



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Mary's Voluntary Controlled CE Infant School

Church Green  
Witney  
OX28 4AZ

**Previous SIAMS grade:** Good

**Current inspection grade:** Good

**Diocese:**

Local authority: Oxfordshire

Dates of inspection: 10 June 2015

Date of last inspection: 16 June 2010

School's unique reference number: 123137

Headteacher: Sally Clarke

Inspector's name and number: Lesley Turville 732

#### School context

St Mary's is a small infant school serving the town of Witney. Almost all pupils are from a white British background and the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those supported by pupil premium are below that found nationally. The school is part of the Witney partnership of schools. Since the previous inspection there have been significant changes in the buildings, staffing and the governing body. The school is currently, in the process of appointing a new headteacher for September 2015.

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

- The close working relationship with the church of St Mary's has been instrumental in the development of collective worship and the Christian character of the school.
- The importance placed on collective worship and prayer within the school has developed pupils who are very spiritually and morally aware and who treat each other with care and respect.
- The Christian care and nurture shown to all pupils through carefully targeted support enables pupils to flourish and achieve their potential.
- The new governing body is rigorously and creatively following up all options available to it to secure the future of the school as a church school.

#### Areas to improve

- Embed the core Christian values by clarifying the relationship between them, the Happy Rules and the social and emotional literacy programme (SEAL) used by the school in order to secure the Christian character of the school and its articulation by all stakeholders.
- Develop global learning opportunities in the curriculum to enhance pupils' understanding of and respect for cultural diversity.

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

The way the school supports pupils and staff reflects the Christian principle of 'learning to love' to which it is committed. This principle is visually and verbally expressed through the four core values of compassion, trust, perseverance and friendship. Together with the long established Happy Rules and the SEAL materials these values shape the good relationships between all members of the school community and are understood as Christian through links to Biblical stories. Pupils enjoy coming to school so attendance and behaviour are good. They, and their parents, feel their individual needs are listened to and met. The Christian commitment to meeting the needs of every individual learner is seen in the targeted support given to groups of pupils and the 'Hideout' which provides a safe space for one-to-one or small group social skills work. Pupils flourish because staff know them well and they feel valued and safe within this small Christian community. One parent shared with staff how her child had talked about perseverance whilst doing her homework demonstrating how the values impact the children and their learning. All this results in achievement by the end of Year 2 which is consistently above national expectations. Christian principles in action are also seen in the celebration system that rewards pupils' achievement and their exemplification of the school values by giving pupils opportunities to serve in special roles in the school community in the following week. The interesting, broad curriculum offered at the school supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of the pupils. A good example of this is the 'skills swap' sessions between pupils and residents of Newlands House care homes. Pupils learn skills such as flower arranging from the residents and in return they teach information technology skills. Religious Education (RE) is taught through termly topics built around enquiry based learning which encourages pupils to ask 'big questions'. They enjoy the opportunity to learn about other faiths and are willing and able to express their thoughts and listen to the opinions of others showing respect. The school has identified the need to develop further its global awareness programme.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

Collective worship and the strong relationship that exists with the local church are central to the school day and central to the school's articulation of its core values as Christian being rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus. Worship is a valued time of the day for everyone in the school community and makes a strong contribution to the spiritual development of pupils. A particular strength of the school is the involvement of the pupils in leading prayer. Different prayer leaders are chosen from each class each week to pray at the end of acts of worship. They do so confidently after a short period of sharing ideas with adults present in the room. This means that pupils feel that prayer is something that they can use in their daily lives rather than something they listen to. This is further seen in the pupils' use of prayer stools in the classrooms, a prayer tree in the hall and the new prayer bench on the playground. Children speak enthusiastically about their use of these and explain what they pray for. This includes people in other parts of the world suffering after an earthquake. This shows a growing awareness of the needs of others and finds expression in fund raising activities for charities like 'Cecily's Fund' which provides education for children in Africa. Frequent use of the church for special services and a strong liturgical structure to worship which includes the use of set greetings and practices roots worship within Anglican traditions. An example of this is the lighting of the three wick candle accompanied by the spoken words 'God the father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit'. This helps the children to have a good age appropriate understanding of the Trinity. A group of pupils explain that the Holy Spirit was sent to 'help once Jesus had left' and 'to remind us that Jesus is always with us'. Worship is carefully planned by a small group which includes governors and clergy. Themes introduced in whole school worship are followed up in the classroom. This ensures that children are aware of the main seasons and festivals of the church year and can explore themes in an age appropriate way. The same group evaluates worship through conversations with pupils and ensures that this changes practice and feeds into school development planning. An example of this is the development of the role of 'helper' who sets up and helps the leader each day for a week. This ensures children

feel that they have ownership of worship. Another example is moving worship to first thing in the morning which provides 'a special time at the beginning of the day' and means it has more importance. Parents appreciate opportunities to attend frequent special services in the church and feel that this is an important aspect of the school's character. Governors recognise that monitoring needs to be organised more formally and include all forms of worship, staff and parents.

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

Leaders at all levels have a clear understanding of the school as a church school and talk about the Christian values that underpin its ethos. This vision is clearly promoted through the website and displays within the school. However pupils sometimes confuse the newer values with the more established Happy Rules because the two systems have been insufficiently linked together so far. The character of the school is most clearly evidenced in the excellent behaviour of the children and the love and care for one another demonstrated by the whole school community. Collective worship themes are shared with lunchtime supervisors so that messages given in worship can be followed up on the playground and rewarded. Parents value the individual care given to their children and the family feel of the school. There is a very strong, mutually beneficial relationship with the local church which maintains a highly visible and pastoral presence. A good example of this is the 'listening ear' initiative where the church's pastoral assistant greets parents every Monday morning at the school entrance. Many governors are new in post but show a commitment to ensuring that the character of the school is maintained during this period of transition. They have been creative and diligent in their exploration of different solutions to the appointment of a new headteacher for September and the creation of new partnership working models for the future. They regularly evaluate the impact of the ethos on SMSC development and standards through the Raising Attainment Plan, observations and informal conversations with staff and pupils. Staff and parents speak highly of the careful and extensive reworking of the school building which has greatly improved the working environment for all. Leadership potential is identified and nurtured through professional development of staff ensuring good teaching and learning and leadership in RE. The RE coordinator has worked successfully with the diocese to implement a new, more challenging, scheme of work throughout the school and the headteacher works closely with the Witney partnership. All areas for development from the last inspection have been met. The school is situated on the church green which gives it a village feel although it is in the centre of Witney. It takes advantage of this by using the green for school events to which all in the area are invited ensuring that St Mary's is seen as an important part of this community.

SIAMS report June 2015 St Mary's CE Infant school, Witney OX28 4AZ