



Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England VA Primary School, Amersham	
Address	School Lane, Amersham, HP7 0EL

School vision

St Mary's Primary School is a caring community that values each child and family. Our Christian values and ethos, within our inclusive school, provide opportunities for all to flourish. We aim to nurture successful learners, confident individuals and respectful citizens who are ready to take the next steps in life.

'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.' (Joshua 1: 9)

School strengths

- The school's Christian vision is absolutely central to the strategic decisions made by governors and leaders. As a result, both adults and pupils flourish at St Mary's.
- Collective worship is inspirational and has a profound impact on the spirituality of pupils at the school. It is reinforced by a wealth of additional opportunities for spiritual development during the school day.
- Religious Education (RE) is expertly led and managed. Pupils rightly enjoy the subject which challenges them and enables them to thrive both academically and as people.
- Relationships at St Mary's are characterised by kindness. Each child is known as an individual. This enables all pupils, including the most vulnerable, to live out the school's key values.
- St Mary's offers pupils many openings to develop as active citizens. This is both within the school and by taking initiatives outside through the school's excellent links with the local community. This helps them approach new challenges with confidence.

Areas for development

- Develop a shared language for spirituality across the school. As a result, members of the school community will be better able to recognise spiritual development in themselves and others.
- Consider reframing the school's vision statement, so that the deep significance of its inclusive Christian vision is fully recognised by the whole school community.

Inspection findings

St Mary's School is characterised by the commitment of governors and leaders to apply the school's Christian vision to all the work they do. This has caused them to review and refresh their vision statement in the light of the COVID pandemic. As a result, the school's strap line has been identified as 'courage, respect and opportunity'. This addresses leaders' conviction that these are the factors most needed for the school community to flourish. They are underpinned by the Biblical quotation from the book of Joshua. This roots the school's vision and actions in the Christian narrative.

Leaders and governors habitually take strategic decisions that make the school's vision a practical reality. The construction of a peace garden and a wildflower meadow offers spaces for quiet reflection. Both contribute directly to promoting the mental health of adults and pupils. The creation of smaller classes and the employment of an emotional learning support assistant generate a nurturing environment. This has a direct impact on the flourishing of pupils at the school, particularly those who are most vulnerable. School leaders identified that one of the consequences of lockdown was a shrinking of pupils' experiences. In response, they now place particular emphasis on helping pupils seize opportunities in their education. For example, there are many clubs and societies, school visits and extracurricular enrichment activities. Teachers take great care to ensure that these are accessed by all, particularly those who are disadvantaged. As a result, pupils thrive both academically and socially. St Mary's vision makes a real difference to pupils' experience of school. However, not all members of the school's community fully understand its deep Christian resonance.

Collective worship is a strength of the school. St Mary's is an exciting worshipping community. Every day begins with an act of worship. This regularly includes singing, reflection, invitational prayer and a simple liturgy. Pupils participate in an attitude of worship. They join in enthusiastically and participate in both quiet reflection and questioning with insight. One Year 6 pupil said that collective worship helped her 'feel closer to God'. The calendar includes religious festivals of major world faiths, the Anglican lectionary and the school's values. In this way it supports and promotes the school's Christian vision to great effect. The school's partnership with the local church enhances its effectiveness in enabling pupils to flourish spiritually. The rector and other church members regularly lead acts of worship. Their weekly 'open the book' assemblies are particularly valued by pupils who enjoy their involvement in acting out a Bible story. They say that this helps them remember and apply the teachings of the Bible. In addition, the school uses the church when it celebrates major festivals. Pupils state with pride that the local parish church is 'their' church.

Opportunities for pupils and adults to develop their own spirituality are abundant in collective worship. This is through times of reflection and the posing and answering of big questions. Equally, times for spiritual reflection and development are present throughout the school day. Each classroom has a reflection corner and the peace garden is available for all. Pupils use these to self-regulate their emotions when needed. Teachers are attuned to the need that any pupil may have for a restorative time of quiet. Reflections before lunch and at the end of the day are part of the rhythm of school life. Pupils value the opportunity this gives for expressing gratitude. Spiritual development is a strength of the school. However, at present there is no shared language for spirituality.

St Mary's is a vibrant place, characterised by caring relationships. Pupils listen to each other with respect and discuss issues, even controversial ones, with courtesy and enthusiasm. Older pupils take their responsibilities for looking after younger ones very seriously, for instance as sports leaders. Parents rightly identify that all children at the school 'are noticed'. This means that when pupils are going through difficult times, they are given individual practical care and support. This is an important fruit of the school vision's emphasis on nurturing pupils. It affords dignity to all members of the community and enhances the wellbeing of all. Staff approach their work with enthusiasm. They value the priority that leaders give to their welfare. Like the pupils, they feel that they are supported and treated as individuals. Access to wellbeing training and shared planning time results in a cohesive and mutually supportive staff community.

The school provides many openings for pupils to take leadership roles and to be agents for good, both in the school and outside. Within school, the eco council are very active in promoting sustainability and fair trade. Evidence of their work is visible throughout the school. House captains lead the school in deciding which charities to support and how funds will be raised. The school has

established links with a school in Kenya and pupils raise funds to support their Kenyan peers. Year 6 pupils recently presented on a local, church run radio station to raise money for street children. Their willingness to do this is indicative of the culture in the school. They are empowered and encouraged to seize chances to work for the good of others. The school is also valuably embedded in its local community. This provides further occasions when pupils step forward and serve others. The school choir sings at community events and pupils take part in the civic Remembrance observation and Christmas celebrations.

RE is given high priority at St Mary's. It is expertly led and managed. The curriculum is rich, engaging and carefully differentiated to meet the needs of all. Different perspectives are covered including the major world faiths and non-religious views. All teachers receive appropriate training and deliver lessons with confidence and clarity. Philosophy for children is used alongside the agreed syllabus. This creates an atmosphere of open enquiry in lessons and leads to rich learning. Assessment is careful and thorough, giving pupils clear feedback. As a result, pupils of all abilities genuinely enjoy their RE lessons and make strong progress. They take pride in their written work and engage well in discussion about matters of faith. The centrality of RE in the school's curriculum is further enhanced by the way in which it features in a range of subjects. It is taught in areas as diverse as French, music, class reading and design and technology. This means that pupils see RE as being at the heart of their education and talk naturally about it. Its contribution to their learning is considerable.

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

Information			
Inspection date	12 January 2024	URN	110455
VC/VA/Academy	Voluntary aided	Pupils on roll	318
Diocese	Oxford		
MAT/Federation			
Headteacher	Julie Hills		
Chair	Jacqui Carr		
Inspector	Andrew Wilcock	No.	2112