



## Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Diocese of St Albans



**Northchurch St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School**  
Northchurch, Berkhamsted HP4 3QZ

**LA:** Hertfordshire  
**SIAS Inspection:** 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009  
**Previous S23 Inspection:** 10<sup>th</sup> July 2006  
**URN:** 117424  
**Headteacher:** Eloise Haezewindt  
**SIAS Inspector Name:** Alan Thornsby  
**SIAS Inspector No:** NS 137

### School Context

St Mary's is a first school in which almost all pupils are White British. The proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals and those with learning difficulties and /or disabilities are below the national average. The school has a number of awards including Healthy School and Activemark. The head has been in post since January 2009.

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

St. Mary's has a distinctive Christian ethos that underpins the values and relationships in the school. The recently appointed headteacher has already introduced a range of initiatives to further raise the attainment of pupils and to revisit and reaffirm the distinctive character of the school as a church school.

### Established strengths

- The vision of the headteacher to fully develop the Christian character of the school
- The links with the church
- The profile of prayer and impact on spiritual development

### Focus for development

- Ensure development points from previous inspection are fully implemented
- Make the Christian ethos explicit in displays
- Ensure RE is developed as a core curriculum area
- Develop a cycle of evaluation for staff and governors to monitor the distinctive character of the school

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

This inclusive caring school has an ethos securely underpinned by Christian values. This ensures good relationships amongst the whole school community. A range of incentives for good behaviour and achievement such as 'Good Deeds' and 'Tree of Success' raise the self-esteem of pupils, who may be nominated by adults, each other or themselves. This maintains the high profile of behaviour, care and respect. Pupils clearly value each other as friends and older pupils take responsibility for the welfare of younger children. They have a good awareness of the need for forgiveness and fresh start, making a typical comment, 'if we fall out, we sort out our problems, say sorry and be friends again'. The school has recently introduced monitoring and tracking systems to further motivate pupils and these have already begun to improve progress. The Christian ethos of the school successfully promotes good spiritual and moral development of pupils. Out of school activities and the museum displays of the local historic society, housed in the school enhance the spiritual and social development of pupils. Cross-curricular activities, the teaching of French and involvement in maypole and country dancing give pupils a good cultural awareness. Pupils have a good understanding of the need to care for the school and wider environment through the involvement in and impact of the ROSE (Respect Our School Environment) club. Although some displays reflect the ethos of the school and pose reflective questions, the school has identified the need to extend the use and impact of these.

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

Collective worship is a strength of the school in nurturing pupils understanding of Christian values and Biblical knowledge. Pupils show they enjoy worship by their response to leaders and the way they create a quiet atmosphere. The range of worship includes a 'Good Deeds' assembly that acknowledges acts of responsibility to others within the context of worship. This allows children to make links between stories and hymns, for example between 'The Good Stranger' and 'Cross over the road'. The vicar leads a weekly act of worship in school to explore Bible stories. Pupils have a good understanding of the Anglican tradition because of the frequent use of ritual such as liturgical colours for the focus table and the lighting of a candle. Children are familiar with the church and pattern of worship because the church is used as a learning resource and for monthly and festival services in which they have a number of roles. Prayer has a high profile in school and pupils readily read or recite their improvised prayers. These are recorded in a prayer book that is a resource for everyone to use. Many pupils enjoy being a part of a wider worshipping community because they attend family services as members of groups such as Brownies. Children's experience of the variety of Christian worship is increased through the input of the Methodist minister. Although the school has made little progress in establishing a formal evaluation process for worship, the new head is aware of the need to include the responses of pupils in the newly established cycle of self-evaluation of the school.

**The effectiveness of Religious Education is satisfactory.**

A 'book look' carried out by the headteacher indicates the need for an immediate review of policy and practice for religious education. There have been inconsistencies in pupils' progress because of inconsistent teaching and lack of differentiation of tasks, a lack of recording of practical activities in RE and monitoring against learning objectives to indicate coverage rather than progress. The school believes these indicate that achievement and progress are not in line with national expectations. The inspection findings fully agree with the findings of the school. Teaching is satisfactory when work is linked to the experience of pupils who can also relate to the experience of teachers. It is often good when teachers share their enthusiasm with pupils who enjoy developing their ideas through research using a range of media. Effective use of teaching assistants, for example recording discussion points also adds to the quality of lessons. Although some marking of written work helps children to develop their ideas, there is often a lack of continuity and progression in children's books. The school has already begun to devise and implement action plans to address the issues they have identified.

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

The headteacher has clear vision to develop a church school in which self review and ongoing development are the norm. She has very quickly made an accurate review of strengths and areas for development of the school. This includes the involvement of all stakeholders in a review and revision of the mission statement, aims and policies to reflect the Christian ethos of the school. Staff have made a learning walk around the school to develop their understanding of the distinctive character of a church school. Governors are now more aware and active in their role in school development. Foundation governors are effective critical friends who understand their role in maintaining the ethos of the school. Some of their strategic planning meetings are held in church and this immediately impacts on and is an obvious reminder of their specific Christian role. Although the issues from the previous inspection have not been fully addressed, recent developments show the school has a good capacity to make further improvement. Parents are very supportive of the school and praise the way Christian values are shared and developed in home, school and church.