

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mark's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School,
Albert Road,
South Norwood,
London,
SE25 4JD

Diocese: Southwark

School's Unique reference number: 101789

Date of inspection: 1 and 3 April 2008

Date of last inspection: October 2003

Headteacher: Mr Peter Burton

Inspector's name with National Society inspector's number: The Rev'd. Richard Peers (125)

School context

St Mark's is an average sized primary school in south London. Most pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, principally African and Afro-Caribbean. Less than the national average of children have English as an additional language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than average. Most pupils come from families that are actively involved in Christian churches although few from Anglican families.

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

St Mark's is a very happy school drawing on a well established Christian culture and in which an atmosphere of calm and purposeful learning pervades every room. Its values are built on a deep sense of security and belonging which fosters great self-confidence in pupils and adults. This is a school in which individuals are valued as created in the image of God and success is celebrated.

Established strengths

- the Christian leadership of the head and deputy headteacher
- the links with the parish church
- the place of prayer in the day to day life of the school

Focus for development

- to develop pupils' familiarity with the Anglican tradition and particularly the use of symbol and ritual to give pupils a sense of the presence of God in beauty
- to make cross-curricular links with RE and Worship and relate these to their own faith
- to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to get to know and understand people of a variety of faiths

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

St Mark's is a school that its pupils are proud of. They are happy, feel safe and have a strong sense of belonging. Pupils rightly believe that they are treated as important because of the Christian faith of their headteacher and the commitment of all staff to the Christian account of creation of each person in God's image. This is an inclusive school in which pupils of all abilities do well and are valued. Although the school is successful at meeting the needs of pupils pastorally as part of its Christian mission, it is still having to work hard to meet the academic needs of pupils more effectively. Pupils say that they like the way their work is celebrated by being used very effectively in displays around the school and they enjoy looking at each other's work. They also like having the parish church as part of the school site and they draw attention to the original school building which one pupil describes as 'nestling' into the church. Pupils know that the church provided the school with its building and land and they are glad of this long tradition. Pupils know people in the neighbourhood who attended the school and it gives them a sense of belonging and continuity. The school community is based on good role models which reflect the Christian values

of the school. Pupils say that they would like to be like their teachers and the other adults who care for them and visit them. They know that they can go to adults when they are upset in any way and this contributes to their sense of self-worth and independence. They are calm, courteous and confident when speaking to visitors and are very happy to be involved in guiding and welcoming visitors. Standards in RE are good and pupils enjoy learning about the Bible. They are less confident in speaking about people of other faiths and say that they do not know many people who are not Christians. They can describe a few facts that they know about other religions but cannot say anything about how they can learn from other faiths in a way that would enrich their own lives. Pupils are not very able to make links between their faith and other areas of the curriculum. The Deputy headteacher has recognised this in her first term and is eager to address this important issue.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils really enjoy worship and they recognise that it is a fundamental part of the school day. Worship is unself-conscious and feels very natural. Pupils speak very confidently about prayer and its importance as a way of 'making friends with God'. Prayer punctuates the school day and pupils think it is important that they say thank you to God before they eat and pray together again before they go home. Pupils are not able to say where they would go to if they wanted intercession for a particular need and although they think the prayer corners in each room are important they can't say why or in what way they make or could make use of them. There is a cross in the hall which is intended to act as a focus for worship but it is very high up and none of the children spoken to knew it was there. Worship is well planned and all members of staff contribute to leading worship and do so very well. One very good act of worship involved pupils in demonstrating the importance of working together and linked this very effectively with St Paul's teaching on the parts of the body. Another very good act of worship was in the church and very well led by the vicar. Pupils feel very confident and at ease in church and participated to a very high standard in drama and prayers. Pupils particularly enjoy singing and join in well. They say that singing makes them 'feel good' and 'like we all belong together'. Pupils enjoy the range of visitors who speak to them about the Christian faith and really value the variety, energy and enthusiasm they bring. Very good use is made of the parish church and pupils enjoy visiting it for worship. However, pupils are not able to explain much about Anglican worship or what might happen in the church on Sundays. They not able to explain liturgical colours or the liturgical years and could not respond to basic liturgical formulas and greetings.

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

The headteacher is clearly motivated by his Christian faith and pupils, staff, governors and parents recognise him to be a person of considerable integrity and depth. They value his calm leadership and approachable manner. The deputy headteacher is also the Worship and RE Co-ordinator. She has an exceptionally good understanding of how these areas can contribute to the life of the school and how to develop the school's specifically Anglican ethos. Governors have given much time over a number of years to discussing and developing the school's Christian distinctiveness. They have participated in self-evaluation of this and recognise the school's strengths and weaknesses. The leadership is aware of the areas which need developing and have begun to address them. Links with the parish church are very good. Pupils know who their vicar is and that it is his role to pray for them and to talk to them about God and Jesus. They know that he cares very much for them and believe that he is someone they could talk to in need. Pupils know that they are prayed for each Sunday in church and that other members of the congregation take an interest in them. Pupils highlighted joint events such as fairs and fund-raising as some of the ways that the school and the church work together as one pupil said 'like a team.'