

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

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

Redinnick Place,
Penzance,
Cornwall,
TR18 4HP.

Diocese: Truro

Local authority: Cornwall

Date of inspection: 23rd November 2007

Date of last inspection: the 4th & 5th November 2003

School's unique reference number: 111998

Headteacher: Mrs Mary Johnston

Inspector's name and number: Mrs. Jenny Pestrige (153)

School context

The school is housed in a Victorian building in the centre of Penzance. Many of the 131 learners come from families which are experiencing challenging circumstances. The number of learners with special educational needs or disabilities is above average. There is a high degree of mobility amongst the learners and their families.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The care and support offered by the school to learners and their families is a reflection of the aim, to provide education, "within a school based on the example of Jesus in the Gospels." The partnership between the church and the school is enriching the learners' experience of the Christian faith. The school is characterised by challenge and compassion. Within this context, teachers are enabling learners to reach their potential.

Established strengths

- The leadership of the Headteacher in providing a role model of 'gospel care' and support to learners and their families, supported by a committed staff team.
- The developments in religious education led by the coordinator, and the quality of teaching.
- The dynamic contributions made to the Christian ethos of the school by the Parish Priest and the foundation governors.

Focus for development

- Re-word the collective worship policy, to reflect the school's current practice of wholly Christian worship.

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

"The school feels like a village school in the town." This statement by a foundation governor describes the close community atmosphere in the school. The learners are happy, because of the high and consistent expectations of all staff. This means that standards of behaviour are outstanding. One learner said, "It's relaxed here, nobody is being shouted at." Christian values are apparent in relationships amongst staff, and as a result, they provide outstanding

role models for learners. There is an emphasis on mutual respect and humility. This is evident in the way that learners treat each other, and listen to each other's views. The opinions and beliefs of learners of other faiths are treated with sensitivity and respect. The quality of religious education displays is outstanding. For example, a frieze made by learners illustrating the Patriarchs, enables learners to respond to the key learning objectives in the Biblical stories. The award winning CD-ROM on the same theme is an example of the impact of these texts. The school puts into practice the Gospel emphasis on caring for others, by a range of charity support. This means that learners are developing a sense of social responsibility, for local and global issues. Both religious education and collective worship provide outstanding opportunities for spiritual awareness. This means that learners are experiencing the importance of the life of the church as a means of expressing faith. Maximum use is made of the school environment to encourage spiritual development. Learners are proud of the secret garden, which is being created in the corner of the playground. This provides an opportunity for reflection, in the midst of a built up area. Outstanding teaching in the three lessons observed meant that learners were given opportunities to think about their feelings. As a result, learners are developing confidence in their ability to talk about spiritual and emotional concepts.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

The school gives a high priority to collective worship. This is because there is a recognition of the wider significance of these occasions for learners. One Foundation governor stated that, "this is the only Christian experience many children here will have." The school bases the rolling programme of themes around the Values Pack, produced by three Dioceses. These are linked to the SEAL material, (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) in an effective way. Collective worship is seen as a major opportunity to express the Christian character of the school. A special feature of worship in the school is the twice-termly service of the Eucharist. This is outstanding practice. The support given by the Church means that learners are receiving outstanding experiences of Anglican worship. Foundation governors regularly attend and monitor collective worship, and are proud of the behaviour of learners on these occasions. Their support is an example of the successful church/school partnership. Learners' enjoy the weekly visits of the Parish Priest to lead collective worship. Parents speak warmly of his presence in the school and learners refer to the talks and themes in daily worship to their parents. Their knowledge of key Christian beliefs, festivals and teaching is outstanding. A Muslim child also attends worship. She feels that she is respected, which is a reflection of the school's values in action. One learner said that it was important to respect others, "because Jesus said we should care for everybody." In the act of worship observed, the table, special cloth, crucifix and the Bible, helped to focus the attention of learners. Listening to different musical versions of 'Amazing Grace,' highlighted the theme of the story of John Newton. The sense of the hall as a special place is emphasised by several religious education displays and the school prayer. Learners are therefore reminded of the Church of England foundation of the school. A different learner each day is given the opportunity to write a comment on the worship. This is an example of best practice. However, learners are not currently involved in the overall planning of worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

Standards in religious education are outstanding. This is because of the quality of teaching, and of the quality of the coordination and planning. The school's implementation of the Agreed Syllabus is well managed and effective. Learners have an outstanding knowledge and understanding of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Sikhism. They understand the significance of ancient religious tradition for believers. The recent emphasis on providing a creative curriculum is resulting in exciting, 'themed' weeks. This is being supplemented by identifying cross-curricular opportunities to focus on religious education. For example, in literacy, when writing for different audiences, learners wrote a guidebook for a Sikh Temple. There are various other initiatives in religious education, such as assessment, target setting,

thinking skills and an extensive portfolio of work. All of these initiatives are best practice. As a result, learners are making outstanding progress, in both Key Stages. Teachers are using a wide range of creative teaching strategies. This means that learners are being given a variety of ways in which to learn. They particularly enjoy using information and communication technology (ICT) in religious education. For example, in Key Stage 2, learners research key questions regarding St Nicholas. All learners were enthusiastic and behaviour was outstanding, because of detailed preparation and planning. In another lesson, role-play on the main features of infant baptism meant that learners could think about the feelings of the parents. These opportunities also mean that learners are being given outstanding opportunities for spiritual development.

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

The Headteacher is providing outstanding leadership and management of the school. As a result, Christian beliefs and principles are at the heart of the school. The atmosphere amongst all the staff is one of humility. This is resulting in a calm, secure atmosphere, where, "prayer and worship are real educational experiences." This means that the learners feel safe, and are enabled to make progress. The Headteacher encourages all staff to develop their leadership skills. This means that the school has an effective team identity. The school's partnership with the Parish Priest is making a unique and dynamic impact on the staff, governors, parents and learners. His chaplaincy ministry amongst the whole school community is welcomed. As a result, there is an awareness of the radical challenge of the Gospel. His summary that "this is a school of second chances", is exemplified in the whole life of the school. The foundation governors are playing a major role in supporting the school's Christian ethos. This underpins the initiatives led by the Headteacher. There are excellent links with the community, for example the private nursery, which is accommodated in the school. The close proximity of the nursery means that young children have an early experience of collective worship. This is outstanding practice.

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