

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Southam Road

Banbury

OX16 2EG

Diocese of Oxford

Local Authority: Oxfordshire

Date of inspection: 28 April 2008

Date of last inspection: June 2004

School's Unique reference number: 123094

Name of Headteacher: Mr Stephen Wass

Inspector's name and NS inspector's number: Mari Powell 143

Context

The school, which is situated in the centre of Banbury, is proud of its Christian heritage as a Bluecoat Charity School. The school population now reflects the cultural and faith diversity of the local community.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's as a Church of England school are satisfactory

The school leaders have established a clear set of aims reflecting a core purpose which is to recognise and promote the distinctiveness and self-esteem of all pupils. The Christian foundation, together with the respect shown for the multi-faith elements of the community, provide an important basis for the harmony which pervades the daily activities of the school.

Established strengths

- The headteacher's well articulated vision for the spiritual, moral social and cultural development of the children.
- The link with the local church and partnership with the priest in charge which enrich children's experiences of worship.
- The inclusiveness of the school's approach to other faith and community groups.

Focus for development

- Provide a comprehensive, written plan for worship. Ensure that it is evaluated and assess its impact on the consistency and quality of class based worship.
- Encourage governors to undertake some focussed, incisive monitoring and evaluation of worship to stimulate dialogue and assess the consistency of the impact on children's overall experiences of worship.

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

The school has a warm, welcoming approach which impacts very positively on the personal growth of the children. Diverse groups of children bond very well, are kind and considerate towards each other and in particular, have a good awareness of how to support each other in difficult times. Parents who were spoken to, felt this to be a very significant feature and recognised that it is a result of the impact of the school's well conceived and implemented system of values. The school staff encourage and support the children to undertake responsibilities and exercise initiative both through activities within the school and others which they share with the local community. Some older pupils excitedly discussed arrangements for participation in a dance activity during the May celebrations. Others proudly described the fact that their voices had been heard in planning the attractive outdoor area. Children behave very well and show gratitude for the exciting activities planned for them as well as the respect that they feel for their teachers. Many features of the immediate environment such as the gardens, natural sculptures and also the imaginative work displayed inside school, provide pupils with material for reflection. They also serve to celebrate their achievements. The children benefit spiritually and socially from the very active relationship the school has forged with St. Mary's church. The church is a source of considerable enrichment for learning in religious education and also provides good opportunities for joint activities which boost

the pupils' confidence, for example, to perform before an audience. An additional, effective aspect of the school's provision for developing spiritual awareness is the use of the arts such as music and the creative arts to promote spiritual awareness.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

The long standing support provided by the priest in charge at St Mary's, together with the headteacher's approach to worship are good features of acts of whole school worship. A variety of approaches are used effectively and engage the pupils' interest and involvement. The presence of God is felt as worship leaders are skilful at creating an atmosphere of reverence and calm as pupils enter the hall. The singing of a Taizé chant by the worship leader was a very effective introduction to one whole school act of worship. Pupils listen well and know how to respond appropriately to prayer. They say that when the Bible is read to illustrate a theme, they are reminded of what they have learned during lessons in religious education. For instance a reading about the Ascension was linked immediately to discussion of events before and during Easter. The children appreciate that features of the church, such as the stained glass windows illustrate the parables. Some aspects of whole school worship, such as the use of candles and opportunities to reflect are features of class worship. However, the overall framework for planning requires review and greater focus to ensure that, where appropriate, the theme of whole school worship has greater impact on class based worship. Planning for collective worship overall is not sufficiently coherent to ensure that where possible and appropriate, links are drawn between the themes of whole school worship and what occurs in class based worship. Opportunities for reflection are provided during "circle time" but monitoring and evaluation procedures are not yet sufficiently rigorous to ensure quality or consistency within a church school.

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

The headteacher, senior staff and governing body have appropriately reviewed the aims of the school and taken account of the views of its partners such as parents. As a result, the school is gaining in confidence to ensure that the distinctive nature of a church school is recognised and respected. The mission statement clearly states that the "values and principles" that underpin the activities of the school are consistent with the school's Christian foundation and also seek to be inclusive. The school's purpose is to "develop knowledge and respect for Christian values and respect for and understanding of the cultures, religions and ways of life of a multicultural community". The school's leaders and governing body who are deeply committed to providing a good quality of educational experiences for the children, recognise that monitoring and evaluation of distinctive activities such as worship across the school are not yet rigorous enough to ensure that the school's practice fully and consistently reflects its aims. Some good models already exist which have the potential to ensure consistent provision across the school. Activities undertaken in partnership with the church community, the school's involvement with a local interfaith group, together with the support of the local centre for religious education are all features which have the potential for raising the profile of the school and its confidence in proclaiming its Christian vision within the community consistent with the recent review of aims undertaken with the leadership and commitment of the headteacher and governors.