

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Clifford Road, Boston Spa, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 6DB

<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>York</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Leeds
Date of inspection	27 January 2017
Date of last inspection	March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VC Primary 107997
Headteacher	Jan Alexander
Inspector's name and number	Lizzie McWhirter 244

#### School context

There are currently 137 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is increasing. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is increasing and is higher than the national average. The headteacher has been in post for 10 years. The assistant headteacher also shares the responsibility for collective worship and leads religious education [RE]. St Mary's is in an area with little cultural diversity, but has achieved the Stephen Lawrence Educational Standard [SLES] for diversity. St Mary's belongs to the Wharfe Valley Learning Partnership [WVLP], which is a collaboration of local schools.

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

- St Mary's strong Christian character and perspective is rooted in its vision, 'In God we live and learn.' This is based on the Christian values of love, respect, perseverance, hope and faith.
- This is evident in the way that the school is inclusive and serves all the pupils and their families, especially in its excellent pastoral care and support for those who are vulnerable.
- In this secure environment, all pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- There is a strong partnership with St Mary's Church which nurtures the worshipping life and the Christian character of this church school.
- The growing importance of prayer and reflection in this church school, such as the use of prayer spaces, supports the pupils' spiritual journeys.

#### Areas to improve

- Extend governors' strategic monitoring and evaluation in RE to ensure that it is more frequent and rigorous in order to strengthen this important aspect of Christian distinctiveness.
- Enable pupils and adults to develop their understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their experience of Christian worship.

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

St Mary's strong Christian character and perspective is rooted in its vision, 'in God we live and learn' which shapes the school's excellent relationships at all levels. This is especially seen in its inclusive approach to serving all the pupils and their families as a Christian family community, resulting in exemplary pastoral care. This stems from the

way the school's Christian values, such as compassion, are integral to school life and lived out daily. Consequently, those who are especially vulnerable are very well supported and make very good progress. Attendance is usually well above the national average and there have never been any exclusions. This is because pupils want to come to come to this church school which is a safe place to be. As a result, behaviour is good and all achievement is celebrated. Confident pupils enthusiastically articulate the importance of the school's values, such as hope and forgiveness, in word and deed. The school's vision is rooted in love, respect, perseverance, hope, faith and moral understanding. Everyone is accepted as they are and all differences are valued. Year 6 pupils are symbolised as butterflies on the prayer tree as they blossom and fly on to the next stage of their life. This is because of the excellent encouragement and firm Christian foundation which St Mary's provides where everyone can thrive and succeed. This results in pupil progress, which is good for all groups of children, with attainment consistently above national and local averages in all core subjects. The learning mentor supports pupils in need of friendship and one to one support. She has created very effective ways to meet their individual needs, such as the use of a worry wheel. This helps to remove any barriers to learning, finds a positive way forward and ensures they grow in self-belief and achieve well. Pupils have a better understanding of being part of the diocesan family as well as Christianity as a worldwide faith because the Archbishop of York visited St Mary's in May 2016 on his summer pilgrimage. Older pupils were studying inspirational religious leaders and were able to ask him if he was bullied because of his skin colour, learning about forgiveness and his favourite blessing. Pupils are able to develop their understanding of Bible stories in different ways, for example when the Knitted Bible exhibition when it visited St Mary's Church in November 2016. Pupils can link Christian values to biblical stories and ask enquiring questions in RE, such as, 'how Jesus came about and why he came', which deepens their understanding. Consequently, both worship and RE make a very good contribution to the school's Christian character. Charity fundraising and world events extends pupils' global awareness and they explore diverse communities and cultures as part of their RE work. Pupils can relate the Christmas and Easter story very well, as one might expect in a church school. Every year special books are created by St Mary's pupils, telling the significance of these two key times in the church year. They can explain the significance of Candlemas and how 'Simeon was told by God before he dies he would see the saviour of the world'. Pupils also enjoy asking big questions and learning about Hindu stories of creation and the five pillars of Islam. Thus, RE makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual and cultural development. Boston Spa is an area where there is little cultural diversity. To this end, St Mary's has a programme of visits and visitors in place.

