

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Mill Lane, Bradford Abbas, Sherborne, Dorset. DT9 6RH

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Salisbury
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 June 2017
Name of multi-academy trust	Sherborne Area Schools' Trust
Date of inspection	20 June 2017
Date of last inspection	15 June 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 144299
Headteacher	Emma Grunnill
Inspector's name and number	Lesley Turville 732

School context

St Mary's is a small rural primary school of 118 children situated in the heart of the village. The majority of its children are drawn from outside of its catchment area. In June 2017, the school became an academy as a member of the Sherborne Area Schools' Trust. The large majority of children are from a White British background. The proportion of children eligible for the pupil premium and those who have special educational needs is lower than the national average. The school enjoys close links with the Sherborne Pyramid of Schools and the Sherborne Small Schools Cluster. The church of St Mary's is situated next to the school.

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

- The aspirational leadership of the headteacher and governors creates an atmosphere in which all adults and children feel nurtured and valued as individuals.
- Excellent relationships across the whole community ensure that children feel safe and valued and develop as confident, reflective and responsible individuals who achieve above national expectations.
- An inspirational school motto which encapsulates a set of Christian values is made explicit to all stakeholders through worship and has a significant impact on the daily life of the school.
- Collective worship reflects the strong mutually beneficial relationship with the local church and reflects Anglican traditions and practices and the seasons of the church year.
- Governors support, challenge and monitor the Christian character of the school ensuring that it informs strategic planning.

Areas to improve

- Through consultation with children and staff, create a school worship format that ensures greater consistency across the school and enable more children to be involved in planning and leading.
- Share outstanding practice with other schools in the new multi-academy trust so that the Christian character of each school is recognised and developed.

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

St Mary's Primary School aims to 'provide a secure Christian environment in which consideration and respect for self and others, including the wider community, can be fostered.' Through a focus on Christian values and human rights as a Rights Respecting (level 1) School, it has succeeded in doing this. St Mary's is a school where children flourish, make good progress and grow in confidence and wisdom. This is because the headteacher has led the school in creating an ethos where adults and children in school, and the wider community, feel supported and valued as individuals. Thus, relationships across the school and with the community are excellent. Values make a significant contribution to the wellbeing and safety of children and have a positive impact on learning. Children explain how values are seen in action every day. One child commented, 'Our values make school a better place and teach us to think about how we can serve each other'. Parents say staff show the values in the way they respond quickly and efficiently to even the smallest issue. The school's distinctive Christian character has a significant impact on the children's high academic achievement. This is seen in the strong commitment that all pupils achieve well and flourish within this Christian and nurturing community. It is illustrated in the decision to train one of the teaching assistants as an emotional learning support assistant. (ELSA). This has not only transformed her life but also the lives of some of the children and parents in the school as they struggle to cope with difficult times. Children thrive both academically and personally, making good progress from their various starting points. Furthermore, as children enjoy school, attendance is high and behaviour is excellent.

Spiritual development is a strength of the school and contributes to the broad and exciting curriculum. Since the last inspection the school has created an inspiring spiritual garden, using designs and ideas gathered from the children. Children say that if they feel 'sad or down', it is 'really quiet and you can go to sit and reflect or worship'. In addition to this, spiritual journey days offer children the chance to reflect deeply upon biblical teaching and respond through poems, art, music and drama. These are very popular and memorable and give children a chance to 'grow our souls' as each day starts and ends with worship. A spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) audit identifies opportunities in the curriculum and afterschool clubs and ensures provision in these areas is strong. This, combined with the effective religious education (RE) curriculum, which includes visits to a range of places of worship, means children show a high degree of understanding and respect for diversity. Children enjoy religious education (RE) and recognise the importance of knowing about the beliefs of others and being able to talk openly about their own. Children explore 'big questions' during lessons and talk knowledgeably about what they have learnt. They identify similarities and differences and challenge stereotypes. They make links between their learning and their lives and are developing an understanding of the idea of 'courageous advocacy' and making a difference in the world. This is seen in the support of Kisumu children's orphanage in Africa and the many roles and responsibilities the children have around the school.

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

The school community places great value on collective worship. Parents enjoy attending services in the church and feel included regardless of their own beliefs. A good example of this is the way the school presented a Muslim child with a Qur'an instead of a Bible at the leavers' service. Another parent says that her child always comes home 'talking and asking about worship' rather than other subjects and another says that because of worship her child 'asks for Bible stories at bedtime'. Staff value the time for reflection and say that they leave the room 'with a smile on their face' having had time to reflect on their own issues. Children say that they are inspired to be a better person such as doing acts of kindness, raising money to help others or being fair. Collective worship is instrumental in creating the Christian ethos of the school. It sets the values and the rights respecting agenda within a biblical context, reinforced through the display of biblical verses throughout the school. Furthermore, worship clearly demonstrates the Christian foundation of the school through its emphasis on following the seasons of the church year. Children are fully engaged in worship; they listen carefully, respond willingly, sing beautifully, reflect and pray. Music is carefully chosen to reflect the themes. An example of this was seen on the day of inspection when the children sang 'We are marching in the light of God,' in several different languages to illustrate the disciples speaking in different languages at Pentecost.

