

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St. Mark's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Aylesbury Road,
Bromley,
Kent
BR2 0QR

Diocese: Rochester

Local authority: Bromley

Dates of inspection: 9th & 10th October 2007

School's unique reference number: 101648

Headteacher: Mrs Kate Owbridge

Inspector's name and number: Ms Jan Thompson N.S.92

School context

St. Mark's is a Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School in Bromley. Founded in 1871, the school moved to its present site in the 1980s and has had a number of extensions so that it now accommodates its 399 pupils very well. The admissions policy gives preference to families living in the local parish and consequently very few pupils are admitted because of their church background. Less than 20% of pupils are from regular worshipping Church families. About 75% of pupils are White British, with an increasing number of pupils from a variety of other ethnic backgrounds in the last five years, so that there is now a higher than average number of pupils whose first language is not English. This is a very successful school with very high standards and was judged by Ofsted to be good with outstanding features. The previous headteacher had been at the school for 19 years and was very highly regarded. The current headteacher is new this term.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Mark's as a Church of England school are good

St. Mark's Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School in Bromley is a good Church school with a particularly strong emphasis on moral guidance.

Established strengths

- The all-pervading Christian ethos of the school, with its very strong emphasis on moral and social education.
- The excellent relationship with the parish church, whose incumbent is the chair of governors.

Focus for development

- Teachers should make more use of the national level descriptions in Religious Education (RE) to raise standards.
- Relevant documentation needs revising for clarification and a greater emphasis on Christianity to accurately reflect the strong Christian character of the school.
- Pupils should be involved in evaluating worship and RE.
- Pupils should not be withdrawn from Collective Worship for booster classes. (This is a statutory requirement.)

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners

St. Mark's is a school firmly based on Christian values. Its friendly, welcoming ethos results in pupils who are happy and out-going. Pupils are taught that they are special because God loves them. They learn to care for each other, showing extra concern for any with special needs. The strong religious faith of many adults in the school and the underlying prayer-life of the school helped everyone to cope recently when a young pupil died. Relationships at all levels are very good and supportive. Pupils behave excellently and everyone is polite and

considerate. Worship and Religious Education make a particularly strong contribution to pupils' moral development with much teaching about right and wrong, often related to Biblical teaching. A Christian lunchtime 'JAM' club ('Jesus and Me'), run by teachers, attracts about thirty pupils a week; and pupils make good use of a new memorial garden for quiet times. Parents were impressed with the new headteacher's first letter to them that ended with "God bless you and your family."

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is important in the life of the school, as seen in its careful planning and preparation and the positive attitude of staff towards school worship. This results in interesting acts of worship where pupils learn a lot and are inspired to lead good lives. All teachers attend, but unfortunately some pupils are withdrawn for booster lessons with teaching assistants, which inevitably limits its impact and goes against statutory requirements. All acts of worship are Christian, within an Anglican framework that starts with responses and the Gloria and finishes with the Lord's Prayer. Teaching is usually linked with Bible passages. This gives pupils a good grounding in Anglican worship. Pupils like the use of the candle in worship and particularly appreciate their four festivals held in the Church because of the beautiful setting compared to the plain school halls. Singing plays a particularly important part in school worship and makes an impact on pupils by contributing to the theme of the worship. Pupils now have a 'Prayer Candle Assembly' once a month, to which they are invited to bring their own prayers. They like the fact that this encourages them to think of others and personalises the prayers used in Collective Worship. It is now so popular that only a selection of prayers can be read out and the school needs to develop a prayer board to display all of them.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

Pupils generally enjoy their RE lessons and value learning new information, particularly about other religions. They work hard and respond well to the lessons, which are well prepared. However the issues identified in the last inspection are still there. Although the school has adopted the national level descriptions on the two attainment targets for RE, these are not yet being used well enough in lesson planning. Consequently, pupils are generally attaining standards at or below national expectations and certainly not as good as they are attaining in the core subjects by the time they leave primary school. Also, the two sides of RE tend to be dealt with separately with the result that pupils are either doing religious studies or personal development, without always connecting the two. A scheme of work is currently being prepared to meet some of these criticisms. Teaching about Christianity is rightly given priority, but pupils have a very scant knowledge of other religions apart from Judaism. This means that they are not well prepared for RE in most Bromley secondary schools.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good

The new head teacher is a committed Christian who worships at a local church. This and her prior experience in leading a Church school have given her good ideas to develop aspects of this school. She also has the advantage of inheriting a school with a strong tradition of genuine Christian leadership and staff support. The governing body is fully behind the school as a Church school and is ably led by the incumbent. However, the prospectus lacks clarity about the importance of the school's Christian character and the policy statements for worship and RE are not sufficiently informative. The self evaluation process has been well done, with thorough attention to the toolkit suggestions; but it has not yet been adequately shared with pupils and parents. Some development has taken place as a result of the last inspection, four years ago, but many issues with RE still remain. Also, the Governing Body does not have a link governor for Collective Worship, for which it is responsible. Links between the school and St. Mark's Church continue to go from strength to strength. A recent very effective development is the linking of a 'Church Friend' with each class for practical and prayer support. A new school service held in the church for Reception pupils and their families is also proving a popular way of introducing them to the local church.