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

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| **St Mary’s Church of England Primary School (Voluntary Controlled)**  **Southam Road**  **Banbury, Oxon OX10 6LX**  **Previous SIAMS grade: Good**  **Current Inspection Grade: Good**  **Diocese: Oxford**  Local authority: Oxfordshire  Date of inspection: 12 July 2016  Date of last inspection: 28 April 2011  School’s unique reference number: 123094  Headteacher: Victoria Woods  Inspector’s name and number: Jane Tuckett 668 |
| **School context**  St Mary’s CE Primary is a medium-sized school of 188 pupils situated at the heart of Banbury’s town centre where it has an enclosed but spacious site. The recent past has seen many changes with a falling roll and shifting demographic in the town centre. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds with currently less than 40% White British and increasing numbers of pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) and special educational needs and disability (SEND). Over the same period there have been frequent staff changes and several heads, as well as a total turnaround in the governing body. The current head took office in September 2015. In May 2016, the local church had a new vicar who has joined the governing body and has already begun to strengthen links between the school and the church. |
| **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary’s Banbury CE Primary School as a Church of England school are good**   * A dedicated and visionary head, hardworking and committed staff and increasingly effective and proactive governing body all contribute to creating a school with a distinctive Christian ethos in which Christian values underpin all of school life and impact positively on learning.. * The school is characterised by excellent behaviour and attitudes because relationships throughout the school are nurturing and caring with teachers modelling the Christian values. * Pupils have a great respect for cultural diversity because of the broader perspectives given by increasingly strong links with the local church, enquiry based religious education and the diverse ethnic and cultural mix in school and in the local community. |
| **Areas to improve**   * Discuss and formulate the school’s aims and ethos, making them explicitly Christian then communicate them to all stakeholders through dialogue, documentation and the website. * Fully embed monitoring and evaluation of the Christian dimension at teacher, leadership and governor level and ensure the continuing prominence of this aspect of school life. * Develop a reflective space outdoors to enable spiritual development in line with the Christian ethos. |

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| **The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is good at meeting the needs of all learners**  The school’s ethos is based on five values (compassion, endurance, koinonia, creation and truth) which have been developed from the historical SMART behaviour values. The new values are clearly Biblically linked in school though less overtly on the website. One grandparent with long experience of St Mary’s commented that ‘You’ve brought God and the church back to school’. Since her appointment less than a year ago the head has worked tirelessly to improve teaching and thus attainment in the core subjects as an aspect of the Christian vision for every child. There has been significant staff turnover but she has now established a committed and highly effective team who share her vision of how this church school works. As a result progress has improved significantly though as yet levels in core subjects remain below the national average. With much improved standards in the Early Years and more consistently good teaching, levels look set to rise. There is a strong and effective focus on the needs of all individuals with special emphasis on SEND, Pupil Premium and other vulnerable pupils as aspects of the school’s Christian effectiveness. To address attendance and behaviour issues the Special Needs Coordinator and Home Schools Liaison Worker have close holistic links with vulnerable families and pupils who are supported through a range of care groups. Pupils are taught to reflect on their behaviour in the light of the Christian values, resulting in good behaviour and personal development with a strong focus on tolerance of diversity and respect for others. One Muslim mother spoke through a translator saying that she was very happy for her children to attend a church school because the values and Bible stories underline similarities between the faiths rather than differences. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are all good as a result of the wider creative curriculum with its emphasis on awe and wonder and increasing extra-curricular opportunities, especially in sport. Pupils benefit from a welcoming building in a deceptively green and spacious setting. All staff, including lunchtime and playground supervisors, are fully involved in the school’s Christian ethos and provision in the playground is imaginative and generous. The school aims to promote self-esteem and confidence in pupils, a significant number of whom face a variety of challenges in their lives. Parents and carers speak emotionally of the school doing much more than could be expected or hoped for to support children and their wider families. Success and achievement are celebrated in weekly assemblies where pupils enthusiastically share the fruits of their learning with their parents and the whole school community and are awarded certificates recognising good behaviour in the light of the values. Throughout the school community relationships are positive and supportive reflecting the core value of Koinonia with the very strong staff team all striving for the best for their pupils. Religious education is taught by class teachers as part of the broader creative curriculum with at least one term’s topic per year specifically based on RE. The subject leader is very enthusiastic and thorough and is aware of the danger that RE could be overshadowed in this model. However, she is determined that standards in RE should rise with those in other subjects and is undertaking rigorous monitoring. RE contributes significantly to understanding of Christian beliefs and the life and work of Jesus as well as the knowledge of other faiths and cultures reinforcing the first-hand experience pupils receive from their peers. The atmosphere of inclusivity, tolerance and mutual respect in the school is inspirational in an area of racial diversity. Parents recognise and value this greatly. The newly established link with a school in South Africa will add a further dimension to global awareness. |
