

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England Controlled Infant School			
Address	Church Green, Witney, Oxford OX28 4AZ		
Date of inspection	11 March 2020	Status of school	Academy inspected as VC Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST)
Diocese	Oxford	URN	142508

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Excellent
Additional Judgement	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Excellent

School context

St Mary's is an infant school with 88 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Many pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages. The headteacher has been in post for 3 years. Since the last inspection the school has joined the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust.

The school's Christian vision Together we love to learn and learn to love

St Mary's Infant School is committed to inspiring every individual. We embed the Christian value of love across school life because we believe that a person who feels loved, secure and happy can flourish. We encourage everyone to achieve their potential, develop their talents, celebrate their uniqueness and rejoice in their relationships with others. *'Do Everything in Love' 1 Corinthians 16:14*

Key findings

- The deeply embedded Christian vision of the school drives every aspect of school life. The school is exceptional in enabling pupils and adults to flourish so that they are able to 'achieve their potential and develop their talents'. Highly positive relationships are a driving force in school, built on the school's value of love. In this way pupils and their families are 'celebrated for their uniqueness and rejoice in their relationships with others'.
- The passion and dedication of the headteacher flows into every decision and interaction within school. She has set the bar high for all staff and they have responded so that they too, knowing they are valued and loved, live out the vision every day in every way.
- Governors monitor the school's distinctive Christian character rigorously so that it truly leads to transformational change within the school community and beyond.
- Collective worship has been made highly relevant to these very young children. Set within a variety of Christian themes, the practical outworking of what it means to love is central to worship.
- Religious education (RE) is well-led and the school has developed a curriculum that is inspiring pupils to think deeply and to critically reflect on how their learning helps them to live out the school's Christian vision.

Areas for development

- Deepen the school's understanding of spirituality so that staff feel confident to plan ways in which the pupils can grow spiritually across the curriculum.
- Begin to share the school's excellent practice in RE with other schools so that others may be inspired to expect more from their youngest children.

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

St Mary's is a school that inspires everyone who walks through their doors. This is because it is clear in its purpose and this is reflected in its Christian vision, which is simply focused on love. Staff capitalise on their knowledge of each and every child so that they flourish in every way. The headteacher has appreciated the potential of working with such young children and has exploited this in every aspect of the school's work. Recognising that relationships are at the heart of St Mary's, she is relentless in ensuring that pupils, staff, families and governors feel loved and valued. In this way the whole school community rejoices in these relationships so that pupils and adults flourish exceptionally well. Even the youngest pupils understand that they must show love to others because 'God loves us'.

Love is the prism through which every decision is made and this is clearly seen in school development plans and policies. Governors are rigorous in holding leaders to account because they know the school well. They too share the vision that every child will achieve their potential. Proactive in seeking the views of all stakeholders, they have taken courageous decisions to enable the school to deliver its vision. For example, governors have made resources available for an emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) to work within the school. Consequently, pupils who need additional emotional support have a ready friend to encourage them when they struggle. Parents place a high value on this, recognising how it has given their children confidence so that they achieve their potential.

Pupils make very good progress whilst at St Mary's. Staff are determined to offer pupils the very best of experiences so that they are able to develop their talents. More able pupils are constantly challenged in a safe, loving atmosphere to 'be their best'. Vulnerable pupils are identified early and the school is relentless in securing the funds and support that they need so that they too reach their potential. Pupils move on to their next school well-placed to flourish in their new setting.

The school holds pupils' spiritual development close to its heart. Determined that pupils will feel happy, secure and loved, it creates special moments for all. It is beginning to map these experiences across the curriculum by considering how pupils 'experience, reflect and grow'. This formal planning is not yet embedded and staff identified this as an area for development. Recognising that the Year 2 pupils might be ready for more than forest school, they have developed 'Adventure Plus'. In these sessions, pupils explore a variety of activities in the context of the school's current Christian theme. Fencing, biking and archery develop teamwork and leadership skills whilst at the same time providing times that contribute to pupils' spiritual journey.

Families are not only valued at St Mary's but loved unequivocally. Seen as important partners in the life of pupils, their wellbeing is paramount. The whole team is highly effective in working alongside those that struggle so that lives are transformed, and pupils feel secure. Pupils' mental health is of the highest importance and the work of the ELSA and special needs leader is simply seen as 'doing what is right for our children'. Governors take the mental health of staff very seriously. They undertake regular surveys and make changes where needed. Staff give many examples of how the school is helping them to flourish professionally and personally.

Partnerships are highly valued within St Mary's. Close links with the church sees regular visits there and the school supports one of its charities, Besom. This reflects the school's vision to love others, as it supports local families facing hardship. The clergy are a valued source of pastoral support for all stakeholders. Fellow schools within the ODST are supported generously so that they too may benefit from the early years' expertise within St Mary's.

Behaviour is exemplary. This is because pupils know that they are loved and there are clear pathways within school to help those that struggle. 'Repair' sheets help structure conversations with pupils as they seek forgiveness and reconciliation. They are tolerant of each other, understanding that 'some people's brains work differently'. Fundamental to the school's behaviour policy is love and how together we can all help each other.

St Mary's celebrates difference and, understanding its context, is determined to offer pupils a wide range of experiences in and out of school. New books in the library have been chosen to reflect the world today with all its difference and diversity. Carefully chosen themes across the curriculum are helping pupils to ask questions and to want to make a difference. A board in the hall celebrates the families who have connections in other parts of the world. Making up around a third of families, the school is proactive in making them feel loved and wanted. Parents who don't speak English are buddied up with another family so that they and their children settle into school life quickly.

Collective worship is pivotal to the Christian vision. Recognising that these young pupils might find it a challenge to plan and lead worship they have devised other ways to include them. The worship committee meets weekly to evaluate worship and to decide who to award certificates to. These are given to anyone seen to demonstrate the collective worship theme within the community. Weekly love certificates and hearts are awarded to those who have notably lived the school's vision. They are cherished by all. Worship is inspirational, centred on love. Half termly themes, such as courage and forgiveness, are used to set the outworking of love within a Christian context. Bible stories are highly effective in helping pupils to understand difficult concepts. At the end of worship pupils are invited to lead prayer. This they do with confidence and reverence, showing how the worship time has touched their hearts. 'Help us to be a forgiving school' prayed a Reception pupil. Prayer is important within school and pupils show an impressive understanding of its purpose and power.

RE is highly effective in enabling pupils to show dignity and respect to all. Even though pupils are very young, teachers expect pupils to think deeply about some tricky questions. Pupils relish debate, seeing it as a 'good' argument. Visits and visitors are opening pupils' eyes to the world further afield. The use of 'Big Books' is very successful in recording how pupils understanding and thinking develops through a topic. The RE curriculum is inspirational in the way that it promotes the critical thinking of these young people as they grow in knowledge and understanding. This is practice well worth sharing.

St Mary's is a little school with a big personality. Leaders have created a sanctuary of high expectation for all that is centred on its Christian vision. This is underpinned every day by an expectation that everyone will 'do everything in love'. In this way pupils and adults flourish exceptionally well.

Headteacher	Sarah Grier
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