

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England High School			
Address	Lieutenant Ellis Way, Cheshunt, Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire, EN7 5FB		
Dates of inspection	14 and 15 January 2020	Status of school	Stand-alone secondary academy
Diocese	St Albans	URN	138360

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Good
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Excellent
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Good

School context

St Mary's is a secondary school with 1244 students on roll. The majority of pupils are of Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage. Many pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is above national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is above national averages. The headteacher was appointed in September 2019 and acting chair of governors in June 2019. The RE lead took up her post in January 2019. The local church was without a priest for over two years prior to September 2019. The school was judged as requires improvement by Ofsted in September 2019.

The school's Christian vision

Through God's love, we are the rich soil where seeds flourish and roots grow. Our vision, rooted in the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4: 3-9), underpins our caring, nurturing environment where everyone can flourish. It is the foundation for our motto, 'Aspire Challenge Succeed', and for our key Christian values. St Mary's provides an environment where people are safe, well cared for, can flourish, and all in our community are challenged to succeed.

Key findings

- The headteacher provides inspirational, challenging and supportive Christian leadership. He has worked with the community to articulate the biblical roots of the longstanding, inclusive Christian vision.
- Inspirational collective worship makes vibrant use of creative arts. Students and adults relate its transformational impact on their lives. It often results in students becoming advocates for change and taking compassionate action. Community events and passionate students enrich worship in the community.
- Exceptional support for wellbeing and mental health is provided for all, including the most vulnerable.
- Although this compassionate and nurturing environment often changes lives, not all students make good progress. Strong leadership, informed by the Christian vision, is driving a range of initiatives to address this by securing good behaviour and improving teaching and learning. These are making a tangible impact.
- RE provides a safe space to explore beliefs. It enables students to value diversity. Most students make good progress. However, the most able are not always appropriately challenged.

Areas for development

- To ensure that procedures for planning, monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the Christian vision, collective worship and RE are embedded within the school's self-evaluation cycle. This is so that self-evaluation effectively and routinely informs development planning for the school as a Church school.
- To provide training and support for all staff teaching RE, to ensure that exciting lessons challenge and effectively support progress for all students, including the most able.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

The Christian vision for a school providing a 'fertile soil', where all are enabled to flourish, results in an exceptionally inclusive and caring community. The recent process of developing the vision and embedding its biblical roots has resulted in all staff and governors thinking deeply about their practice in the light of Jesus' teaching about love. This has been driven by the strong leadership of the recently appointed headteacher, who is described by all as living the Christian vision. One member of staff said that he had been challenged to change his own approach to behaviour management by the firm but compassionate approach of the headteacher. Although there have recently been many changes to the governing body, access to diocesan training means that governors have a good understanding of their roles, know the school well and are well-informed about Church school issues. Development planning for vision development is included in the school improvement plan and therefore subject to review, but this is not the case for collective worship and RE. Consequently, rigorous self-evaluation of these areas does not always feed into development planning.

Vibrant, inclusive and relevant collective worship is highly valued by the whole community. It is greatly enriched by the partnership with local churches, drawing on their culturally diverse worship styles. It is a key way in which the loving and nurturing vision for the school is shared. The worship leader is also the leader for music and this results in worship being richly infused with creative arts. The choir and gospel worship group sing frequently and students are passionate about leading worship. There is a strong emphasis on the distinction between worship and performance. Consequently students develop a deep understanding of skills needed to support spiritual reflection and prayer. Many work with the worship leader to contribute to worship in their own churches and the school often provides music for worship in the local community and diocese. Excellent planning is supported by consistent use of a structure which ensures that worship is invitational and provides time for reflection and spiritual development. Worship is often emotionally engaging and many explain how it has been life-changing. Students often lead worship. The warm and caring atmosphere within the school means that both adults and students feel safe in sharing life experiences for the benefit of others. Recent worship has included students sharing personal experiences related to issues such as sexuality, special needs and disengagement with school due to poor behaviour. This has been transformational for adults and students. Worship in form times is rigorously monitored and seamlessly woven into time for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). Students find this thinking time helpful and often draw biblical quotes from RE or perspectives from different faiths into the discussions. The school is delighted that there is again a priest linked to the school and is seeking to re-introduce celebration of the Eucharist which has been much missed. Formal and informal evaluation of collective worship accurately informs planning.

Support for the wellbeing and mental health of students and adults is a significant strength. This is driven by the vision for removing barriers to learning. It results in considerable financial investment to support the mental health of the most vulnerable, including a range of counsellors and the 'Place2Be' which provide counselling for students, staff and parents. Students learn about mental health through PSHCE. As a result, they understand signs of mental illness and support each other. The exceptional support for students who have additional needs, through the Student Centre, is core to the Christian vision. A richly varied range of support strategies help vulnerable students to engage with school and succeed. Pastoral support is highly effective and a recent project, developed in-house, to address gang culture and knife crime is being rolled out on a national basis. Practical support is extended to families in need, for example, gifts of Christmas hampers. Many students explain the impact of this nurturing environment on their own lives and parents tell moving stories about the impact on their children. However, although progress in the sixth form is good, not all students in earlier years make expected progress. One reason for this is that the level of challenge in lessons has been inconsistent. There has also been poor behaviour from a minority of students. The leadership team are working on a range of initiatives to address these issues. Securing consistently good behaviour has been the first priority. Initiatives include restructuring leadership to provide capacity for change, staff development with regard to behaviour management, introducing a silent starter for lessons and addressing uniform issues. Staff and students comment on the impact of recent changes and the way these are contributing to a calm learning environment.

The Christian vision drives design for a relevant curriculum. Curriculum strands include character development and social justice. The 'St Mary's Way' includes a strong tradition of taking action to secure the rights and wellbeing of others, including support for a rich variety of charities and action in the community. Students are quick to identify injustice and work for a fairer world. Their understanding is developed through local and global partnerships. Parents relate the way St Mary's has inspired students to respond to incidents in the community and some students are involved in local youth politics. Curriculum planning effectively supports reflection on the school's Christian values.

Strong leadership from the RE leader contributes to RE being a safe space to explore beliefs. RE makes a significant contribution to attitudes to diversity. Students describe RE classrooms as centres of interfaith dialogue, because all students feel comfortable in sharing their beliefs and experiences. Students enjoy the subject and the number of students choosing to follow it at A' level has increased significantly. Regular monitoring takes place through learning walks. However, due to the limited capacity of the RE leader, learning walks are carried out by leaders without specialist knowledge who do not always pick up key development issues. Consequently, precise self-evaluation of important RE issues does not always feed into planning. Some RE is currently delivered by non-specialists. The quality of their teaching is good as a result of support from the RE leader and they give freely of their time to improve their practice. However, opportunities for further development are not secured as they are not usually available to attend departmental meetings.

This is an exciting time at St Mary's, with the green shoots of development and change becoming evident. The longstanding vision for demonstrating the love of God, through the care and nurture provided for all, remains the driving force for all decision making.



The effectiveness of RE is Good

Teaching is always at least good and is effectively supported by the subject leader. Most students make good progress. Achievement at A' level is good and improving. Progress at GCSE and Key Stage 3 is good for most students. However, the most able students do not always achieve their full potential. This is because lessons do not always provide effective challenge or support them in developing the high level thinking skills needed to secure the highest grades.

Headteacher

Nicholas Simms

Inspector's name and number

Carol Berry 324