

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Stocks Lane, Barnsley, S75 2DF	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Leeds
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	August 2012
Name of multi-academy trust	St Mary's Academy Trust
Date of inspection	23 November 2017
Date of last inspection	December 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Academy 137870
Headteacher	Lee Spencer
Inspector's name and number	Nigel Castledine 652

School context

This average-sized Church of England primary school serves its local multi-ethnic community in the centre of Barnsley. A small but growing number of pupils come from minority ethnic families, many of whom have English as an additional language. The school has a lower than average percentage of disadvantaged pupils but a higher than average percentage of pupils with additional needs.

St Mary's was the founding school of the St Mary's Academy Trust. The school has links with three Anglican churches and two Methodist churches in its locality.

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

- Sustained and inspirational senior leadership rooted in Christian belief, has ensured the school has continued to develop, maintaining its high levels of pupil progress and attainment over the years.
- Inspired by the Christian belief of the God-given unique and infinite worth of each child, the school provides its pupils with personalised support that removes potential learning barriers and enhances academic success.
- Strong and influential links with the Christian churches within Barnsley ensure pupils are able to benefit spiritually from the varying worship styles of the different Christian traditions.
- Pupils' caring and thoughtful behaviour is underpinned by the Christian values of the school, which stress the importance of friendship, forgiveness, love and trust.

Areas to improve

- As a school community, build on the strengths of the Christian values by identifying and celebrating the most influential of these as core values. This will enable the chosen values to become fully embedded in school life and to have significance for all stakeholders.
- Develop the role of the collective worship committee by supporting these pupils to develop the skills to effectively and independently plan, lead and evaluate worship, and then guide others to follow their example.
- Build on the successful introduction of the 'Understanding Christianity' resource in religious education (RE) to further enhance the school's use of the diocesan RE syllabus and new assessment procedures.
- Extend the local governing board's systematic challenge to senior school leaders with the inclusion of formal evaluation of the impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness on all aspects of school life.

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

This school's Christian vision is clear in the many ways in which it shares God's love and Christian values with all who come through its doors. St Mary's is very much the community's school, accepting pupils of all faiths and cultures and ensuring all are made welcome. This creates an inclusive learning environment in which pupils gain a life-long love of learning. School data shows continuing academic success, because of high expectations for every pupil. Exciting teaching and learning opportunities ensure that pupils can achieve their maximum potential.

Christian service motivates the staff team to work co-operatively together, so creating a friendly nurturing environment that ensures all pupils feel safe, valued and secure. This ensures pupils enjoy their learning and want to be in school regularly and on time. The school works with families to support improvements in attendance for the minority who find this harder to achieve. Because the academic success of each individual is important, those with special educational needs or disability and those with English as an additional language are especially well supported.

The wide-ranging Christian values are promoted through worship, class discussion, and also through specially-themed events such as Kindness Week. However, because the number of Christian values makes it difficult for all to be remembered, the selection of core faith values would be beneficial. Christian distinctiveness influences the school's behaviour policy which references the gospel values of respect, responsibility, reconciliation and forgiveness. At St Mary's, every day is a fresh start with positive encouragement to make appropriate choices and forgive others. As a result, pupils' behaviour is friendly and respectful, with consideration for the needs of others. Any instances of bullying or discrimination are dealt with speedily and compassionately.

Pupils are keen to show Christian service by taking up responsibilities such as being school councillors or playground buddies. Christian teachings inspire pupils to think of the less fortunate. After the harvest festival, for example, they decided to continue collecting for the Barnsley food bank as hunger is a year round concern. Christian love and desire for equality is seen in pupils' global awareness, and their ideas to alleviate the effects of poverty, hunger and disease.

The school shows its Christian values in action by celebrating its mix of languages, faiths and differing ways of life. All newcomers are supported effectively so that they can quickly integrate into school life. Pupils and staff are open and welcoming to those of contrasting cultures and beliefs, seeing them very much as a positive part of school life. One older boy commented, 'Our school is a place where everyone is welcomed as a new friend, because we are one big family at St Mary's.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The school's daily acts of worship bring the school family together to praise God through liturgy, teaching and biblical study. Poetry, discussion, drama, video, audio, artefacts and music are all important aspects of the worship. Its themes extend into the classroom curriculum, enabling pupils to explore further in age-appropriate ways. Friday worship shows the importance of Christian values, with praise given to pupils who have clearly demonstrated them.

The worship themes are based around the Anglican Christian calendar of religious festivals and seasons, alongside the school's Christian values. These themes, selected by the senior leadership team in consultation with local clergy, also give pupils a wider perspective on Christianity as a multi-cultural global faith.

