

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St. Mary's Walthamstow Voluntary Aided Primary School

The Drive
Walthamstow
London,
E17 3BN

Diocese: Chelmsford

LA: Walthamstow

Dates of inspection: March 4th, 2008

Date of last inspection: 4.7.2003

School's Unique reference number:103092

Acting Headteacher: Ms Beverley Hall

Inspector's name and number: Janet Dyson

School context

The school serves an ethnically diverse community. The proportion of pupils with a first language other than English is average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is above average. Although there has been some disruption in the leadership of the school in the last eighteen months an Acting Headteacher has been recently appointed.

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

Some aspects of its distinctive Christian character and collective worship are outstanding.

Established strengths

- The strong leadership and Christian vision of the Acting Headteacher
- The shared understanding of staff, pupils and governors of the Christian character of the school
- The central place given to reflective prayer in the school
- The positive attitudes of pupils to their school as a Christian school

Focus for development

- Establish an RE curriculum which meets Diocesan requirements
- Set clear learning objectives in RE which focus on *what* is to be learnt and *how*.
- Develop assessment against agreed, subject related criteria and provide constructive feedback to pupils to ensure that they know how well they have achieved in RE, and how to improve.
- Governors continue to develop their understanding of their strategic role in order to support the school most effectively.

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

The Christian character is strongly evident in all aspects of the school's life. Spiritual reflection, prayer and worship have a central place. All classrooms have a quiet area with a class prayer book. Pupils are invited to reflect and/or pray there and to make requests for prayer, which they do. The hall has a focal point for worship which includes an excellent display on the weekly themes, for example, photographs of pupils' parents to illustrate the theme of God as loving father/parent. Children's views of the school are extremely positive, reflecting Christian values. They feel valued, are treated with respect, feel secure, happy and confident, support others and show pride in their school. They describe how the school 'tries to include you,' saying, 'you don't feel left out or different here.' The School Council is active and pupils say, 'The children are actually helping to run the school.' Pupils who belong to

faiths or life stances other than Christianity feel included by the school: 'Some people here don't believe in God but that's OK.' (Key Stage 2 pupil) Pupils say they value opportunities to learn about the beliefs and experiences of others, summed up here by one pupil: 'It's good to learn about other people's beliefs because you need to be able to respect their religion as well as yours.' The school has a close and productive relationship with the local church community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship, plays a very important role in the life of the school. There is a strong focus on prayer. Grace is said before lunch, prayers are said at the end of the day and at the beginning and end of governing body meetings. The emphasis on reflective prayer is a strength of the school's provision. Time is given in assemblies for reflection and care is taken to create an atmosphere for worship. Pupils frequently respond to the invitation to write prayers and share them in assemblies. The worship co-ordinator keeps very careful records and monitors the quality and impact of assemblies to ensure that the quality of the experience is high. Feedback from pupils through school questionnaires and discussions during the inspection shows that they enjoy assemblies, particularly when they can be actively involved. They see them as focusing on worship and 'learning about God'; they enjoy singing, which they do well, and particularly enjoy the regular opportunities they have to plan and lead their own class assemblies. Very good use is made of visitors, including local clergy, to lead assemblies. All members of the school community attend assemblies and many parents come to the Friday celebration assemblies, showing that parents and staff strongly support the school as a worshipping community.

Religious Education is satisfactory

After a period without a clearly defined curriculum for RE progress is being made towards introducing a curriculum which meets Diocesan requirements. Achievement is in line with age related expectations. The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to good. Most pupils have a good understanding of the Christian faith, Bible stories and significant events of the Christian Year. Learning objectives often focus on what is to be *covered* rather than what is to be *learnt*, and *how* pupils will learn. Although there is some evidence of the principles of assessment for learning being applied in RE, assessment is under-developed. A stronger focus on effective assessment against agreed, subject related criteria and constructive feedback to pupils would ensure that they know how well they have achieved in RE, and how to improve. The many good quality displays show that RE is valued. Teachers often make relevant links with assembly themes in RE. Good features of lessons include good challenge, pace, high expectations and opportunities for pupils to engage in a variety of meaningful activities and tasks. Colourful paintings by Reception children showed understanding of the poppy as a symbol of remembrance. Year 3 pupils learning about genre in the Bible identified interesting similarities and difference when comparing a Psalm with a 'Rap' poem written by a pupil. Year 5 pupils explored the symbolism of the Last Supper through paintings and were pushed to think at a high level. These features of good practice are not consistently embedded across the school. Pupils speak positively about much of their experience of RE, often finding it interesting and enjoyable, although not when 'the work is too easy' or 'there's lots of writing and colouring in.'

The leadership and management as a church school are good.

The Acting Headteacher, supported by the governors and staff, provides strong and effective leadership and Christian vision. A well thought out Christian purpose for the school has been effectively communicated to staff, pupils and other stakeholders so that everyone is able to articulate it. Staff and governors describe the school as 'putting Christian values into practice', through approaches to behaviour management, for example. The governing body is developing an understanding of its strategic role, with evidence of improved communications and new energy. Foundation Governors have a good understanding of their role and have been

involved in a School Vision Survey which consulted all stakeholders about their views on ethos and school vision. There are good links with the Parish. The incumbent is seen as very proactive and a strong, positive influence. His leadership of a Liaison Group set up to rebuild and restore mutually supportive networks is viewed as a key factor in the school's recent improvements. The school values the strong and effective support given by the Diocese during the recent challenging period.

March, 2008, St. Mary's Walthamstow VA Primary School, The Drive, Walthamstow London, E17 3BN