

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mark's Church of England School, Bath

Address Bay Tree Road, Larkhall, Bath. BA1 6ND

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

Overall grade **Good**

The impact of collective worship **Good**

The effectiveness of religious education (RE) **Good**

School's vision

St Mark's promotes self-worth in pupils to inspire them to live well, achieve their goals and be a force for good both in school and the world beyond. Matthew 5:16 tells us to 'Let your light shine,' which reminds us to have aspiration and resilience and to value the importance of community. We work hard to be the best version of ourselves.

Key findings

- The inclusive and distinctive vision inspires school leaders to expect the best from pupils and staff and the living out of the values enable this to happen. Pupils and adults blossom as a result.
- Partnerships with the Bath Hub, the Diocese and a local independent school make a demonstrable impact on pupil learning, school facilities and pupil and staff aspirations.
- The school's vision creates a culture where all members of the school community, including the most vulnerable, are treated with dignity and respect. Pupils and staff show a very high degree of commitment to the school.
- Collective worship offers a safe space where adults and pupils can reflect on the school's vision. Worship often inspires them to take meaningful action. Pupils' spiritual development is strengthened through collective worship and RE but there are fewer opportunities for this across the rest of the curriculum.
- Pupils respond well and make good progress in RE due to a well-planned curriculum and high expectations. There are further opportunities for pupils to be enriched by visits and visitors.

Areas for development

- Develop a shared language around spirituality that, in turn, leads to further opportunities for spiritual development across the curriculum.
- Ensure acts of worship are fully relevant to pupils through increasing their involvement in planning and evaluating worship.
- Enrich and enhance pupil experience of a range of religions and world views so that pupils understand them more as living and diverse faiths.

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

Though the vision of 'Let your light shine' is a fairly recent one, it has quickly become embedded throughout the school community. Pupils and adults understand that they have a unique light to share and that they should strive to be the best that they can be all the time. The associated values of aspiration, resilience and community are the vehicles by which the vision is enacted. Pupils, consequently, have high expectations for their academic progress and personal development. Applying the vision and its associated values means pupils are determined to persevere to achieve their goals. It also means they make a difference through kindness, in particular, in the school and in the wider community. School leaders and staff are absolutely committed to leading and facilitating this. There is a tangible sense of working together, as a result of the vision, throughout the school.

The majority of pupils start at St Mark's without prior contact with church. In this inclusive school, leaders ensure that the school's values are accessible to all whatever their previous links with churches have been. Values are clearly underpinned by theology and the Bible. The values of aspiration, resilience and community are aligned to the hope, wisdom and character of the Church of England Vision for Education. Pupils understand they are connected to the wider movement of church schools. They find the headteacher and chaplain to be particularly encouraging role models in how to translate the vision into practice.

Living out the vision was at the heart of the school's actions during the COVID lockdowns. Pupils and adults felt cared for and looked after, both educationally and practically. Staff went the 'extra mile' in supporting families with learning materials and food, where appropriate. Regular collective worship meant that spiritual needs were also attended to. Pupils and adults were both reassured and uplifted by the collective worship.

School leaders have formed significant partnerships to enhance the delivery of the vision. The Midsomer Norton Schools' Partnership is committed to achieving higher standards and active citizenship across its schools. This chimes well with the aspiration within the vision of 'being a force for good'. The Bath Hub provides pupils of this smaller than average secondary school with links to other pupils and progression routes to post-16 education. It also allows staff to be part of wider networks and to have leadership opportunities. These partnerships demonstrate one effect of the outworking of the value of community. The Diocese of Bath and Wells acts in a mentor capacity to the school. The governors, for instance, value its training in understanding how to apply the vision in church school leadership.

The vision ensures that the curriculum is suitable both for the school's immediate context and to prepare pupils to play a role in the wider society of the future. Pupils refer to 'even better if' in feedback as a spur to higher achievement. Pupils who are vulnerable and disadvantaged are challenged and supported to 'be the best they can be'. Making a collage based on the vision is the first activity at the annual summer school. This underlines the centrality of the vision and how leaders allow pupils to respond to it in creative and age-appropriate ways. Careers education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) play a crucial role in supporting pupils. The aspirational curriculum in these subjects enhances the sense of ambition and care that staff have for all pupils. There is a remarkable range of additional activities organised by staff and relished by pupils. Spiritual development is good in RE and collective worship but it is less embedded across the curriculum. Leaders are to develop a curriculum-wide definition of spirituality and the language surrounding it.

St Mark's is an inclusive school. The impact of the vision is seen in the strong and supportive relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults. Vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils are fully integrated into the life of school. Pupils from Orchard Lodge, for example, thrive in appropriate curricular and additional activities. Some vulnerable pupils have the courage to apply for, and to become, effective senior pupils. The living-out of the vision results in higher attendance rates. Prioritising mental health flows from the promotion of self-worth in the vision. Pupils and adults feel that they, and their mental health, are nurtured by the school.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are embraced as ways to live, and the naming of the behaviour area as 'Reset' demonstrates this. Compassion is a hallmark of many pupils and staff and is an example of the impact of the vision.

Compassion underpins relationships in school and some of the outstanding charity work, such as in support of the local foodbank. Pupils are courageous advocates for significant issues of justice locally and further afield. Pupils take regular action on fair trade, racial equality and the environment, which enhances their opportunities to challenge injustice.

The vision inspires engaging collective worship that unites pupils and adults and promotes good spiritual development. The headteacher and chaplain plan a programme that deepens understanding of the vision and values and that provides welcome moments of reflection. There is always an opportunity for response, often in terms of practical kindness. Evaluation of impact is undertaken by pupils and leaders but pupils have less opportunity to be involved at the start of the planning. Involving pupils ensures that the language of prayers is relevant and accessible. Clergy offer valuable support and leadership of collective worship and provide opportunities for voluntary communion services that encourage spiritual development. Opportunities to enhance pupils' appreciation of the centrality of communion to Christian worship need to develop further.

RE supports the school vision proactively through exploring the theme of belonging at the start of Year 7. RE effectively helps pupils to understand identity through belonging to St Mark's and the wider community, locally and globally. It also explores what belonging means to faith groups. The vision also informs the respectful approach to religions and world views as it is an outworking of the associated value of community. The passionate subject leader has developed a challenging and enriching RE curriculum that requires engagement with core texts and notable thinkers and theories. Pupils respond well to this and appreciate the safe space created in which they are able to debate freely. Pupils are helped by consistently being challenged to find the crux of arguments. Cross curricular links are being developed, particularly with history, geography and art. These help pupils to see the relevance of faith to the world today. There are further opportunities for the curriculum to be enriched by visits to places of worship and by relevant visitors.



The effectiveness of RE is

Good

RE and school leaders have devised a progressive curriculum that catches the imagination of learners. Teaching is always at least good, as evidenced by regular monitoring by school leaders and verified by the inspection. Pupils make good progress due to high expectations and structured tasks that test knowledge, understanding and evaluative skills. They engage well with a good range of religious, philosophical and moral issues. Pupils of all abilities thrive in RE.

Contextual information about the school

Date of inspection	8 and 9 December 2021	URN	147801
Date of previous inspection	5 and 6 March 2015		
School status	Secondary Academy inspected as voluntary aided	NOR	265
Name of MAT	Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership		
Diocese	Bath and Wells		
Headteacher	Barnaby Ash		
Pupil profile	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 is above national averages.		
Additional significant information (if needed)	The school converted to an academy on 1st May 2020. The school hosts a resource base, Orchard Lodge, for pupils with moderate learning difficulties.		
Inspector's name	Simon Stevens	No.	953