

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

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

<b>Address</b>	Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 1BQ		
<b>Date of inspection</b>	12 February 2019	<b>Status of school</b>	VA primary
<b>Diocese</b>	Chelmsford	<b>URN</b>	115155

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

#### School context

St. Mary's is a one form entry primary school in the heart of Saffron Walden with 201 pupils on roll. The school has a low level of religious and cultural diversity and few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below the national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also below the national averages. In the last year the school has been through significant staff changes with the appointment of an interim headteacher, an interim SEN inclusion leader and three new teachers.

#### The school's Christian vision

The school vision to 'Let your light shine as you grow' (based on Matthew 5:15) is associated with the six key values of perseverance, compassion, respect, trust, truthfulness and friendship. Promoting 'Life in all its fullness.'

#### Key findings

- The Christian vision and associated values are established. While the vision is theologically underpinned, it is not yet consistently articulated by all members of the school community.
- There is evidence that the school's vision is beginning to shape policies and school development planning but this is still in its infancy.
- School leaders have proactively engaged with the diocese who have provided key support in developing religious education (RE) and the school's new Christian vision.
- The school enjoys, and benefits from, a strong and supportive partnership with their local church.
- The interim headteacher has developed an inclusive, collaborative team which provides a nurturing and supportive community within which both pupils and staff flourish.

#### Areas for development

- Ensure all members of the school community know and understand the theological underpinning of the Christian vision and how it drives all aspects of school life.
- School leaders and governors to develop rigorous systems to measure the impact of the Christian vision to ensure the current rate of progress is sustained.
- Embed the 'Understanding Christianity' resource to ensure there are greater opportunities for enquiry-based learning and the critical engagement of biblical text.

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 school's vision 'Let your light shine as you grow' and the associated values of perseverance, compassion, respect, trust, truthfulness and friendship has recently been established. School leaders, alongside the governing body, have taken significant steps to develop this new vision. Their decision to seek input and on-going support from the diocesan advisor is indicative of their commitment to this. Consultation with all stakeholders has resulted in a vision which they believe best 'fits our school'. While the theological underpinning of the vision is in place, alongside specific biblical links, it is not clearly known, articulated and lived out by all members of the school community. The vision is beginning to shape school policies and development planning. Regular monitoring visits by the governing body are in place and these, together with rigorous systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of the vision, will be required to ensure the current rate of progress is sustained. The school enjoys, and benefits from, strong links with the local parish church. Weekly collective worship support, together with after-school clubs and church services provide opportunities for the school to experience a breadth of Christian worship. Parents recognise this link and see it as a real strength with one commenting that the 'school feels like an extension of the church'.

A broad and balanced curriculum is in place where all pupils, including the most vulnerable, are able to flourish. The school's commitment to all pupils was endorsed by one parent who described the school as a place where 'all the children are known'. Such recognition of the inherent worth of each pupil, made in God's image, can be seen in reflective circle time in RE which provides opportunities to nurture the pupils' spiritual needs. A clear link to the vision was expressed by one member of the leadership team who spoke of the resonance between letting your own light shine and the importance of an inclusive curriculum with its emphasis on the value of every light. One parent, speaking of the encouragement her child received to explore an opportunity, commented that 'seeing your light shining was like drawing out your gift'. This overarching care is reflected in pupil progress which is at least in line with national averages for all and is well above average in some curriculum areas.

The school value of perseverance, together with the promotion of growth mindset, enables the pupils to become resilient learners and work to overcome barriers. Pupils spoke of the way in which assessment of their work, together with curriculum support groups, help identify and offer strategies to overcome difficulties. One Year 6 pupil described how she felt 'safe to ask questions in class'. Parents convey their confidence about the school's approach and concern for their child's growth and ability to overcome barriers to their learning. The school has an established focus on charitable giving and the close involvement of the school council in decision making helps deepen their awareness of disadvantage and exploitation of the natural world and how they can make a difference. However, pupils have not yet been given the opportunity to develop global links.

Relationships across the school are harmonious and the support offered to pupils and staff is evident in the way they speak positively of their school. One staff member praised the support she received following a family bereavement. Parents described the school as being 'welcoming', 'happy', and 'inclusive' and a place where 'there is a go-to person' in times of need. They praised the school buddy system which helps foster relationships between year groups. Positive behaviour is actively promoted and encouraged by leadership at all levels and expresses the school's Christian foundation well. Pupils articulate their involvement in, and understanding of, the school's behaviour policy and sanctions. This encourages them to demonstrate respect and recognise the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. Parents value the establishment of good behaviour and are very supportive. The interim headteacher has given significant time to nurturing a collaborative team and this has had a positive impact upon the physical and mental wellbeing of staff and pupils and is tangible on entering the school.

The school is committed to celebrating diversity and difference and upholding the dignity of all God's children. This is seen, not only in their employment of an inclusion manager, but in the manner in which they support a number of pupils with complex needs. The curriculum provides opportunities for 'each light to grow' through relationships and sex education (RSE) and Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) which help pupils recognise human uniqueness and the centrality of good relationships. The school has effective procedures to address bullying and this was endorsed in conversation with pupils. One pupil, commenting on the question of copying unacceptable behaviour, said that doing so 'was not letting your light shine'.

Daily collective worship invites all, through activity and response, to reflect upon life's spiritual dimension. Parents speak of the positive feedback they receive, particularly about the inspirational songs pupils enjoy. Greater pupil involvement in collective worship, raised as an area for improvement at the previous inspection, has been addressed. The pupil-led worship council is involved in the planning and leading of collective worship and school-wide evaluation helps inform future planning. Pupils and staff speak passionately about a recent 'light festival' service where they learned new songs and discovered a basis for their vision. Pupils and staff have opportunities to grow spiritually through an encounter with the biblical narrative and are challenged to reflect personally. However the understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is currently under-developed. The singing of the school prayer during worship, and the closing of each day with prayer, help to ensure the centrality of prayer. Reflective spaces are prominent in classrooms and highlight the current value in focus.

The recent recruitment of joint RE leads is enabling the school to develop a more robust approach to curriculum planning. The 'Understanding Christianity' resource is now being used and the diocesan advisor is supporting staff with its implementation. The RE leads benefit from diocesan-led training which has helped establish a clearer rationale for RE and build the foundations for a more enquiry-led approach to teaching. While pupils speak of their enjoyment of this approach, it is clear that greater engagement with, and analysis of, the biblical text is necessary to give pupils confidence when discussing concepts such as the Trinity. RE provides pupils with opportunities to develop a greater understanding of world religions and fosters respect for difference and diversity. RE provision supports the school vision and associated values and reflects the Church of England Statement of Entitlement.



**The effectiveness of RE is Good**

RE is given a core position in the school and pupils enjoy the opportunities to explore topics particularly through the use of images which generate enquiry and discussion. This has enhanced pupil engagement with the subject and is making a positive impact on the learning of all pupils, including the most vulnerable. The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good as reflected in the overall progress of all pupils which is in line with expectations. Since the appointment of the joint RE leads, regular monitoring of pupil work through lesson observations and tracking of pupil progress, is beginning to inform planning. There is also now a greater consistency in the marking of RE books which was previously identified as an area for development.

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