



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 Academy

Trinity Avenue
Mildenhall
Suffolk
IP28 7LR

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

Local authority: N/A

Date of inspection: 11 March 2015

Date of last inspection: June 2010

School's unique reference number: 124766

Principal: Colin Haley

Inspector's name and number: Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

St Mary's became an academy in September 2011. It serves the market town of Mildenhall and the local USAF airbase. The school became a straight through primary from September 2012 and there are now 415 pupils on roll. The majority of these children are from a White British background. 10% of families receive support from the Child and Family team. The headteacher has been in post since September 2014.

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

- This nurturing and inclusive family Christian community is rooted in Christian values and supportive of all, regardless of faith background.
- Strong leadership and good governance ensure the Christian character of the academy permeates all academy life.
- Mutual and substantial links between academy, church and village communities are valued by all, whether or not they belong to the local Christian community.

Areas to improve

- Enhance pupils' experience of Christianity as a worldwide faith and their encounter with people of other faith to support their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development [SMSC].

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

St Mary's sustains an excellent and inspirational learning environment for the pupils and the families it serves. It lives out its mission as a Christian school to inspire value, learn and celebrate together. This is because the Christian values which lie at the heart of this inclusive, family community are deeply

embedded in its ethos, curriculum and worship. There have been no recent exclusions and attendance is good and improving. This is because the school takes a Christian approach in working with each of their families to support them, embodying love, respect and service. Excellent examples include the valuable contribution of the Family Support Worker who goes the extra mile to support the children and their families. This includes a practical parenting course. Parents say, 'the support network in this school is really amazing. Children have blossomed and grown because of the support. If you are a single parent, you get great support'. As a result, pupils achieve well, with progress and attainment by the end of Key Stage I above national average. Good role models and mentoring are provided for every teacher and teaching assistant to ensure understanding, support and confidence. Very good examples include stable staff working across all year groups, including the Year 4 cohort. Consequently, there has been good progress in Key Stage 2 over the last few years, with importance placed on the children being happy, working hard and engaged in their learning. This reflects the principles of a Christian community, working together to achieve the highest possible standards. Relationships are excellent, with all members of this growing community continually and consistently demonstrating the school's Christian values. Pupils feel able to make a positive contribution through their fundraising activities, demonstrating generosity and service, which also enhances their global awareness. Pupils show respect for the community they belong to and develop their understanding and awareness of diverse communities through their religious education [RE] curriculum. This enriches their SMSC development. Vibrant displays throughout the school include contributions from the nurture club and help proclaim the school's Christian character for the whole community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Engaging collective worship is an important facet of daily life at St Mary's where child-led worship is celebrated. Pupils and adults alike, including parents, derive meaningful principles for life from the worship offered. Such worship involves them and enables them to reflect on Christian values, such as courage. Parents articulate this value as 'feeling able to push boundaries, feeling proud and able to grow in self-esteem and encouraged to take on another challenge'. The Anglican church year is carefully followed, with the pupil-led collective worship team helping to interpret and support the chosen value for each half term. Excellent examples include last year's summer term Holy Communion service, with its focus on the Christian value of thanksgiving. This was led by the pupil collective worship team and supported by the clergy. This service culminated outside by a tree, prompting pupils to desire and obtain more outdoor worship. St Mary's enjoys a wide variety of worship leaders, who are welcome and regular visitors. These include the local 'Open the Book' team, the vicar as well as the Chair of Trustees who children say 'teaches us about the church and Jesus'. Pupils say they especially enjoy going to church to worship. Prayer features strongly at St Mary's with prayers at the end of worship linked to the current value. Pupils say, 'we pray every day when we come in and go out'. They say they would welcome a prayer garden in the quiet garden. They relate the teaching on Christian values they receive to Jesus' teaching and their daily lives. Very good examples include pupils speaking highly of love as 'being close to your family and enemies as we are all still one family'. They continue, 'Peter had the courage to walk out, not be afraid and believe in Jesus' and 'we need courage to tell the truth'. The school's main prayer space encourages private prayer and reflection. It also enables pupils to show how they are growing in their understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God with their response to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They speak of God as creator, looking after everyone in his world. Jesus and God show me the straight path. Jesus leads us through light and dark. He went back to heaven and sent his Holy Spirit down. The Holy Spirit gives his disciples courage to speak out in different languages'. They continue, 'the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus', speaking of her courage. Robust and thorough evaluation of worship, involving pupils, staff and governors is carried out regularly. Year groups as well as individuals take responsibility for contributing their reflections, which are then shared with the governing body. In addition, the collective worship team celebrate 'one good thing' daily about worship and take initiatives, such as interviewing pupils after worship who like 'the new blessing' or say 'the songs are amazing'. Consequently, this provides on-going feedback to staff and governors. In all these ways, worship is consistently and constantly improving in quality and integrity, nurturing pupils' and adults' spiritual journeys.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE enjoys a high profile at St Mary's and is very well led, managed and resourced. The RE subject leader is passionate about RE and has helped all staff to assess this important subject. At St Mary's RE is not kept in a box, but leads the way. This key subject is known as Beliefs and Values which 'proclaims who we are and underpins all the curriculum'. Consequently, pupils show very good religious literacy and are able to relate the Christian narrative very well. As a result of consistently good teaching and learning, every lesson enables them to ask and answer key questions, following the enquiry model. Year 2 pupils are encouraged to think about things differently when studying creation whilst Year 6 pupils explore what religions teach about death. Excellent examples include, 'Do you have to believe in God to believe in heaven?' and 'I wonder how Jesus felt when he died'. They speak with great knowledge and respect of the Hindu Trimurti as well as talking about the key Islamic belief of prophet hood. Importantly, pupils know how to progress in their work as they are actively involved in self-assessment of their RE work, which is well established. By the end of their time at St Mary's many pupils achieve above age expected levels. Excellent examples include one Year 6 pupil aspires to 'getting a Level 6 when I leave'. Pupils are able to make meaningful links, using the enquiry approach, explaining what and why they believe. RE is marked, monitored and evaluated as a core subject. However, the school recognises the importance of nurturing pupils' experience of Christianity as a worldwide faith through its diocesan link with Kagera. Pupils value the rich activities they experience on Africa days, such as singing in Swahili, but say they would 'like to learn more about Kagera'. The school also acknowledges that the children would welcome meeting people of faiths other than Christianity in their school as well as in their differing places of worship. The latter already happens. This ensures pupils' SMSC development is enriched.

