

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### St Mary's C of E Academy Stotfold

Rook Tree Lane, Stotfold, Hitchin, SG5 4DL

<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>St Albans</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	April 2012
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	n/a
Date of inspection	26 April 2018
Date of last inspection	10 June 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Academy 138022
Headteacher	Sam Bishop
Inspector's name and number	Shirley Whales 830

#### School context

St Mary's C of E Academy is an average sized, well-established and growing lower school set in the town of Stotfold. Most pupils are from a White British heritage and the percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below the national average. The number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average, as is the number of pupils entitled to free school meals. The headteacher has been in post since January 2014 and staffing at the school remains stable.

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

- The strong Christian leadership of the school ensures that an inclusive Christian vision permeates all aspects of school life.
- Distinctive Christian values, which are at the heart of the school's ethos, underpin the respectful relationships throughout the school community.
- The high-quality learning experiences offered in collective worship are led and developed by the whole school community and are embraced by all.
- The evident commitment and robust evaluations from the school's leaders, governors and clergy support the on-going development and deepening of the distinctive Christian ethos.
- The partnership with the parish church is mutually beneficial to both church and school communities and makes a significant contribution to the quality of collective worship and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

#### Areas to improve

- Provide greater opportunities for pupils to grow spiritually by developing a wider variety of ways for them to take part in spontaneous prayer and reflection.
- Enable pupils to explore multicultural aspects of learning so that they improve their understanding of faiths across national and global communities.
- Improve the tasks and marking feedback in religious education in order to support pupils' skills and deepen their knowledge.

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

Life at St Mary's is significantly shaped by the effective promotion of the distinctive Christian values. They are celebrated and consistently articulated by all members of the school community and as a result pupils' personal development and behaviour are outstanding. Consequently, exclusions are rare. School leaders have high expectations of good attendance and they deal sensitively with any issues. The impact of the school's Christian character and the school's highly inclusive practices enable most pupils to make expected progress by the end of Key Stage 1. 75% of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieved a good level of development in 2017. The end of year outcomes for reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2017 were above national and local authority averages.

Exceptionally strong links with the parish church impact greatly on the whole life of the school and the very positive relationships within it. Pupils speak highly of their teachers and friends and they are enthusiastic advocates of the Christian traditions and stories that underpin their acts of kindness. One pupil described the picture of Jesus washing his disciples' feet as a 'way of showing that he was an equal even though he was important'. In conversation, pupils readily refer to the biblical connections that relate the Christian values to the broader Christian narrative and the impact on their daily lives. The school has an inclusive, friendly and intimate atmosphere with one parent expressing this as 'every child is cherished for the talents they bring.' The Christian values ensure that everyone is valued for the person that they are.

Pupils' social and moral development is reflected in the school's involvement and commitment in supporting a variety of charities, including festive celebrations and local events such as Stotfold Festival Week and The Need Project. Teachers provide pupils with enjoyable opportunities for spiritual expression. In a lesson based on special objects, special people and special places, one Year 2 child had brought in a pebble that he had found on a beach during his Easter holiday because it reminded him of 'the big rock in front of Jesus' tomb'.

The new Understanding Christianity units have been an effective tool for teaching pupils about Christianity and the quality of the religious education (RE) curriculum is improving as a result. However, the lack of effective marking and feedback does not allow pupils the opportunity to extend their thinking and learning beyond what is asked of them. This limits the contribution that RE makes to the school's Christian character and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils enjoy visiting their local church and other places of worship. These visits enable them to explore a range of faiths. Pupils are able to speak confidently about the differences between religions and they enjoy learning about how Christians see themselves as 'brothers and sisters' in their faith. However, through the self-evaluation process, the school has rightly identified pupils' understanding of 'global perspectives' as an area for development as links with communities across the world have not been fully established.

