

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

### St Mary The Virgin Primary School, Gillingham

<b>Address</b>	Pheasant Way, Shaftesbury Road, Gillingham, Dorset, SP8 4LP		
<b>Date of inspection</b>	14 June 2019	<b>Status of school</b>	Academy inspected as VA primary Sherborne Area Schools Trust ( SAST)
<b>Diocese</b>	Salisbury	<b>URN</b>	147145

<b>Overall Judgement</b>	<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>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Additional Judgements</b>	<b>The impact of collective worship</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
	<b>The effectiveness of religious education (RE)</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Good</b>

#### School context

St Mary The Virgin is a primary school with 203 pupils on roll and 41 pupils in the nursery. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with national averages. The school joined the Sherborne Area Schools Trust on 1 June 2019.

#### The school's Christian vision

*Direct my footsteps according to your word  
Psalm 119:133*

#### Key findings

- A strong Christian ethos of inclusion, acceptance and supportive collaboration at all levels, with high expectations and aspirations, has enabled transformation in the lives of pupils and their families, especially the vulnerable, so all flourish.
- Bold decisions result in true generosity of spirit and service allowing a wider sharing of effective practice, enabling other schools to flourish.
- The reciprocal partnership with the Church and the wider community enables a rich awareness of diverse and different needs which engenders respect and understanding. Since the previous denominational inspection, prayer and reflection is now integral to pupils' ongoing spiritual journeys.
- The commitment to be active agents of change for good is making a difference in pupils' lives.
- Pupils are eloquent advocates of the Christian story from the youngest to the oldest pupils. This is particularly evident in collective worship and their respect for one another, strengthening the links between worship, Christian belief, teaching and action.

#### Areas for development

- Deepen the pupils' understanding of the biblical narrative that underpins the twelve core values so they can tell the story of their school's ongoing Christian journey.
- Embed the religious education (RE) curriculum to give staff more confidence in developing the school's chosen new approach to teaching and learning in RE. Alongside this, enable pupils to meet people of diverse faiths and beliefs more frequently to nurture their spiritual and cultural development.

## **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**

'Our vision of following in God's footsteps helps us to enable and direct the children to do their best in every aspect of their lives.' This comment from a member of staff sums up well how the deeply embedded vision of St Mary The Virgin (SMTV) is enabling all to flourish. Adults in this supportive Christian community embrace this strong vision as it 'enables us to join together on a journey. No one is left behind, if they need help-we are all there.' Indeed, everybody makes an impression by their footsteps. It is like a prayer to God for guidance to live their lives on the right pathway of pilgrimage and discipleship. The desire to serve others is not confined to SMTV. This school supports other schools in the trust and beyond diocesan boundaries. It successfully develops leaders at all levels. SMTV employs courage, one of its dearly cherished Christian values, when making bold curriculum decisions. Leaders firmly believe in God's direction enabling the whole community to live and breathe the school's vision. This helps everyone to have a shared understanding of spiritual development and growth. Whilst the vision is well established, the large number of values which are very much part of the school, cannot always be traced back to biblical teaching. Pupils speak of their values which are boldly displayed in the hall and remind everybody 'to show them today'. SMTV's pupils and adults, including parents, can name some Bible stories which demonstrate key values, such as friendship or forgiveness. However, they are not always sure where they can be found. They readily explain *koinonia* as community even if they are unable to root this in Jesus' teaching. Leaders have a robust system of monitoring church school distinctiveness in place, with floor books capturing the learning journey for all subjects. Each has its own subject champion.

SMTV's motto that, 'Everything is possible, just believe' is also at the heart of this inclusive and accepting school. Pupils, especially the most vulnerable, are given hope and confidence to achieve. With the mantra of 'keep up, not catch up!' all pupils can have aspirations to succeed from their starting points. Indeed, there are many success stories where pupils have flourished because of the exceptional long term emotional support for families. Skilled and specialist staff have brought about transformation and changed lives in challenging circumstances. All staff believe in knowing the right path and changing the path for individual pupils according to their needs. Some pupils have won success in sport or music, showing how all areas of the curriculum contribute to spiritual and personal development. Academic results across the school demonstrate all pupils, including those who are vulnerable, make good progress and achieve very well.

Pupils at SMTV enjoy a variety of roles and responsibilities. These include the school council, where the school values are always at the forefront of discussions. In addition, some pupils are sports ambassadors or peer mentors, making a valuable contribution to school life. Pupils are good advocates for change and actively support a large number of charities, such as the local foodbank and a Down's Syndrome awareness day. Pupils explain that, 'God wants us to have hope and never give up.' They have 'huge compassion' and sponsor a boy in Indonesia to 'help him have a better life'.

Each new day begins afresh at SMTV. The clear behaviour policy, alongside the commitment to mental health and emotional wellbeing, serves pupils and their families well. One of the innovative ways in which the school works with the Church and the local community is through 'Memory Box'. These are monthly meetings when pupils meet with those living with memory loss, which is valued by adults and pupils alike. Another extension of the Church in the local community is the establishment of a community café in school for any who might be feeling isolated. This place of refuge and friendship is praised by attendees. This is because SMTV is very much a place which lives out its vision and embraces difference and individuality.

Pop up prayer spaces and stay and pray spaces are well used throughout the school, showing how the school has moved on since the last inspection. Prayer and reflection are now integral to school life, with pupils' reflection journals capturing key Bible verses and how pupils link Bible passages to everyday life. For example, pupils reflect deeply on the value of trust, likening themselves to stones which can be 'slowly polished until they are all smooth'. Pupils value the time to delve deeper in class and have 'bigger discussions'. This might focus on big questions, such as, 'Is there such a thing as an angel?' In addition, worship leaders, such as the local 'Open the Book' team, help everyone to look at the Bible to help direct their paths. Stories such as Nehemiah focus on second chances. Inspiring and invitational worship is a true expression of the school's vision and values. The pupil faith committee is active in planning, leading and evaluating worship alongside adults, showing the importance of

learning together. The strong focus on the Trinity is very evident in SMTV's gathering song, which welcomes God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in each verse. Some pupils explain the Holy Spirit in the light of the vision as, 'directing your footsteps to God as he wants you to do'.

Clergy are very involved in the life of SMTV, supporting RE teaching, resulting in some Year 5 and 6 pupils being confirmed. RE is well led and resourced, with pupils given time to critically reflect within safe spaces and staff well supported. Deep thinking takes place in RE lessons, especially by the time pupils reach Year 6, where they discuss jihad and how decisions have consequences on others. Pupils across the school can readily articulate the Christian story, with great detail given to the death and resurrection of Jesus, Ascension and Pentecost. Pupils receive their full entitlement in RE and learn about different beliefs, as one might expect in a Church school. Meeting people of diverse faith and belief more frequently is currently limited.



**The effectiveness of RE is Good**

Monitoring and assessment of RE is accurate, with moderation enabling all staff to grow in confidence in SMTV's chosen new approach to teaching RE. All pupils are making good progress. Standards in RE are in line with other core subjects. This means all groups of pupils are flourishing academically in RE, including any vulnerable pupils who are also doing well. Embedding the new RE curriculum and updating assessment in RE in the light of this are ongoing.

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