

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England VC Junior School, Ware

Address Heath Drive, Ware, United Kingdom, SG12 0RL

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**

School's vision

Our vision is for our whole school community to live life in all its fullness (John 10:10), inspired by our core Christian values of love, respect and friendship.

Key findings

- The school's distinctive Christian vision is clearly articulated and understood by the school community. It has been successful in creating a place of love, respect and friendship.
- The school's shared understanding of spirituality complements its Christian vision. It can be articulated by leaders and is used as a foundation for the respect the community shows to each other, their environment and the wider world.
- Collective worship is held in high regard. It is inclusive, in line with the vision, and enjoyed by the pupils. Not all pupils have the opportunity to plan or lead collective worship.
- The school has a new and engaging curriculum written to reflect its vision. However, links with spirituality are not yet fully embedded. Therefore, opportunities to elevate pupils' spiritual experiences are missed.
- Religious Education (RE) provision is robust. It coherently reflects the school's vision. Opportunities to learn through deep thinking weaves RE and the school's vision together.

Areas for development

- Embed the school's understanding of spirituality within the new curriculum so that all opportunities for spiritual growth are captured.
- Increase pupils' opportunities to lead creative and adventurous collective worship and prayer so that spiritual growth is maximised.
- Continue to strengthen RE provision by working alongside the diocese and the local authority to develop and share good practice.

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

St Mary's Church of England Junior School (St Mary's) has a highly effective Christian vision. The dedication and commitment of leaders ensures the vision successfully permeates the community. They are motivated by the understanding that life in all its fullness is created through expressions of 'love, respect and friendship'. This generates deep caring relationships that are effectively fostered across the community. It is characterised by the care and trust seen between pupils and adults.

The headteacher is well respected by colleagues and parents. This is because of her strong determination to do the best for the whole community of St Mary's. She has engendered a deeper understanding of the school's Christian vision to promote opportunities for all to flourish. She is supported by a well informed and committed governing body who share this vision.

To better reflect the school's vision, leaders and staff have created a bespoke and effective enquiry-based curriculum. The curriculum is underpinned by the understanding that pupils should have opportunities to think for themselves and ask searching questions. Consequently, pupils' understanding of living together in love, friendship and respect is growing. Additionally, discussion opportunities within class collective worship times are linked to the curriculum's intention to foster enquiry. It has helped them develop a growing understanding of what is right and wrong and the ability to act accordingly.

Staff dedication to constructing a curriculum rooted in the school's Christian vision means pupils find learning exciting and relevant. As a result, they are flourishing. The new curriculum has increased opportunities for pupils to learn about their changing world. For example, they speak with compassion and clarity about recent conflicts in Europe and famines in other continents. As a result, through supporting national and international charities, they make positive, age-related contributions to the global community. By engaging with such activities pupils are beginning to understand that they can be advocates for change within their community and beyond. These opportunities complement the school's vision to grow in love, respect and friendship.

RE is well led and popular with pupils and reinforces the importance of the school's vision. Relationships with the diocese and the local authority are strong. Consequently, St Mary's has had initial opportunities to share and develop RE practice with other local schools. Enquiry based approaches and varied experiences challenge pupils' thinking. Work on comparative religions promotes respect so that every individual is valued. Pupils articulate well that whatever one's faith they can live and learn together. In this way RE makes a distinct impact on the spiritual, social, cultural and moral development of pupils. Standards are consistent due to the good level of support provided for staff. The RE leader takes effective steps to improve outcomes and as a result pupils are flourishing in RE. During the pandemic RE lessons continued online.

Leaders took decisive action to provide education throughout the pandemic. This was because they wanted pupils to continue to live life in all its fullness despite adversity. Staff met online or face to face with families who needed additional support. Effective in-person and remote learning enabled pupils to engage with their lessons and make academic progress. This was appreciated by parents who welcomed the support their children received. They recognised this as a practical expression of the school's vision that enabled pupils to flourish during adversity. Leaders and staff have received training delivered by the diocese to support their knowledge of spirituality within a church school context. As a result, leaders can articulate their understanding of spirituality, and how they think this is expressed at St Mary's. The process of creating opportunities for spiritual growth within the broader curriculum has begun. However, spirituality is not fully embedded within the curriculum, thus moments of spiritual awareness are not always captured. In addition, the school has few areas set aside for pupils to develop their spirituality through prayer or reflection.

Collective worship is held in high regard. The leader has created a well-balanced, inclusive, and invitational collective worship programme. As a result, collective worship is attended and enjoyed by adults and pupils of all faiths. Parents say they appreciate the moral integrity that collective worship provides for their children. Monitoring and evaluation of collective worship is robust. Governors attend collective worship regularly and observe and record the impact of worship. Additionally, they evaluate collective worship through conversations with pupils and through questionnaires. Children are excited to contribute to this process. Governors report their observations to colleagues at full governing body meetings. They ensure collective worship reflects the Anglican status of the school as expressed in its trust deed.

The further development of collective worship through greater pupil participation has been hampered due to the recent pandemic. Nonetheless some pupils contribute prayers or presentations during collective worship. However, pupils do not lead or plan collective worship. Consequently, opportunities for pupils' spiritual development through greater engagement with worship is missed. The school's commitment to its vision, founded on the teaching of Jesus, ensures it reaches out to the vulnerable.

To this end the school has welcomed pupils who need a 'fresh start' to join its community. Relationships are cultivated to enable healing and growth so that all pupils can live a full life and flourish. They are treated with dignity and respect. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from a robust programme of learning and support that meets individual needs. Support for good mental health and emotional wellbeing is a strength of the school. Staff are equipping their pupils with the personal skills and mental resilience consistent with the school's vision. For example, Year 6 pupils help teach physical education at a local school for pupils with severe learning difficulties. Mental health, wellbeing and academic attainment are all equally valued at this school. This holistic approach keenly reflects the school's Christian vision as it promotes the belief that everyone should live life in all its fullness. The love, respect and friendship that underpins the school's vision creates a community where everyone is treated with kindness. Staff speak positively of their experience of working at St Mary's school. Their determination to live out the school's vision is reflected in their relationships with each other. They support those going through difficult circumstances who say the 'comfort and support' they have received has been 'invaluable'.

By living and working well together the leaders, staff, and pupils of St Mary's have created a community that enjoys learning together. Their passion to treat everyone with love, respect and friendship has created an inclusive community where individuals can flourish.

Contextual information about the school

Date of inspection	27 September 2022	URN	117409
Date of previous inspection	31 March 2015		
School status	VC	NOR	238
Name of Multi Academy Trust or Federation			
Diocese or Methodist Circuit	St Albans		
Headteacher	Hannah Orton		
Proportion of pupils deemed to be disadvantaged	Below National Average		
Proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Below National Average		
Additional significant information (if needed)			
Inspector's name	Delia Sheppard	No.	0942