Children recognise the Christian foundation of the values because they understand the biblical stories that support them and have spent time exploring what they mean to them in age appropriate ways. Staff lead class acts of worship and appreciate the difference between this and the more formal larger acts of worship. These are used to explore how children make sense of the modern world and global events in the light of their Christian values and the teachings of Jesus. However, there is a lack of consistency in practice across the school as there is no school format in place to help with planning and evaluation.

There is a close working relationship with the local church and several other local provides such as The Vine Youth Ministry and Open Air Campaigners. These very different approaches to worship ensure that children experience a

wide range of worship styles. Local clergy are regular visitors to the school. They lead the infant children in worship in the school whilst the older children worship monthly in the church. This means that the building, symbols, artefacts and Anglican traditions are very familiar to the children. All the main seasons of the church year including Advent, Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are celebrated. These themes, and teaching in RE mean that children have a good understanding of the person of Jesus and The Trinity. They explain that, 'Jesus came down to earth to show God' and that 'He died on the cross to forgive our sins'. They also explain that The Trinity, 'is all God but in different forms'. Children are able to talk about logos they have designed to illustrate this.

Children understand the purpose of prayer and pray both formally using the school prayer and the 'Lord's Prayer' and informally when they write their own prayers during spiritual days. A child says he likes to use school prayers at the end of the day at home. Children write prayers for special church occasions which show a great depth of knowledge and reflective thought.

Since the last inspection small groups of children have worked with the chair of governors to plan and lead acts of worship. During special church services children lead everything including the talk on Palm Sunday in the village service. Children enjoy this but say they would like to plan and lead more often. At present the school doesn't have a format to help them do this.

The headteacher is the collective worship leader and ensures that planning and monitoring is rigorous and informative. She has recently introduced the 'Roots and Fruits' material which adds to the school focus on spirituality using 'window, mirror and door' imagery for reflecting and learning. This is something she is keen to extend to lessons. Governors attend worship, monitor provision and challenge the school on its impact and feed back to the full governing body. Observations of class worship and whole school worship are undertaken and children are consulted through questionnaires and discussion. All this contributes to school action planning and ensures that practice is continually evolving and improving. An example of this is that, following a child saying they didn't always understand the prayers, one class teacher is focussing on the Lord's Prayer in class worship time.

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

The school vision of 'The roots to grow, the wings to fly' reflects the strong aspirational feel of the school and its ethos. It is rooted in the church, which is physically and emotionally at the heart of this community. Christian values underpin the vision statement and are used to fulfil the non-negotiable aim to meet the needs of each individual pupil. Parents choose to send their children to the school, many come from out of catchment, because of its ethos and are delighted at the care and attention their children receive both pastorally and academically. One parent says, 'I'm so pleased I chose this school. It's everything as special as I was told it was. I'm thrilled.' The nearby location of the church reflects the strong mutually beneficial relationship that exists between the church and the school. This relationship has remained strong throughout the appointment of a new incumbent because of the committed leadership of the head. She is ably supported by governors and staff who share her vision to provide the best possible education for everyone within a clear Christian ethos with attainment and progress being well above average.

Governors know the school very well and, by successfully challenging it, ensures that it continues improving. The school development plan and governor development plan contain sections on the Christian character of the school. These are reviewed regularly and monitored through visits to the school, talking to children and parental questionnaires. They form a part of all full governing body meetings. This level of scrutiny ensures that self-evaluation is accurate and informs strategic planning. Areas for development from the previous inspection have been met and RE and collective worship meet all statutory requirements. This improved focus on the character of the school is reflected in the fact that governors now start meetings with prayer. The headteacher is covering the role of RE co-ordinator, but plans are in place for the new RE lead to take up her role next term. The school considers it best to separate the roles of collective worship and RE co-ordinator. Careful assessment and monitoring of RE shows that attainment is in line with other subjects reflecting good quality provision.

Strategic and financial decisions are taken with the ethos of the school in mind. This is illustrated by the recent appointment of the ELSA and the recent conversion to become an academy in the Sherborne Area Schools' Trust. The trust is made up of seven local schools; six of these are church schools. This group recognises the benefit of sharing inspirational practices such as spiritual days to ensure the Christian character of each school is maintained and developed. The headteacher makes good use of existing partnerships with the Diocese, and the Sherborne Pyramid of Schools to ensure the best provision for the children and high quality continuing professional development for staff. Thus, staff are happy and confident in their roles with most having been in the school for many years.