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

St Mary's Christian foundation is effectively promoted and proclaimed by the whole community. Strong shared leadership has continued with the new principal. There is an excellent partnership with the parish church. Such mutually supportive and substantial links between church, school and town ensure the academy's Anglican foundation is celebrated and secured. The trustees are both supportive and challenging, especially through the Ethos and Mission steering group, to ensure high standards for achievement and well-being are maintained. All are committed to monitoring the performance of the academy and embedding this within the school's distinctive Christian character. The standards and curriculum steering group takes a lead in looking at the detail, ensuring that data is accurate and accessible and that teachers understand and can ask questions. A hallmark of St Mary's is the commitment to ensure all newly qualified staff attend diocesan training on RE and worship. In addition, the close partnership with the Faculty of Education at Cambridge ensures that staff professional development on values and the spiritual heart of education is nurtured. Above all, the trustees ensure that what is distinctively Christian in their approach to all aspects of their work. They value the importance of all groups, including 'the vulnerable and their progress which is very much part of the ethos of this school'. All areas from the last inspection have been fully addressed, with far reaching effect. Exemplary examples include the Family Support worker's contribution in supporting other schools in the area. In addition, the RE subject leader, working closely with the diocesan RE adviser, has been able to share her expertise within the diocese. Consequently, collective worship and RE meet the statutory requirements and have an equally high status. Children have a voice, with the collective worship team part of the leadership programme. Parents praise the community work pupils take part in, such as the seniors' tea and food collections for the elderly at Harvest. They go on to speak highly of the way the 'teaching ethos has changed so much with the headteacher' in a relatively short space of time. They value the way he is visible every morning and afternoon and attends the school residential. Parents praise the approachability of all staff, saying 'this school has helped me and my family to do things differently'. Everyone works hard to reflect the academy's Christian foundation through its commitment to serving the children of St Mary's and their families.