

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mark's Church of England Junior School, Cheltenham	
Address	Robert Burns Avenue, Benhall, GL51 6NU
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	Excellent
The impact of collective worship	Excellent
The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Excellent

School's vision
Growing together, becoming all we are created to be. 'One body, many parts' -1 Corinthians 12
Key findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Christian vision and associated values have a profound impact and transform the school community. It is a thriving example of the best a Church of England school can be. Leaders conduct robust monitoring of the vision and its impact, and this informs development plans. • This excellent Church school has continued to grow in love and service to its community and beyond. Traumatic events and challenges are met with compassion, humility and grace. • Pupils learn exceptionally well. They are excited to learn as a result of a curriculum that raises big questions and promotes a culture of constant reflection that supplies rich spiritual nourishment. • Collective worship inspires adults and pupils to make a difference to the lives of others. Partnerships with the parish church and diocese further connect the worship life and so unite the many parts of the one body. • Pupils engage with genuine interest in religious texts and theological ideas through a religious education (RE) curriculum that is outstanding. Pupils are exceptionally well taught and talk with great confidence of how their learning of the range of faiths helps them to grow.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders to consider how they may further apply their evaluation of Church school aspects so that this continues to drive the future development of the school.



Inspection findings

St Mark's is truly blessed in its gifted leadership. The headteacher leads with phenomenal wisdom and energy. She inspires others with her clarity of vision of academic, personal and spiritual growth. In rewriting the vision, leaders, including governors, very skilfully created a vision that promotes unity and honours diversity. This perfectly matches the context of a special Church Junior school that works alongside a community Infant school. What is truly remarkable is the growth in the school's nurturing culture, curriculum and partnerships through several years of trauma and challenge. Governors have a clear understanding of their role as guardians of the Christian foundation while ensuring the school meets the needs of its local community. Governors are clear that the school is successful because of its historic roots in the Christian faith: 'Our Church school status is who we are, it is not a bolt-on.' Leaders conduct astute and perceptive monitoring of the school. Development plans are more implicit in the way they link planned outcomes to the Christian vision.

All leaders are unswerving and highly effective in their commitment to inclusion. As a result, those pupils and families who have additional needs are welcomed and enabled to thrive. Parents and school staff work together to ensure financial support is provided towards the cost of educational visits. Pupils are treated with generous patience and unfailing respect. As a result, they behave well and show consideration for each other. All staff appreciate the clear direction provided by leaders and know they themselves are powerful role models for pupils. The culture of forgiveness and love, built on the 'FACE' values of forgiveness, aspire, compassion and engage, is the lifeblood of the school. Never were they more evident than when the community experienced bereavements. It is clear that the school and parish church together are a source of great comfort and strength. In this way the vision of one body with many parts is powerfully lived out. The relationship between school and church is harmonious and nourishing. This bond is strengthened as the headteacher serves on the church leadership team. Partnerships with the diocese, local community and further afield are strong evidence of an effective Christian vision of growth. For example, the RE lead makes a highly valued contribution to the diocesan RE network. Links with many charities, hospitals and a residential care home speak of a school that shares its love in service to others, growing its Christian branches from secure roots.

Staff, many with years of devoted service, are energised. The vision and values are a strong motivational force by which staff adapt to change and overcome trauma. Several staff cite the deep compassion they share with each other as key to their wellbeing. Staff teach with enthusiasm and secure knowledge, built on insightful professional development, expertly modelled by senior leaders. In this way staff have a deep understanding of how they grow as teachers and in their personal lives. What is striking is how the current leadership has effected change and taken staff on a journey of improvement during recent years. This growth is driven by the vision of each becoming the person they are meant to be. As a result, pupils and adults are tended with care and develop their own knowledge, skills and interests.

The curriculum inspires pupils to learn and grow. Meaningful links between subjects and enrichment activities, like educational visits to the Hindu community centre, enhance the learning experience. In tandem with the way worship inspires pupils, the curriculum ignites pupils' social conscience and spiritual growth. Considered and thoughtful reflection is a constant feature of learning. Pupils know that being spiritual is part of everyday life and is often seen through searching 'for a deeper meaning to life'. Pupils are confident to suggest, promote and lead actions which make a positive difference to their own lives and the lives of others. Pupils in Year 3 eagerly champion the links to a charity that supplies eco sewing machines to an organisation in Tanzania. On 'Children in Need' day, they organised a fun




run to raise funds for that cause as well as the 'Pudsey' appeal. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the vision-driven curriculum. It promotes and secures deep thinking, informed questioning and practical action.

RE is extremely well led and resourced. Pupils have a mature understanding of the impact of religions on the world today. It is impressive that they explore the different expressions of Christianity across the world, even singing in Swahili during worship. Pupils learn well through the range of religions studied. Vibrant, creative activities and lively discussions feature in lessons and empower pupils to express their views. For example, articulating what the terms 'agnosticism, theism and atheism' mean, 'different places near faith'. Pupils are confident to describe how RE helps them 'to be our best selves'. They reflect on how in adult life the subject will help them understand and respect the multi-cultural society in which they grow.

Collective worship embraces and unites the whole school community. It is eagerly anticipated and provides a joyous focus every day. The worship life of St Mark's is excellent because of its significant impact. Pupils exercise their own considerable leadership skills. Many regularly contribute to and lead aspects of worship on class and the hall, helping to shape the wider spiritual life of the school. They learn about and from Christian teaching and explore current events, reflecting on how these may affect both themselves and others. Pupils and adults are inspired by creative acts of worship. They are agents of change, benefitting others. For example, rousing social conscience on themes such as local litter, cancer research and overseas water supply. A further example of innovation and excellence is in the way the worship life is expertly coordinated by the headteacher and representatives from the churches. Support from clergy, members of the 'Open the Book' team and 'Youth for Christ' volunteers add to the deep understanding of Christian beliefs and practises. Worship respects those who express no personal faith and those of a range of beliefs and worldviews. This shows sensitivity to pupils and families who transfer from Benhall community school. A Muslim pupil told of their feeling of belonging in worship as they are free to say their own prayers. Parents, governors and staff speak of feeling 'upheld' during worship, particularly when pupils take the lead. It is clear that the worship experience at St Mark's is rich and life-enhancing.

St Mark's is a highly effective Church school because it is one flourishing body of many parts, growing together through its all-encompassing vision, rooted in love.

	The effectiveness of RE is		Excellent
	<p>The experienced RE leader ensures teachers are confident and creative in their approach to the subject. Pupils make exceptional progress because the curriculum excites and challenges their thinking. They have an impressive vocabulary with which to explore their knowledge and understanding. Pupils delight to express their thinking, making insightful connections between a range of beliefs and practices. Their learning goes beyond the expectations for RE in Church of England schools.</p>		
Information			
School	St Mark's Church of England Junior School, Cheltenham	Inspection date	18 November 2022
URN	115712	VC/VA/Academy	Voluntary aided
Diocese/District	Gloucester	Pupils on roll	238
Headteacher	Angharad Fitch		
Chair of Governors	Trevor Cooling		
Inspector	Allyson Taylor	No.	768