Worship provides pupils with an insight into the breadth of Anglican faith tradition. This worship often commences with the lighting of a candle whilst the 'candle prayer' is said. Worship songs and the use of the Lord's prayer are also integral parts of the liturgy. A termly school Mass is celebrated on All Saints' Day, Ash Wednesday and Ascension Day, using the altar within the sanctuary area of the hall. During Mass, a small number of pupils and staff receive the bread and wine but almost all pupils choose to be blessed. This ensures the Mass is an inclusive, invitational and spiritually meaningful experience. A worship committee pupil explained, 'The Mass is special because the bread and the wine help me feel close to Jesus.' The Christian festivals of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost provide pupils with experiences of worship in church, at which many of the pupils' families are present. The teachings of these festivals also support pupils' development of understanding of the Christian teaching of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Collective worship is led by school staff, regularly augmented by the clergy and lay pastors of the churches of the area, so giving pupils a rich insight into both Methodist and Anglican traditions. Pupils are becoming more involved in helping with aspects of worship, but currently they do not have opportunities to plan and lead the worship without adult guidance.

Prayer and reflection are not confined to worship times. Through provision of attractively inviting prayer areas in each classroom, pupils are encouraged to pray and reflect at any time of the school day. Prayers are also used at lunchtime and the end of school. There is a prayer tree in the school hall on which prayers for others are placed, along with ribbons to represent personal prayers. The school grounds also have quiet areas for personal reflection.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE is the core subject that is at the heart of the school's curriculum, influencing all aspects of school life and enriching its daily worship. It is given prominence in the life of the school, and its cross-curricular approach enables all pupils to engage positively in its varied themes. A new RE and worship leader has taken up post recently, and is already developing her role, well supported by the senior leadership team, as well as working with the other Church of England schools of the Academy Trust.

Since the last inspection, the school has adopted the Leeds diocesan RE syllabus. It has also made significant changes to strengthen the quality of learning about Christianity through the recent introduction of the 'Understanding Christianity' resource. This is already having a marked effect on pupils' depth of learning and their use of more theological terminology when discussing religious concepts.

This was observed in two RE lessons seen during the inspection, where pupils were able to have meaningful and deep conversations in their discussions about contrasting faith teachings and ways of worship. Pupils were keen to find out more when answers were more complex and used facts in carefully thought-out hypotheses that showed their sustained interest and ability within RE. A Year 6 boy was keen to discover the function of a mosque's minarets and rightly suggested that it might serve a similar type of purpose to that of a church tower.

The school is also working to introduce a meaningful assessment system for RE that records pupils' progress and attainment levels in ways that are comparable with other national curriculum subjects. Outcomes so far indicate that RE remains on a par with the other core subjects. In common with these subjects, the school's ongoing development plan for RE is ensuring that inspirational teaching supports more pupils to reach a greater depth within their learning.

Pupils are encouraged to learn about religions through their exploration and responses to the faith customs, teachings and sacred scriptures of contrasting beliefs, as well as through their growing spirituality and daily worship in school. Pupils are supported in learning from religion through their cross-curricular exploration of religious faith and its influence on life style and choices. This is enriched by the pupils' thoughtful responses to the 'big' questions of identity, meaning and purpose within life.

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

Senior school leaders have ensured that the school's Christian mission of sharing God's love with all that come through its doors has enabled its pupils to benefit from its richly creative curriculum. A continuous cycle of robust evaluation and review of all areas of school life informs ongoing development plans which hold senior school leaders to account. These support the necessary ongoing improvement and developments that ensure pupils' needs continue to be met in the best possible ways. However, whilst the local governing board is part of this process, governors do not ensure sufficient scrutiny of the impact of Christian distinctiveness on all aspects of school life.

Because of the school's emphasis on the highest standards, pupils make consistently good progress so, by the end of Year 6, many are achieving above national expectations. The school uses cross-curricular themes to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They are enhanced by collective worship and RE which enable pupils to experience awe, wonder and spirituality. An eclectic range of other extra-curricular activities is also provided, including gardening which enables pupils to care for and appreciate the infinite variety of God's creation.

St Mary's also shares its teaching expertise with the members of the Academy Trust and other schools within the local area. The Trust schools work together to provide a rich source of expertise in supporting the ongoing professional development of all members of staff. This includes enabling middle and senior leaders to prepare for leadership roles in other schools. The Trust's RE subject co-ordinators work together, so ensuring that schools can share each other's expertise and experience. This has been invaluable to the new RE co-ordinator at St Mary's. The school considers it has close links with the Diocese of Leeds and strives to share its educational priorities, regularly benefiting from its conferences and training events.

St Mary's values the important contributions that parents make to their children's education. It rightly considers pupils achieve best where there is a strong and positive relationship between home and school. Accordingly, the school's 'open door' policy ensures that parents feel welcome and involved in their child's learning and successes. The influence of the Christian values of the school are regarded positively by parents, one commenting, 'The values clearly work because the pupils know the right ways to behave and they all care about each other.'

SIAMS report November 2017, St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Barnsley, S75 2DF