

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Main Road
Woodham Ferrers
Chelmsford
CM3 8RJ

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex
Dates of inspection: 18.04.08
Date of last inspection: 23.05.03
School's unique reference number: 115176
Headteacher: Sue Grocock
Inspector's name and number: Lyn Hillier

School Context

St Mary's C of E Primary School is a smaller than average rural primary school. A number of children come from outside the designated catchment area. The school has a higher than average number of children with learning difficulties but there are no children with statements and none who have English as an additional language.

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

The school has some outstanding features. A Christian ethos permeates the whole life of the school. Relationships are excellent and staff strive to provide a curriculum which promotes the children's spiritual and personal development. Pupils demonstrate a good attitude to learning, behave well and are proud of their school.

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Established strengths

- An explicit Christian ethos which permeates school life
- Very positive relationships exist between all members of the community
- There is a strong emphasis on personal development underpinned by Christian values of care and support
- The headteacher and staff are committed to promoting Gospel values within the school

Focus for development

- Developing a strategy for pupils to be more actively involved in the evaluation of acts of worship on an ongoing and regular basis
- To offer more opportunities for free writing in RE to pupils in the two lower classes
- Review the self-evaluation toolkit

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

There is a strong Christian ethos which permeates every aspect of the school's life. Pupils flourish as individuals, feeling valued, special and supported in their learning. Pupils talk confidently about their work and the activities provided for them. They are proud of their school and they are able to articulate this confidently. The pupils feel safe and show considerable care and concern for others. The school's Christian character aids their personal development and also their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. This results in very good pupil behaviour. Very good relationships throughout the school support the learning that takes place. Children learn the values of love, respect and caring for others through the school's Christian ethos. Children are encouraged to think compassionately about those less fortunate than themselves and raise a great deal of money for charity. There is a good reward system in place and children's achievements are celebrated regularly.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils value the daily act of worship and see prayer as an important part of the school life; they appreciate the use of a prayer box as a way of bringing their concerns to the rest of the school. It is seen as central to underpinning its Christian nature. Pupils especially like it when they are actively involved in worship and the school offers good opportunities for the children to develop their own acts of worship as well as participating in those planned by adults. The worship is consistently Christian in nature. In the observed act of collective worship the children were attentive and eager to answer questions. There is a planned programme and pupils learn about Christian values through the Bible, religious traditions and relevant stories. The incumbent plays an active and important role in the life of the school and gives good support to the headteacher and staff. Staff know it is important to seek the pupil voice and have developed a questionnaire in order to do this. However, the school needs to develop a strategy in which to allow children and staff to comment more regularly so that the quality and content are monitored and evaluated in order to develop and improve the acts of worship.

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The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Religious education follows the Diocesan agreed syllabus and contributes well to the social, spiritual, moral and cultural development of pupils and the school's overall ethos. It is recognised as an important part of school life and the co-ordinator is committed to her role. Achievement by the end of Key Stage 2 is good. Pupils have a positive attitude to the subject as is evidenced by the pupil questionnaire. The children are able to talk about the other world religions they study and are developing understanding and respect for them. RE lessons provide the children with opportunities to discuss their beliefs and opinions but staff should consider ways in which they can broaden the range of written tasks offered to the children. There also needs to be more consistency when marking children's work so that the children can see ways in which to improve and develop their ideas.

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

The Headteacher and governors believe that the school's Christian character makes a significant impact on the lives of the children and the inspection confirmed this. The school is well led and the headteacher and her staff ensure that there is good provision for the pupils' personal and spiritual development. RE and worship are given status within the curriculum. There are strong relationships within the community and the school staff are very accessible to parents. The incumbent who is the chair of governors is very supportive of the school and is committed to her role as a governor and a pastoral leader. The school uses questionnaires to gather the views of parents and pupils and continually reflects on its work and seeks to improve its practice. The toolkit was completed some time ago and needs to be reviewed so that it truly reflects and celebrates all the good things which are happening at the school. This will also provide the basis for the school to continue and develop as a church school.

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