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

The long and well established partnership between church and school is fundamental to the quality of the worshipping life at St Mary's. There is great dedication on the part of the clergy to lead weekly worship in school. In addition, members of the parish community, such as the church worker, help organise Advent workshops and Easter experience in church which results in pupils applying the message of the teaching they hear to daily life. Parents also attend and value church services throughout the year to mark key Christian festivals. The importance of prayer and reflection in school life is growing. The prayer spaces event which took place in October 2015 greatly enriched the lives of pupils and adults alike. For example, using creative ways to explore God's forgiveness, which is one of the school's core Christian values. Pupils reflect on forgiveness and their actions towards others and express, 'sorry for the times I've been mean'. Prayer spaces allowed pupils time to reflect and use spontaneous and personal prayer, which make a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual journeys. Consequently, class and school reflection areas are interactive and are well used. In addition, the school had a day to focus on reflection and prayer in December 2015. Pupils are growing in their understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They speak of the Trinity as, 'it means three. It's God altogether'. Pupils know three candles are lit at the start of worship to remind everyone of the symbolism of the Trinity. They speak of God sending his son down to earth to save us. The Holy Spirit is everywhere, no matter where you are.' The school recognises the importance of deepening pupils' Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as part of their daily experience of worship. More importantly, many pupils say the most important aspect of collective worship for them is 'praying to God our Father'. They go on to say they feel nearer to God when they pray in church and comment, 'when you go to church you learn more about Jesus'. They also value the curate leading morning worship each week in school. They speak of the importance of living in God's world and following God, explaining the school's vision and values in their own words. They say, 'He's the leader; we're quite committed to God in the way we live in God's world and learn about how to live our lives.' Year 6 pupils now have ownership of 'Move over Mondays' when they plan and lead worship, showing how St Mary's has moved on since the last inspection. For example, pupils led worship focussed on the Christian value of hope, encouraging pupils to pray spontaneously about hope for those in need, both locally, nationally and internationally. Good examples include prayers to recognise Holocaust Memorial Day as well as invitations to record their own reflective prayer of hope on a lily pad. The evaluation of worship has evolved, with pupils, staff and governors all contributing their viewpoints as to how worship is a daily experience which is welcoming, learning, reflecting and responding. This informs future planning and the direction for school worship, going forward.

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

This is a Christian community where the dedicated headteacher, her staff, the clergy and active governors are all committed to belonging to the school family where everyone's welfare, feelings and opinions are important. Parents whole heartedly agree the school's Christian ethos makes a real difference to them and to their children. They say, 'we are very much part of the family here at St Mary's where all the staff and children know each other so well.' They speak highly of the way everyone is included in the school environment, which is 'respecting of people's differences and accepting of everyone as individuals'. This is especially true in terms of gender equality and for those pupils who have special educational needs. Parents praise, 'the way St Mary's lives out its Christian values in the way it teaches my child'. As a result, pupils achieve well, both academically and personally. Pupils have a voice through the school council, with other pupils taking ownership and responsibility in school life, such as equality leaders. This ensures the wellbeing and inclusivity of the whole community is important. Staff endorse this by saying the school is a warm, welcoming and caring community. New staff value the nurturing environment, resulting in some staff saying, 'it is a welcoming school to start my teaching career'. Others comment on being part of the family, saying 'it is a joy to come to work' and they 'love my job'. An excellent example is that of a member of support staff who contributes, 'this was my old primary school and it is a joy to come back and help the people who helped me.' Governors, including those who are new to the role, are committed to the life of the school. Written reports of regular learning walks confirm to all governors the strong spiritual and moral focus in the school as well as the strong teacher and pupil relationships, ensuring all learning takes place in a calm, purposeful atmosphere. All areas have been addressed from the previous inspection, with future plans for action. They are open to new ways of fulfilling their responsibilities, which includes the regular and rigorous monitoring of RE. They acknowledge this is important and needs to be more frequent as RE is an important aspect of Christian distinctiveness. The deputy headteacher is the RE subject leader and the headteacher and deputy headteacher lead collective worship. Consequently, both RE and worship have a high profile at St Mary's. These key areas are well led, managed and resourced and both meet statutory requirements, Community links are strong, notably with the school supporting the Wise Owl café and the local hospice, Martin House. The school values its links with the diocese, and accesses support and training. This is often with its local cluster of schools which in the Wharfe Valley, learning from and with one another. The diocese uses St Mary's development of prayer spaces as an example of good practice when providing training for other schools. St Mary's is ever mindful of the importance of succession planning and support for future leaders of church schools and successfully maintaining that for everyone, 'in God we live and learn'.

SIAMS report January 2017 St Mary's CE VC Primary School, Boston Spa, West Yorkshire LS23 6DB