

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided School, Kettering

Fuller Street
Kettering
Northamptonshire
NN16 0JH

Diocese: Peterborough

Local authority: Northamptonshire
Date of inspection: 5th March 2008
Date of last inspection: January 2004
School's unique reference number: 122024
Headteacher: Mr Jonathan Gardiner
Inspector's name and number: Michael Asquith (317)

School context

St Mary's Primary School is built near to the church of St Mary on the north east of Kettering. About three quarters of the pupils are of white British heritage, with the remainder being from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Whilst some pupils attend the school as it is the local school, many come from further away because of the strong Christian ethos of the school.

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

The strong leadership of the headteacher and strong, effective, links with the local church underpin this voluntary aided school. Pupils are valued as individuals, their opinions sought and acted upon. The school is at the heart of the local community, taking an active role within the town of Kettering, yet remembering it is also a part of the international community.

Established strengths

- Care of each individual person underpinned by a strong Christian ethos
- Leadership of the headteacher and deputy head committed to the Christian ethos
- Links with both the local church and churches across the town
- Active School Council working for the school and in the community

Focus for development

- Develop further the role of the governing body in the monitoring and evaluation of the school, as an Anglican school, in order to more fully appreciate the impact of the school
- Increase the "pace" of religious education lessons to bring them in line with other subjects
- Embed the monitoring and evaluation of religious education lessons so as to be able to evaluate the impact through assessment and tracking of pupils.
- Explore the receiving of communion, prior to Confirmation, for the older Key Stage 2 pupils

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

There is a strong Christian ethos within the school in which every child matters and is given the opportunity to voice their opinions. All members of the school community are encouraged to follow the example of Jesus in their relationships with others both in school and beyond. The school council is very pro-active. They have considered aspects of the Every Child Matters initiative and, for example, have banned the eating of crisps at break-time so as to reinforce a healthy lifestyle. They have also taken a lead in the consultation with headteachers from other schools in designing the equipment available in the playground and have worked with the local borough council in events like the town's Christmas lights switch-

on. Together with the introduction of “play buddies” and the support of many of the staff, the school council is looking to eradicate bullying from the school. Learners feel valued and special, cared for, both physically and spiritually, “I look forward to coming to school” said a young pupil. The “Worry Box” is regularly checked by a member of the school council who look to talk and reassure any pupil who has concerns. There is a deep level of care and concern for every individual, whether pupil, member of staff or guest. The wide cultural mix of pupils contributes to the ethos of the school by bringing a greater variety of cultural backgrounds, and their experiences are drawn upon in lessons, for example in a key stage 1 religious education lesson pupils who had lived in other countries were encouraged to share what happened in their country at a wedding. “St. Mary’s school family includes everybody” claimed a parent. There are strong links with St. Mary’s church with a fortnightly Mass being celebrated at the school. The school recently ran their own “Fan the Flame” mission alongside that of the parish church. The school contributes to the church magazine and reports each year to the annual parochial church meeting. The good clear religious displays around the school; similar crosses in all classrooms together with a large painting of the cross from Taize in the school hall remind everybody of the school’s status as a church school and show understanding of the importance of faith within people’s lives. Pupils willingly support others across the world, for example in a project adopted by the school council, over £1200 has been raised for an orphanage in Kwamazulu. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. The school recently achieved first prize nationally in the British Telecom award for communication within the community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Collective worship forms a central part within the life of the school and is based around the Values for Life and the Social Emotional Active Learning programmes as well as a variety of visitors from some of the churches of Anglican and other denominations across Kettering. Pupils take an active part by doing the readings, the prayers and serving at the long established, fortnightly mass celebrated in the school. Pupils understand what happens during this service, and why it happens, though as yet there is no opportunity for them to receive communion. Year 6 pupils have written their own bidding prayers. This celebration enables an understanding of Anglican practices and pupils are able to value this for themselves. In other acts of collective worship pupils contribute by reading, saying their own prayers, playing recorders to accompany or sing the hymns. Collective worship has an impact, for example pupils could remember both the content and the message from the assembly held three weeks before the inspection on St Valentine’s day, but as yet there is no monitoring or evaluation of collective worship by staff, pupils or governors. The festivals of other faiths are acknowledged and pupils feel affirmed within their own faith. All collective worship takes place within the main hall, and although pupils arrive in an orderly manner, they have to shuffle up in order to enable everybody to fit into the cramped hall. Strong messages, underpinned by the school’s Christian values are communicated during these times, though the effect is diluted due to the length of the worship time, for example there were three or four different avenues to the final message in both acts of worship observed, any one of which would have sufficed. IT is used imaginatively. Though a candle is used for very specific times, currently there is no focal point, nor time given for quiet reflection except when a prayer is being said, in most times of worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

Pupils enjoy their religious education lessons and learn from them, though often they are not challenged enough because the pace of the lesson is slow. From the four lessons observed and looking at pupils’ work, standards are broadly in line with other subjects within the school. Differentiated tasks are given though all too often these are based upon competency in literacy rather than in religious understanding. Pupils are encouraged to question and search and often reveal deep spiritual insights. They are given opportunities to empathise by responding to situations. Pupils’ own experiences and those of today’s world contribute to the content of the lessons. IT is used appropriately so as to increase the experiences for pupils. Pupils show an appropriate understanding of religious beliefs, “Jesus is a very important person” said a foundation stage pupil. Teachers’ subject knowledge is good. There is good medium-term planning though the newly appointed religious education co-ordinator, who is very keen to develop the subject further, is concerned that pupils may have previously missed out studying certain topics due to the classing arrangements within the school;

currently she is working on the curriculum plan to ensure this does not happen. Although she has begun to monitor and evaluate lessons, their planning and the work produced, this has yet to be embedded and so impact has not been evaluated.

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

The strong, strategic, leadership of the headteacher, shared with the deputy and supported by the staff at the school ensures that Christian values underpin the life of the school, giving a clear Christian vision for the school. This vision is made clear within the school's documentation, including the aims of the school, which are displayed in the school, school policies and in the instrument of governance. Parents appreciate the strength of this vision and the distinctive yet highly inclusive nature of the school. They enjoy the opportunity to worship alongside the pupils in the end of term services held in St Mary's church. Parents are always welcome at the school, and the school looks to provide support for them when necessary. Governors are available to talk with parents at the "Monday parents café." Children and parents are welcomed each day at the school's gate by a staff governor. The spiritual leadership of the headteacher, appreciated by the governors, is seen as a model to all members of St Mary's school family. The governing body value the spiritual depth within the life of the school. Governors act as a critical friend to the school but have only very recently begun their work of monitoring and evaluating the school as a church school and so are not always aware of the impact the school is having, though they have received regular reports from the headteacher upon this at their meetings. The school's evaluation of itself, as a church school, is secure though neither foundation governors, nor other governors, contributed to the completion of this self-evaluation. Strong support from the local church and other Christians within the area helps to promote the Christian vision of the school. The pupils also take their part in the leadership of the school; the elected school council has "... made a lot of changes and improved our school" said one pupil.