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

Pupils speak with maturity and confidence about the inspiration that they draw from worship, 'Worship helps us to think about the questions that we might ask God and give thanks to him.' Collective worship is central to delivering the Christian vision at St Mary's because not only is it distinctively Christian, it is also deeply Christian. The rich variety of modern and traditional themes are planned succinctly to include an assortment of readings, reflection, drama and singing. It follows a clear pattern of engaging Christian teaching through Christian values and Bible links.

This Christian worship is at the heart of school life because it models what the school stands for as an inclusive and strengthening community. Reverend Bill, a central and well-respected figure in the school community, explains how worship is engaging more of the church and school community. This is because the 'children are more involved and the church has a great presence in the school'. The impact in terms of the building of mutually supportive relationships between the village, school and church communities is significant.

In the monthly service in school, a pupil-led serving team act as church acolytes by carrying the processional cross and candles and taking a lead in the liturgy. They are proud to be chosen and are 'respectful and enthusiastic participants.' As a result, pupils' knowledge of Anglican traditions is secure and they can describe aspects of the church year with an impressive degree of understanding. They describe Jesus as a 'good storyteller' and recount 'his adventures in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John'. Pupils' understanding of the Trinity is age appropriate as it is limited to knowing that Christians believe that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Pupils are beginning to understand the importance of prayer and time for reflection and prayer is integral to worship. Pupils appreciate the quiet places outdoors such as the 'memory garden' and 'silver area' which are provided for personal reflection. However, the quality of indoor spaces provided for prayer and reflection is not consistently good as in some classrooms pupils do not have the quality physical space and artefacts that give the opportunity for

spontaneous prayer and reflection.

The school invites a wide variety of church leaders from the local area into school, including an Open the Book team, the Salvation Army as well as Reverend Bill. These leaders involve the pupils in rich and active experiences, which they share with their friends and families. This varied diet helps to maintain interest and relevance whilst contributing effectively to the school's community feel and sense of belonging.

As part of the worship and evaluation process, pupils are selected to make a 'speech bubble' comment about each act of worship. Senior leaders and governors evaluate the impact of worship regularly and they consider the comments made by pupils and staff. There is evidence that this leads to a continuous refinement of worship themes and practices.

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

The headteacher and governors provide outstanding leadership of St Mary's as a church school. They are highly effective in articulating and promoting the Christian vision and Christian values that permeate the school and extend beyond into the community. Because of this vision, members of staff work as a cohesive team and they demonstrate respect and care and feel valued whatever their role. They engage effectively with all members of the school community to demonstrate 'a shared vocabulary of values' that is almost 'innate and subconscious'. Widely used parent and pupil voice opportunities allow the community to have their opinions acknowledged and respected. All stakeholders appreciate this, and this mutually beneficial relationship is key in enabling the school to flourish as a church school. Parents and carers recognise the school's distinctive ethos and support it with enthusiasm and passion because of the impact it has upon their children's lives. The most vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils are very well supported through the active promotion of Christian values. 'My children thrive here, we feel a valued part of the community,' one parent explained. Another parent enthused about the school being 'a welcoming oasis of peace.'

RE and collective worship are expertly led by the headteacher, whose enthusiasm in her role impacts on the effectiveness of these areas. Consequently both RE and collective worship have a high profile in the school and requirements regarding their provision are met. The governors' ethos committee conducts insightful and rigorous evaluation ensuring that church school improvements are identified and addressed. Detailed minutes are shared with the full governing body and structured procedures are put in place in a timely manner. School leaders ensure that the curriculum including spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of learning meets the needs of all learners. It raises aspirations, which lead to rising levels of attendance and attainment. Areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been met.

Highly effective partnerships with other local schools and the St Alban's Diocese support many aspects of school management including staff development and training. The demonstration of Christian care and compassion is attributed to members of the diocesan team, who have helped to see school leaders through difficult times. A strong focus on developing each individual member of the school ensures that not only are staff and governors equipped to carry out their current roles successfully, but through effective and strategic planning, are also empowered to be leaders of the future. This, together with the support from colleagues and parents, has resulted in everyone contributing very well to the Christian distinctiveness that St Mary's offers.

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