



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School
St Mary's Way, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 6HY

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 21 September 2010
Previous S48 Inspection: 23 January 2007
URN: 117384
Headteacher: Mrs Val Morris
SIAS Inspector Name: Mrs Judith Ruff
SIAS Inspector No: 528

School Context

St Mary's Infants is a smaller than average school, situated in beautiful grounds. The majority of pupils are from families of White British heritage. There are currently 146 pupils on roll. Approximately 26% are on the SEN Code of Practice. A children's centre has recently opened at the school. This is not managed by the governors. The school is adjacent to the feeder junior school, also having a church foundation.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's Infant School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The inspirational partnership between the headteacher and rector is central to the success and growth as a distinctive church school. Their faithful and committed vision to the school developing as special and different because of its church foundation has enabled impressive progress to be made since the previous inspection. This has been brought about by thoughtful, prayerful and detailed planning, together with honest self evaluation and a combined will to improve outcomes for pupils within a Christian context.

Established strengths

- The modelling of Christian behaviours by staff, including respect, caring and sharing, which make the mission statement a living reality on a daily basis, creating the 'spiritual heartbeat' of the school.
- The way pupils are encouraged and supported to develop a meaningful understanding of God, with whom they could build a loving relationship in a natural and increasingly reflective way as they mature.

Focus for development

- To build further on the integration of relationships between church and school, so that families identify themselves as part of the church community, increase their commitment to a Christian heritage, and that church members recognise and are supportive of the school community.
- To develop the quiet garden and indoor prayer area, so that the Christian ethos of the school is further strengthened by this provision.

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

The well embedded mission statement has become central to the life and work of the school and is described by stakeholders as the 'spiritual heartbeat' within the community. A working group, set up to explore the challenge of making a 'distinctive Christian character' a meaningful reality, has been extremely effective under the committed leadership of the rector and headteacher. The deliberations of this group and the proposed planning documents to support this are a standing item on agendas for governing body meetings. As a result, the outcomes from these discussions have brought into place a school which is outstanding in its Christian distinctiveness. The school learning environment is stunning in the way in which it promotes this ethos. Displays celebrate and value the pupils' efforts and give them clear guidance through effective behaviour codes. This results in outstanding pupil behaviour, where skills of listening and reflecting are amply evident within classrooms. The recently established indoor prayer area and outdoor quiet garden require more development. They both have the potential to significantly enhance the provision.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

Collective worship within the school is outstanding. It is recognised as being central in supporting the Christian ethos of the school. Staff appreciate the value that it adds to all people present and feel valued and affirmed by the experience. The wonderful 'Creation' display which dominates the back wall of the hall is added to by pupils through their artistic efforts as the story unfolds. Pupils' singing is both enthusiastic and reflective, depending upon the hymn choice. The singing of the 'Lord's Prayer' at the end of collective worship was very moving. Pupils participate well through their prayers and responses to the leader's questioning. Good evaluation systems are in place to support further improvements. Parents surveyed spoke warmly of the impact that collective worship, led by the rector on a weekly basis, had on their children's knowledge and understanding of Christianity.

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

The way in which the headteacher, rector and other members of the working party looking at developing a distinctly Christian character is exemplary. Their dedication of time and expertise to plan and inspire others to share the vision is to be highly commended. Their self evaluation processes are rigorous and accurate. They take time to enable other partners to question, challenge and discuss. As a result the whole governing body has grown in its understanding of a church school. The headteacher, eighteen years in post, has worked most successfully with staff, pupils and parents to make the plans a reality on a daily basis. She has every right to be very proud of her school and what has been achieved.

Recently a Parochial Church Council (PCC) took place at the school. Members of this group were able to find out more about the school and its aims. This and other initiatives which bring the church and school communities closer would build further on the integration of relationships between church and school, so that families identify themselves as part of the church community, increase their commitment to a Christian heritage, and encourage church members to recognise and be supportive of the school community.