



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Mary's Church of England Middle School

Coombe Road
Puddletown
Dorchester DT2 8SA

Previous SIAS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: N/A

Date of inspection: 15 June 2015

Date of last inspection: February 2010

School's unique reference number: 138189

Acting headteacher: Michael Hilborne

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field 151

School context

St Mary's is an average sized middle school. It is part of the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership (DASP) and converted to academy status in June 2012. In April 2015, it also became part of the Greenwood Tree Academy Trust along with four of its feeder first schools. Almost all pupils are white British. The proportion supported by pupil premium funding is lower than average as is the proportion with special educational needs. The headteacher moved to another post in April 2015 and the deputy headteacher has taken responsibility for the current term.

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

- The Christian values selected as the basis of the school's vision provide clear direction for the whole curriculum and wellbeing of pupils and staff.
- The school makes excellent use of diocesan training and support. This has a direct impact on current leadership, improvement as a church school, and on pupils' learning and personal development.
- RE is exceptionally well led and makes a significant contribution to the Christian character and to how well pupils understand and apply the school's core Christian values.
- Partnerships with the church, the diocese and networks of schools are all of mutual benefit.
- A range of styles and settings for worship meets the spiritual needs of adults and pupils from all faith backgrounds.

Areas to improve

- To develop a structure whereby the strategic planning of the school's Christian character is shared more widely so that it has a place in the responsibility of all leaders and governors
- To develop partnerships where students can apply their very positive attitudes to diversity and difference in society by engaging directly with communities from other faiths and cultures
- To improve consistency in the quality of teaching of religious education so that more students reach the higher levels

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

The school's core Christian values are understood to be distinctively Christian in addition to being shared human values, and have made a deep impression on pupils by the time they leave in Year 8. The core values of respect, forgiveness, justice, uniqueness, equality and acceptance are completely in line with the school's overarching vision for education. Pupils know what these values are and believe they work. Consequently, they form strong relationships and the confidence to challenge any form of unfairness they encounter. Pupils have a mature understanding of Bible stories and so fully appreciate why Christian values are relevant to issues around diversity and difference in modern society. Units of work in RE have helped them explore the connections between Sikhism and equality, and between Refugees and acceptance. By Year 8, pupils argue the biblical case for justice and uniqueness with conviction but lack the opportunities to check these out with pupils from other cultures. This is something the incoming RE leader has prioritised for action. Nevertheless, pupils rate RE highly as a subject to be studied and it clearly raises the quality of their spiritual, moral and social thinking. The school's Christian values act as the cornerstone of the school's approach to academic and personal development because teachers and pastoral staff constantly refer to them in setting expectations for learning, relationships and behaviour. Each value comes into play when any occasional incidents of bullying occur and when the principles of restorative justice are used to resolve tensions. Behaviour for learning is of a high standard and improvements in attendance have been maintained. Achievement in the core subjects is now above national averages at the end of Year 6 and progress continues to improve in key Stage 3. Pupils for whom there is funding for extra support do well, often as well as other pupils, through the Achievement for All initiative. It shows the impact of pastoral care that is rooted in Christian values and delivered by staff who understand the connection between spiritual wellbeing and academic achievement.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

