

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Mary's CE VA High School

Lieutenant Ellis Way,
Cheshunt
EN7 5FB

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: St Alban's

Local authority: N/A

Dates of inspection: 12 May 2015

Date of last inspection: 15 October 2009

School's unique reference number: 138360

Headteacher: Stephanie Benbow

Inspector's name and number: Kathryn Wright 436

School context

St Mary's CE VA High School is an average-sized secondary converter academy with a rising roll. The intake is ethnically diverse, with the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language above the national average. Students starting in Year 7 come from a wide range of primary schools in the local area. Since the previous inspection the school has moved to new buildings on the edge of the town.

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

- The distinctive Christian ethos of the school is championed by the entire school community leading to a shared vision and practice underpinned by biblical values
- The outstanding leadership of religious education (RE) ensures that the subject has a high priority in the school and is regarded as a core subject
- The inclusive and personalised approach to learning rooted in the Christian values of agape, trust, compassion and forgiveness makes certain that every student can fulfil their potential
- The value and importance given to prayer effectively supports the wellbeing and spiritual development of the entire school community.

Areas to improve

- To actively promote the Christian ethos beyond the school so that it is clear to everyone what lies at the heart of the school's policies and practices and what motivates it to serve its community
- To create teaching and learning activities that stretch and challenge students in RE in order to continue to raise standards and meet the needs of all learners
- To provide a wider variety of collective worship experiences so that students are more aware of the diversity of Christian worship in Great Britain and globally

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

The school lives and breathes its Christian ethos, shown primarily through the values of agape, trust, compassion and forgiveness. Students speak about reflecting Christ's unconditional love through their service to one another. All year groups have a special focus value, and students understand that these are based on biblical teachings such as the parables of Jesus. In lessons observed, the Christian values were explicitly referred to in relation to the curriculum and behaviour for learning. Every student is valued as a child of God, and this is demonstrated through the emphasis on personalised learning and successful outcomes for all. The healthy minds programme effectively supports this through a focus on resilience, responsibility and self worth. Pupils make good progress and provision for disadvantaged and vulnerable students is outstanding. Young carers and those joining the school during the academic year talk about the friendship, welcome and support from students and teachers. One student said, 'My form is like my family'. An act of worship led by autistic students led to moving reflections by students on acceptance of others. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is promoted in all aspects of school life, particularly through the curriculum, an extensive enrichment programme, and the school environment. Religious education (RE) has a prominent place within the school, and makes a significant contribution to the Christian ethos. An Easter Experience event organised by the RE team allowed students and the wider school community to reflect on the meaning and significance of this festival. A memorial garden has recently been opened which was instigated and designed by the school council. This area provides space for peaceful reflection, and is valued highly by all. The diversity of the school community is celebrated and treasured. Social and cultural understanding is supported through Interfaith Week events and charity fundraising. Performing arts productions enable the wider community and local schools to experience the Christian vision and ethos of the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship has a central place in the life of the school. Students and staff understand its purpose both in providing time and space for them to reflect on their spiritual life, and also in learning about the Christian faith. Students enjoy taking part in and leading worship, and talk about its impact on their beliefs, behaviour and attitudes. Students have opportunities to respond to worship beyond the immediate experience, through an online discussion forum, and through links in the curriculum. The act of worship observed was outstanding. A confident and clear Christian message on the theme of sacrifice was presented in an engaging, humorous and biblical way. Students were actively engaged through reflection and giving readings. The worship reflected Anglican practice through its structure. Music forms a central part of worship. Members of the gospel choir say that they value being able to promote God's word through song and show that they are proud of the Christian ethos of the school. Collective worship is exceptionally well led and managed. It is thematically planned focusing on Christian values, and tutorial worship is supported well through effective resourcing. Students develop a good understanding of Anglican faith, including a Trinitarian concept of God, and practice, through a regular Eucharist service which is attended by the whole school. Students of all faiths and none value the opportunity to celebrate coming together as a community. Students' understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist is supported through clergy input into religious education lessons. Prayer lies at the heart of everything the school does. Students view prayer as fundamental to their own relationship with God, and many gather together spontaneously to pray; for example at the start of their recent GCSE exams. A prayer box was introduced at the request of students, and is used regularly by all members of the community. Prayers are blessed and read by the local clergy. Students speak about the impact this has on their positive wellbeing. Monitoring of collective worship is formalised, and as a result consistency in tutorial worship has improved.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

Religious Education (RE) has a high profile within the school. Achievement and progress are good overall. At A Level, progress for students in RE was the second best in the school and take up of the subject has increased. At GCSE, results (A*-C) are better than the school average, but slightly below the national average. At Key Stage 3, students are now making outstanding progress, with many students exceeding expected targets. The quality of teaching observed was good in the majority of lessons, and some was outstanding. The most effective practice enabled students to engage fully with complex ideas. Creative teaching strategies and high levels of challenge were provided in a Year 12 revision lesson, which supported their critical thinking skills and essay writing. In some lessons, students were not stretched and not enough time was spent developing theological concepts. Teachers have a very good grasp of their subject, and are able to answer challenging and controversial questions from students. Assessment for learning provides constructive feedback to students and ensures that they know how to make progress. The curriculum, based on the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus, provides sufficient time for students to develop their understanding of Christian belief and practice. Progression at Key Stage 3, in terms of depth of understanding Christianity, is not fully realised. A core RE programme in the 6th Form is valued by students. They say it provides space of them to debate and discuss difficult issues. The subject leader is exceptionally well qualified and has a robust vision for the subject and its development. She engages enthusiastically with professional development opportunities, and promotes RE locally and nationally through use of social media. Professional dialogue with colleagues through networks has led directly to impacts on students' learning experiences. Good opportunities are provided for students to meet and engage with members of the Christian, and other faith and belief communities supporting spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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

The leadership team articulates a passionate Christian vision for the school which is rooted in the teachings of Jesus and every young person being made in the image of God. This message provides a cornerstone for the life in the school. The Christian ethos lies at the heart of all strategic planning and all policies refer explicitly to Christian values and principles. For example, the behaviour for learning policy is based on forgiveness and reconciliation. The wellbeing and spiritual development of staff is paramount, ensuring that staff are supported, nurtured and recognised for their achievements. Professional dialogue between colleagues is open and honest enabling all to know they are part of a caring team. Regular continuing professional development relating to church school issues ensures that all staff understand the importance of the Christian ethos, and how this can be supported through tutorial worship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The leadership team ensures the Christian ethos of the school is central to the induction of new members of staff. Governors provide robust and challenging evaluation. Monitoring is formalised and undertaken regularly, placing the Christian ethos at the centre of school improvement. The key issues from the last inspection have been met leading to a significant impact on the school's distinctiveness, student motivation and assessment for learning in RE. The value placed on both RE and collective worship by the senior team has led to dynamic leadership of both areas which provides inspiration to colleagues. The school regards itself as on a journey, this has enabled them to accurately and perceptively evaluate their effectiveness as a church school and identify further areas for development. These are clearly identified and lie at the heart of the school's improvement planning. Partnerships with primary schools, the children's centre and the Diocese are strong, and this has enabled the leadership to share its vision beyond the immediate school community. The local clergy team provides good pastoral support which is highly valued by parents and staff.

