

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Uttoxeter,
Staffordshire.
ST14 7LX

Diocese: Lichfield

LA: Staffordshire

Date of inspection: 26/09/07

Date of last inspection: 6/02/03

School's Unique reference number: 124344

Name of Headteacher: Jeni Hammersley

Inspector's name & National Society number: R Mary Gale 337

Context

St Mary's VA First school is situated in the market town of Uttoxeter. The school serves a mixed community of private housing and council properties. It also admits pupils from the wider community. There are 184 pupils on role. The present vicar has been in post for only 5 days.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's CE (VA) First School as a church school are satisfactory.

St Mary's CE (VA) First school is re-establishing its distinctiveness as a faith school following a period of change. The underlying Christian values have a good impact on all learners, while the level of distinctiveness as a church school is less effective. The capacity to improve rapidly is now evident as the partnership between school and the local church community becomes a main focus of school development. The school has high expectations of all its staff and pupils, resulting in motivated and happy pupils.

Established strengths

- Positive adult and pupil relationships and attitudes that abound in this happy school, where pupils feel valued safe, secure and eager to learn.
- Consistent praise and reward schemes which enable pupils to feel proud of their achievements and motivate them to aim high.
- Enthusiasm of the Religious Education and Worship co-ordinators in promoting the Christian Ethos of the school
- Impact of the school council in giving the pupil "voice" recognition and opportunity to affect decision-making in the school community

Focus for development

- Provide training for staff and governors, with the help of the diocese, on making the Christian nature of the school more distinctive.
- Strengthen the partnership between the school, foundation governors and the local church.
- Review the school brochure and all school policies, and in particular the spiritual policy to ensure sufficient attention is given to the distinctive Christian nature of the school.
- Establish worship areas in all classrooms to ensure they provide opportunities for the needs of the pupils.

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

The schools' self evaluation supports the statement that Christian values make a satisfactory impact on personal development and learning outcomes. The quality education provided across the curriculum affirms these implicit values. Teachers and support staff are motivated in seeking high standards in everything that is done for the pupils. There is only passing reference to Christian distinctiveness in school documentation in particular the school has no spiritual policy even though it is evident that this is a spiritual school, as pupils respond appropriately to the awe and wonder of their world, for example a Key Stage 1 pupil said "*the baby is precious and belongs in our school family; I love the baby*". Christian distinctiveness is also limited in the classroom environment. Pupils take pride in their school and are beginning to demonstrate an understanding of its Christian and Anglican traditions. Personal and academic expectations are founded on a good understanding of pupils' needs and strengths. Pupils are happy and communicative; they have many opportunities to contribute to school life and speak enthusiastically about the effectiveness of the school council. They are able to state and explain through concrete examples the school motto "Learning to love, loving to learn", but were unclear about the purpose of the mission and ethos statements, which are on display in many areas of the school. The concept of forgiveness and reconciliation is central to behaviour management, which focuses on developing the child. The result is a culture of praise and reward throughout the school. Pupils are confident that if they are in any difficulty they will be listened to and cared for. Parents speak of the school as being happy and secure where their children are respected. Parents feel they are given sufficient time with the head teacher and the staff when raising concerns, which are then addressed appropriately. Achievements are recognised at the weekly celebration worship resulting in all pupils feeling valued collectively and as individuals. The good record of charitable giving, both locally and globally results in learners being aware of the valuable contribution they make to others less fortunate than themselves.

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

Worship forms an integral part of school life because it is inclusive and imaginatively planned and presented. The family atmosphere generated by being together is a powerful symbol of belonging, which permeates into the playground and classrooms so that pupils feel at ease with themselves and each other. They talk enthusiastically about belonging to God's family. Pupils talk positively about their experience of whole school worship; a Key Stage 1 child commented after taking part in worship, "*we are good at helping, just like Jesus, we belong in his family*". The familiarity of the pupils with the school prayer and the Lord's prayer has a positive impact on their lives. The Head teacher, who is the worship co-ordinator, is keen to further develop the prayer life of pupils; a prayer tree has been created in the main entrance to support this aim. Through careful prompting and support the pupils demonstrate a reflective attitude to worship. They look forward to worship and enjoy taking part. In addition creative and enthusiastic leadership of worship has resulted in an imaginative use of visual aids and music where pupils respond with enjoyment, especially when this involvement includes drama and prayer.

In order to provide additional opportunities for increased age-appropriate pupil contribution to worship, quiet areas and worship areas in classrooms need now to be created. The celebration of some major festivals of the church year at the parish church by focus groups of pupils is enabling the school and church community to enhance the learners' understanding of Anglican traditions. Despite the effective use of the Collective worship policy the monitoring and evaluation process by Governors has yet to be formalised so that its impact on the quality of worship has yet to be realised.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Religious Education is recognised by the large majority of learners and stakeholders as an essential component of the whole school curriculum. The subject is well resourced. All staff benefit from a clear RE policy and newly developed scheme of work. The teaching and learning observed in a year two class was good with an effective use of the interactive white board and talking partners to stimulate thinking at all levels. An additional example of interactive learning was seen in discussion with year two children on changes. They commented that Zaccaeus was able to change his life for the better after learning about how to lead his life from Jesus. When questioned about Christian symbols they answered *'the cross is where Jesus died for our sins'*. The differentiated tasks presented result in pupils working willingly and responding readily with enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Pupils across the age groups can re-call (with some prompting for the younger pupils) the facts of major Christian festivals. Appropriate consideration is given to the learning of different faiths. This inspection supports the schools' self- assessment that the majority of pupils reach as high or better standards in RE when compared to standards in other core subjects for their Key Stage. However, although the children are able to talk about their religious learning experiences with a degree of confidence they are sometimes unable to use explicit religious vocabulary to label Anglican aspects of the church.

It is recognised in the self evaluation document that there is currently a lack of effective monitoring of teaching by leaders in Religious Education, this needs to be developed in order to maximise pupil potential.

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

The school acknowledges through its self review process that due to changes in the organisation of the parish, it is now having to re-develop its partnership with Foundation Governors and the leaders of the local church. This aspect of the school was significantly stronger under the leadership of the previous incumbent who passed away. There are some positive pastoral links between the school and the parish. The newly appointed vicar of five days is reflecting on the role he will play in the Christian life of the school and his contribution is looked forward to with great anticipation by all learners and leaders. The strengthening of the partnership between the school, foundation governors and the local church leading to an enhanced awareness of the distinctive Christian character of the school has been identified by the school as one of the main priorities over the coming year.

At present the monitoring and self-evaluation roles of the Foundation Governors to evaluate the school as a church school are currently limited. The development of a shared Christian vision by the Head and her Deputy for the future of the school has resulted in increased staff involvement in this process. They have recently commenced implementing the new self-evaluation procedures that now form the major tool for school improvement in a Church school resulting in a shared ownership of priorities. The aim is to share this process more widely amongst stakeholders especially Foundation Governors in the future.

The quality of relationships between staff and pupils reflect the growing effectiveness of team management within the school. Parents speak positively of the school and appreciate the way in which the school seeks and values their views.