| **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**  Daily collective worship is seen as important in bringing the whole school community together and in relating the values which shape behaviour, relationships and attitudes to Christian teaching. Pupils are enthusiastic about worship and its impact permeates school life. Whole school worship takes place four times a week with local clergy leading it on one day. It starts with liturgical responses and includes a variety of elements, music, stories, drama, prayer, silence and reflection. There is a good level of pupil participation with all present seeming engaged and attentive. Pupils of different faiths join in prayer using some rituals of their own tradition. Worship on the remaining day of the week is in classrooms led by class teachers and is often entirely planned, devised and delivered by class members. All staff including teaching assistants attend worship with their classes, thus ensuring its impact on all in the community. Teachers speak of valuing the opportunity it offers for calm and reflection. Collective worship is efficiently planned and coordinated by the worship coordinator (also the RE coordinator and now an assistant head) who also leads worship every week. Worship leaders and local clergy have attended diocesan training which has been passed on to class teachers thus improving the quality of worship. All in leadership and management are keen to develop the link with the parish church which has been sustained over several years by a member of the local clergy team who is also a foundation governor. The new vicar is also keen to foster the link. Pupils were involved in his appointment process and he has exciting ideas for mutual participation and support, including Messy Church to take place in the school. Theological teaching occurs mainly through collective worship with a strong focus on Gospel stories and the life and person of Jesus although sometimes worship focuses on the festivals of other faiths to reflect the diverse school and local population. Services in the local church reflect key points in the liturgical year with children and their parents attending meaningful worship there. Pupils feel at home in the church and the strong links give pupils a broad understanding of Anglican traditions and beliefs. The recently formed pupil worship group reflects the multi-faith nature of the school and is important in welcoming people to worship, bringing symbolic artefacts from the classrooms to the worship table, and planning and delivering worship. Prayer is used in its different forms at different times and places in the school day with helpful techniques to aid prayer such as prayer hands and prayer pebbles. Each classroom has a spiritual area designed, set up and maintained by the pupils; the areas are well used for reflection and ‘time out’. An outdoor activity day at the end of term has the development of an outside reflective space as one of its focuses. The school has participated in diocesan ‘Living Faith’ initiatives and recently Year 6 pupils attended the ‘Love is…’ service at Christchurch Cathedral. This, along with the workshop which preceded it, proved to be inspirational and memorable as a gathering of the wider Christian family in Oxfordshire with work on different types of love following on from it. Worship is effectively monitored and evaluated by the worship coordinator with the pupil worship group involved and listened to when shaping development. Recent monitoring by governors shows that they are increasingly involved and prepared to ask challenging questions but this practice needs further embedding. |
| **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good**  The school has recently seen very rapid change spearheaded by its inspirational new head who was appointed by the governors specifically because of her proven experience of school improvement and church school leadership. She, with the senior leadership, is transforming the school into a highly effective church school. Recent staff turnover has resulted finally in a strong staff team where all members of staff feel well supported and benefit from training opportunities. After some years during which the school’s Christian effectiveness was not a high priority, the governors are now committed to maintaining and developing the distinctiveness of the school and seek further ways to communicate it. They are beginning to undertake the monitoring of worship and Christian effectiveness required by the last SIAS inspection and staffing and funding decisions are now made in the light of the school’s church dimension. The new vicar has joined the governing body and is poised to have significant impact through his experience and enthusiasm. Parents are very positive about the school and its emphasis on ‘the Christian beliefs and values which have become much more prominent and visible recently’ to quote one of them. They as well as staff comment favourably on the recent changes and feel welcome in school and confident that problems which arise will be sensitively and effectively managed. Links with the local church are good with pupils regularly involved in Sunday worship and promise to become stronger to mutual benefit. In this ethnically diverse community the school and church are modelling how to live and work together harmoniously with respect for diversity. All in leadership now fully endorse and articulate the overtly Christian vision and documentation is beginning to include it. However, as yet the website and policies do not fully reflect the school’s Christian values. A scheduled vision and values event for the whole school community should enable all stakeholders to be fully involved in formulating an ethos statement and understanding the overarching vision. Management initiatives now seem to be on track to make this an outstanding church school once the changes which are already in place have become fully embedded. |