through consultation with pupils and school council, the core Christian values have been reviewed to make them more explicit and relevant. The impact of this work is seen in the way that pupils talk with confidence about these values and how they affect their lives and relationships. The values now make a strong contribution to the social and moral development of pupils. They say 'we learn about what we should do like Jesus, like forgiving and respecting.' They feel that through roles of responsibility such as play leaders and buddies they are showing qualities of care and compassion. Parents speak positively of the practical ways in which they see the values being used to support the school's approach to managing behaviour and resolving problems. They value the way in which pupils from other cultures and faiths were given opportunities to share their experiences and beliefs with others through RE and topic work. These times of sharing help pupils to develop an understanding of cultural and religious diversity. Recently leaders have focused on developing spaces for reflection to enhance the spiritual dimension of the school. Each class now has a 'reflective corner'. Pupils are eager to share how they are used. They say 'we can go and sit quietly and get in touch with our spiritual side.' They add 'we can sit there, close our eyes and be quiet and pray.'

#### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

Worship holds a place of importance in the life of the school and is well led by the co-ordinator. Pupils enjoy it because themes are relevant and help them to make meaning. In this way it supports their spiritual development. Since the last inspection the worship co-ordinator has worked closely with the clergy team to enhance the worship programme and themes are now closely linked to the core Christian values. These are enabling pupils to make links between the values and their biblical roots. The focused leadership of the co-ordinator has also led to an increased emphasis on the importance of prayer and reflection in the daily life of the school. This means that worship now extends beyond the daily act of collective worship with pupils participating in prayers at the end of the day. Some say that they really enjoy writing and sharing their own prayers at these times. Space is also created for prayer and reflection in RE lessons. Many pupils say that they value these times. They value the way 'teachers encourage you to think and pray and more join in now'. They also say that they 'learn more about God through praying'. Bible stories are a regular part of worship and stories focusing on the life of Jesus, are central to the planning. This together with the emphasis on prayer and reflection is enabling pupils to develop an understanding of God as Father Son and Holy Spirit. There is strong and effective support from the rector and members of the SWAT (Saffron Walden Assembly Team) who are regular and welcome visitors to school. They visit church regularly for services to celebrate major festivals such as Easter and Christmas. In response to the last inspection, collective worship is now regularly monitored and evaluated by governors. Parents also have the opportunity to share their views on class assemblies through a feedback book. Pupils are currently not regularly involved in this process. Pupils contribute to worship through singing, prayer, discussion and role play. They sometimes take leadership roles in class assemblies but opportunities to regularly plan and lead significant aspects of worship are currently limited.

#### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good**

Due to the focused leadership of the co-ordinator and an effective programme of training and development there has been a considerable improvement in the effectiveness of RE since the last inspection. As a result of this training, staff confidence in teaching the subject has grown

and developed so that teaching and learning is now good or better. Standards are broadly in line with other core subjects. Effective assessment procedures are in place. Clear and informative tracking procedures demonstrate that pupils are making good progress through the year. Pupils' knowledge of aspects of Christianity is good. Year 2 pupils are able to discuss the symbolism of the Advent wreath and make links between the themes of Advent and the experience of hope, love joy and peace in their own lives. Older Key Stage 2 pupils are able to think deeply about angels as God's messengers and their significance to Christians. They are able to reflect on what their own beliefs about angels might be. The supportive ethos of the school creates a learning environment where pupils feel included and safe. This, together with skilful and supportive questioning from teachers, gives them the confidence to share ideas and relate what they are learning to their own lives and experiences. It also helps them to think independently and show respect for each other. Pupils say that they enjoy RE. A child said ' I love that even though I go to church, I can still learn even more about religion at school, things that I never knew before.' Some creative and practical approaches in lessons, like creating information posters about Hindu gods, enable pupils to learn about faiths other than Christianity. Careful and consistent planning of lessons ensures that the needs of all abilities are catered for. The quality of marking is, however, inconsistent. In some classes marking is supportive, but this is not the case in every class. Marking does not always give pupils a clear picture of what they need to do to improve their work in RE.

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

Since the last inspection leaders at all levels have reviewed the school ethos statement and core values. These are understood and articulated by all members of the school community. The ethos statement now has a positive impact on the achievement and well-being of the whole community. The school's core Christian values also underpin the life of the school. They offer strong support to the spiritual social and moral development of pupils and are lived out in relationships at all levels. The headteacher and senior management team have effective strategies in place to check on the school's overall effectiveness. The rector and foundation governors are committed to the life and work of the school and are welcome visitors. They undertake monitoring activities to ensure that the distinctive character of the school continues to grow and develop. This is seen in the way that they have carefully monitored the implementation of the class reflective areas and worked with the headteacher on the review of the core values. RE and collective worship are both well led by the co ordinator. Her careful action planning has ensured that the areas for development from the last inspection have been addressed, leading to improvements in both planning and provision in these areas. There are very close and mutually supportive links between the school and the church. These links ensure that the Christian values of the school are shared widely. Pupils visit the church regularly for services and to support work in a variety of subjects. They regard the church as 'our church and our building!' Parents are impressed by the way that these visits are helping pupils to see the church as a welcoming place and developing their understanding of Christian worship and practice. A youth worker and diocesan evangelism enabler are also instrumental in supporting this outreach work. Preparation for future Christian leadership is taken seriously, and encouraged through teamwork and participation in in-service training provided by the diocesan advisors. This has resulted in improvements in the teaching of RE and the school's distinctive character, particularly its values, being more explicit since the last inspection.

SIAMS report December 2013 St Mary's Voluntary Aided Primary School , Saffron Walden, CB10 1BQ