



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Charminster St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School

West Hill
Charminster
Dorchester
DT2 9RD

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: Dorset
Dates of inspection: 19th March 2014
Date of last inspection: 23rd March 2009
School's unique reference number: 113784
Headteacher: Mr Ian Donnelly
Inspector's name and number: Linda Windsor (747)

School context

Charminster St Mary's CE (VC) is a 4 -9 first school located in a village just outside of the county town of Dorchester. There are 207 pupils on roll in seven classes, of which six are mixed age. The school serves a wide, mainly rural and White British community. 42 pupils (20%) have Special Educational Needs and 19 (9%) pupils are registered for the Pupil Premium.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Charminster St Mary's Voluntary Controlled First School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The commitment and vision of the headteacher, supported by staff and governors, in developing the school's Christian character resulting in a hugely caring, inclusive family ethos
- Excellent relationships between all members of the school community
- Each child is valued and their uniqueness is celebrated, encouraging them to be confident, thoughtful and resilient learners

Areas to improve

- Develop quiet areas both indoors and outside the school to enable pupils to reflect, think and pray
- Pupil awareness and understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit

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

At St Mary's, the Christian ethos strongly influences all aspects of school life, resulting in excellent progress by all learners, above average academic results, outstanding relationships and respect for all, including those of other cultures and faiths. With a deeply nurturing environment, all are valued and, indeed, celebrated for their uniqueness. Behaviour is

exemplary and pupils are able to articulate instances where themes from collective worship are reflected on and influence friendship and forgiveness across the school. Pupils also demonstrated generosity of spirit, joyfulness in each other and an understanding of responsibilities, especially seen among Year 4 pupils. Staff, whose gentle kindness and care for each other and all in school, was clear and natural, superbly model relationships. Although prayer and reflection are clearly valued by the school, currently there are no quiet or 'sacred spaces. In this busy school, quiet space is at a premium but is needed by pupils. One Year 4 pupil spoke of needing a place "to clear my head sometimes", another of wanting time to "think when things are going wrong". RE is seen as an important part of the school's curriculum and often helps to build on the school's values. Good planning ensures RE reinforces the school's Christian ethos, supports all aspects of social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and makes good links to other subjects, especially art, music, drama and literacy. Regular assessment informs future planning and ensures the quality of provision. The school supports a number of charities, often chosen by pupils via the School Council. Pupils spoke of their support of a school in India, their commitment to raising money for Sports Relief and described how this helps their awareness of the wider world and of their part in becoming responsible citizens. Parents noted the 'open door' to the school and spoke of how welcome they are made to feel. They also spoke of the inclusivity of the school, welcoming all, whether of Christian faith, other or of no faith. Parents appreciate links with the church and clergy, one parent saying, "Children know how to behave in church as they are used to it. They know the clergy well and are comfortable with them."

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship holds a central place in the school day and the daily 'gathering together' enhances the strongly Christian life of the school. A well-planned programme for collective worship has a sharp focus on Christian festivals and beliefs with well-chosen themes that encourage reflection and prayer. Pupils are able to articulate fluently how collective worship impacts on their daily life in school, relating aspects of their behaviour that are influenced - forgiveness, compassion, respect and love. Aspects of the Anglican tradition are an integral part of worship with a greeting to mark the commencement, a candle to signify prayer and reflection and a blessing to conclude. Pupils are beginning to develop a better awareness of the Trinity though the school is clear that further input is needed. Singing is an important aspect of worship and is both joyous and uplifting. Pupil evaluations, on a half-termly basis, often request more singing! The worship observed, based on Songs and Praise, was simple but engaging and thoughtful, linked to the current theme of 'Prayer'. Pupils sit in mixed ages, which result in a delightful 'family' atmosphere. Local clergy and other visitors regularly contribute to collective worship, leading themed worship on a weekly basis. Prayer is a major focus and pupils are encouraged to choose prayers, to write their own or to sit quietly thinking prayers. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about ways they participation in worship. Additionally, each class leads worship twice yearly combining a celebration of work with aspects of worship to which parents are invited. The local church is used extensively both as a resource and for services. Pupils particularly enjoy the opportunities to participate in workshops, run by the clergy and congregation, centred on the major Christian festivals of Harvest and Easter. A regular programme for review and evaluation ensures future planning takes account of the needs of pupils, an example being when pupils asked to learn more about prayer - now a theme within collective worship and the subject of an RE day last year.

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

The committed leadership of the headteacher, along with the strong support of the leadership team and governors, ensure that the deeply rooted Christian values of the school are upheld and are lived in the daily life of the school. Regular discussion and evaluation of the school as a church school leads to development and improvement e.g. the work undertaken by all

stakeholders to revive and refresh the mission statement. This process involved a home task for parents and pupils, collated by staff who added their thoughts, followed by foundation governors input before the redrafted statement was ratified by the full governing body. There is also a strong focus on progress and achievement along with a drive to ensure the needs of all pupils are met and it is clear that there is no room for complacency. The school is committed to continuous improvement in all aspects of school life and carefully selected professional development meets the needs of the school and the staff, enhancing their career development. RE is valued as a key aspect of the school curriculum with strong links to the school ethos and in daily life, impacting positively on relationships, behaviour and learning. The new RE coordinator was able to access training and development offered by the diocese, as well as receiving in-house support. The school has excellent support structures that enable all to access professional development, as needed, both to enhance their knowledge and understanding and to further their careers. There are strong community links with the local churches and clergy including those of other Christian denominations. Foundation governors play an active part in school evaluation, their feedback to full governing body enhancing governor understanding of the effectiveness of the school as a church school and, where appropriate, influencing the School Improvement Plan. The school meets all statutory requirements for RE and collective worship. All previously identified issues have been addressed.

SIAMS report March 2014 Charminster St Mary's (VC) First School, Charminster DT2 9RD