

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England VC Primary School, Askham Richard	
Address	School Lane, Askham Richard, York, YO23 3PD

School vision

‘Small school, big heart, learning and growing together’.

At St Mary’s we are a community, a family and a team. Through our Christian ethos, we care and nurture our children preparing them for future life. We have high standards and set ambitious aims for our curriculum and outcomes for our children.

Children at St Mary’s become independent, confident, inclusive learners who possess a love of lifelong learning and development of the whole self.

‘Even though we are many individuals, Christ makes us one body and individuals who are connected to each other’. Romans 12: 5

School strengths

- The school’s Christian vision supports, includes and nurtures everyone. As a result, St Mary’s is a welcoming, loving school family.
- School leaders are passionate about their school and community. Their commitment to ‘learning and growing together’ drives improvement decisions and enriches relationships within and beyond the school.
- Inspired by their vision of ambition and community, partnerships are strong. Close working relationships with the parish church, diocese and local schools inform and enhance school life, worship and the wider curriculum.
- Pupils and adults value the many invitational opportunities to come together for celebration, reflection and prayer. As a result, collective worship contributes significantly to spiritual flourishing.
- Characterised by their core values of trust and compassion, staff, pupils and families work together as a team. This highly inclusive approach ensures St Mary’s meets a diverse range of needs exceptionally well.

Areas for development

- Embed rigorous systems of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of St Mary’s as a Church school. This is so it informs improvement, enabling leaders, including all governors, to measure the impact of the vision and values over time.
- Develop a consistent, curriculum wide approach to spiritual development. This is to build upon the unplanned experiences and deliver a range of rich and relevant opportunities that nurture spiritual flourishing.
- Refine the key knowledge taught in religious education (RE). This is to enable pupils to retain knowledge and understanding of world religions and worldviews, and the diversity within them.

Inspection findings

The shared vision of being a ‘small school with a big heart’ wonderfully describes this nurturing, supportive school. Rooted in Christian love, the team-wide approach to living and learning together is a cherished part of everyday life. As a result, St Mary’s is a joyful learning community where everyone is welcomed and treated well.

Compassion characterises school leaders. They are unswerving in their commitment to ensuring all pupils flourish academically, personally and spiritually. This is because they know and understand the community they serve and make ethical decisions in the light of it. The dedicated staff team are highly collaborative and mutually supportive. Rooted in their connection to each other as the body of Christ, vision drives the high standards in the school community. Words of encouragement and positive approaches to mental health are ever present. Formal and informal professional development is a high priority. Through training and support, including from the diocese, staff have high levels of wellbeing and confidence in themselves and others. It is enabling everyone to contribute, belong and thrive.

Governors make vision-led decisions, including bold financial choices to ensure high quality provision and support for all pupils to flourish. Lives are changed through the courageous decisions they make. For example, having two staff members who are trained as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA). The additional support and space these roles offer exemplifies the Christian foundation of the school. As a result, the learning and wellbeing of many pupils has been radically improved. Whilst governors reflect the vision in their role, they know there is more to do to fully develop and embed systems. This will enable them to monitor and evaluate the impact of the vision over time.

The inclusive nature of the school is impressive. Informed by the school’s Christian values and vision, there is a relentless commitment to overcome barriers. Individual needs are sensitively met with Christian love and professional care. Initiatives for the most vulnerable are thoughtfully implemented and focused on the development of the whole pupil. From the first words on the gate to the last words of the school day, welcome and care is non-negotiable. Living out the belief of each person being uniquely created in the image of God, relationships at every level show dignity and respect. Sensitive adjustments make learning accessible to all, both inside and outside of the classroom. Inspirational support from the knowledgeable special educational needs co-ordinator (SENDCO) and staff positively impacts on parents too. They are valued partners, supported by the school’s culture of open communication and treating everyone well. As a result, those that need additional help develop the confidence and independence to flourish alongside their peers. New pupils and parents are welcomed with open arms. One family movingly shared how they have ‘been shown nothing but love’ from their first day at St Marys. This exemplifies the school’s ‘big heart’ in action, as Christian love welcomes everyone to be part of this school community.

The spiritual life of pupils and adults is nourished through inclusive and invitational collective worship. Central to the school’s core value of Koinonia, or community, it is an enthusiastic focal point of each day. As the community gathers, pupils know that they are welcome and important, regardless of any personal belief or none. Worship themes root the school’s values in biblical stories and the life and teachings of Christ. For example, pupils link trust to the story of David and Goliath and forgiveness to the Prodigal Son. Pupils are beginning to contribute their ideas for worship and are keen to participate and lead more. The youngest pupils in school proudly share how ‘we may be small but we can still help our school and other people’, This wonderfully reflects their enthusiasm for participation. Therefore, pupils make connections and understand the relevance of Jesus’ teachings to their lives. The school’s mutual relationship with their parish is a strength. ‘Open the Book’ volunteers are loved by all, introducing pupils to the breadth of the Bible. This is further

supported by special services and events in church. Punctuating the school year, they bring the community together to give thanks to God and to celebrate. These invitational opportunities offer an insight into Anglican tradition. As such, they are proud that their school is part of a worldwide Christian community. This spirit of sharing together is further reflected in weekly celebration worship. This is a highlight of the week, recognising pupils who have demonstrated the vision and values in action. These rich and varied worship experiences positively contribute to the spiritual development of pupils and adults alike. Although there are lots of unplanned spiritual experiences, a coherent approach to spirituality across the whole curriculum is not in place. As a result, some opportunities for spiritual flourishing, beyond collective worship are missed.

Growing opportunities for character development and leadership actively encourage pupils to see themselves as agents of change. Whether as school councillors, digital leaders, or the much loved 'infant partners', pupils act as role models for each other. Because of their vision, pupils are inspired to extend this care beyond the school gates. Offering their core values of friendship and compassion, pupils look to actively help others. A recent request from pupils to support the climate crisis, further exemplifies St Mary's commitment to exploring issues of justice and responsibility. Love is not just spoken about, it is lived out through generous actions, including fundraising. Whatever their age, pupils know they can make a positive difference.

Most pupils enjoy RE and understand that 'just because we may be different, we are all human and can believe different things.' The time and value placed on RE meets statutory and church requirements. Lessons develop pupils' enquiry skills. For example, exploring why people, including parents and members of their own community, may or may not believe in God. They are excited by these opportunities and appreciate the variety of ways teachers explain things and motivate them. Reflecting their vision and values, lessons are led sensitively to ensure that pupils feel safe to express their thoughts and responses. This enables pupils to engage with challenging questions of life and faith. Whilst pupils learn about a range of major faiths and worldviews, their recall of key knowledge is currently inconsistent. This limits the progress of some groups and is driving the current curriculum changes.

Overall, the vision and values of St Mary's have created a tangible culture of Christian love and care. Consequently, pupils are proud to be part of their school.

The inspection findings indicate that St Mary's is living up to its foundation as a Church school.

Information			
Inspection date	13 October 2023	URN	121547
VC/VA/Academy	Voluntary controlled	Pupils on roll	100
Diocese	York		
MAT/Federation			
Headteacher	Richard Moss		
Chair	Glynis Ashford		
Inspector	Simone Bennett	No.	949