A wide range of activities under the umbrella of worship enables all pupils and staff, whatever their faith position, to engage with religious belief and gain spiritual benefit. When the school 'collects' together for worship, there is a real sense of inclusion and of it being a church school for all. Worship has a high profile in the school day and no-one misses out because of other activities. All staff attend worship. They value the time to regularly revisit the school's Christian values and bring them to the forefront of the day. Pupils equally value this time for the tone it sets and the relevance of themes to their own experiences. Whole school worship is distinctively Christian with clear biblical teaching. Pupils have a secure knowledge of the life of Jesus and how this is celebrated in a series of Christian festivals. They are familiar with the religious language and symbols used and talk confidently about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In addition to a strong emphasis on prayer, there are two particular features of worship at St Mary's that mark it out from other schools. The voluntary monthly communion services are very popular, with nearly 100 pupils attending on a regular basis. This is an important part of the partnership with local churches as it offers a network for pupils who come from very small church congregations. Worship, therefore, has a wider impact on the community. The second feature is that on one day a week time is allocated for all pupils to complete reflective worship diaries. These are well established and taken seriously, so over time pupils develop maturity in expressing their views in response to visual stimuli and question prompts. The oldest pupils are discovering that, after four years, the material is not always sufficiently challenging and the school has the satisfying task of having to refine the resources. Pupils have an increasing role in worship and feedback is regularly sought from them and used to make changes. Senior staff, chaplains and clergy share the leadership of worship but the responsibility for planning and evaluation lies heavily with the collective worship leader and the vicar. As in other areas of Christian leadership, there is movement towards a more shared approach and a worship group is being formed to reflect the wider commitment of pupils and leaders to worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The subject leader provides clear direction and support for the large team of non-specialists who teach RE. Pupils arrive with very varied experiences of RE and, in spite of some inconsistency, good teaching ensures their progress speeds up as they move through the school. Data for Year 8 shows attainment for the majority of pupils is in line with expectations and some reach the higher levels, an improvement on previous results. This is due to the enthusiasm of the subject leader and her clear vision for what the subject contributes to the school's Christian character and to how it prepares pupils for life in modern society. This is completely in line with the school's overall vision and, together with persistent monitoring of teaching and learning, it drives any changes to the curriculum for RE. New units on Refugees and Muslim women have captured pupils' interest and raised their perception of the subject as highly relevant to their lives. Consequently, it plays a key part in pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

The detail of planning and resources produced by the subject leader help teachers to focus pupils' thinking on moral and ethical issues. Systems for assessment increasingly provide a clear picture of pupils' progress over time but, within lessons, teachers are sometimes too slow to respond to what they observe about pupils' learning. However, improvements to teaching in the school as a whole, such as the 'green pen' strategy, are being equally applied to RE. Pupils are taking more ownership of their learning by working collaboratively on imaginative tasks that draw on a wide range of their skills and interests leaving them less dependent on teacher instruction. Regular training through DASP and with diocesan RE advisers has been instrumental in maintaining the pace of improvement and keeping the school up to date with national changes in RE. It means there is continuity of vision and expectations as a new RE leader takes over in September and good arrangements for the handover are in place.

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

St Mary's has an explicitly Christian mission statement and a set of Christian values that drive its work. Senior leaders explain confidently that 'the church ethos is not only relevant but imperative to create the best possible adults from the children' and so the vision successfully translates into policy and practice. They believe that academic skills must be underpinned by others such as interaction, obligation to others and moral stature in order for students 'to be givers' in modern society. Consequently, decisions about the whole curriculum are informed by the Christian vision. RE and collective worship are given a high priority by the senior leadership team and governors. It is crystal clear in the access to professional training, expectations for attendance at worship and the allocation of responsibilities at a senior level. Leadership is, therefore, excellent and has a direct impact on the spiritual and moral development of pupils. However, the acting headteacher has wisely recognised that too much responsibility for the implementation of the Christian vision is invested in one person. Although she is exceptionally effective and has kept the Christian ethos at the forefront of the school's thinking, this is not creating a broad enough base for future Christian leadership in the school. From September, this will be distributed more widely with the addition of a worship group and the handover is already underway. Governors are equally perceptive about the strengths and weaknesses of the school and know that, as the Academy Trust becomes established, tighter cohesion is needed in systems for self-evaluation as leadership expands. The use the school makes of diocesan and national training is excellent and better than is usually seen. This is because leaders reflect on what is relevant to the school and take prompt action to put improvements in place. In recent months, for example, self-evaluation has become more insightful and the new units for RE are already in place. Partnerships with the church, DASP and mini pyramids emerging through the Academy Trust are all of mutual benefit. The high quality of transition work with feeder first schools, led by staff and pupils, ensures that new Year 5 pupils are extremely well prepared and understand how prayer and worship are part of daily life at St Mary's.