

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mark's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Eccles Row, Eccles, Kent ME20 7HS

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

Rochester

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Local authority

Kent

Date of inspection

27 February 2017

Date of last inspection

10 February 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Controlled 118618

Headteacher

Jonathan Bassett

Inspector's name and number

Anne Southgate 820

School context

St Mark's is smaller than the average sized primary school. Pupils are taught in mixed age classes. Most pupils live in the village of Eccles and are of white British heritage. Fewer pupils are eligible for the pupil premium than the national average. The proportion of pupils with special needs and disabilities is in line with the national average, although there are a few pupils with significant needs. There is no Anglican church in the village, but the school works with nearby Aylesford church, where there is a new vicar. Most pupils stay at the school from reception to year 6, and after a period of instability, the teaching staff is also stable.

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

- Honest and accurate self-evaluation leads to clear action plans and constant improvements as a church school.
- St Mark's is a highly inclusive school, where all pupils are valued and helped to achieve.
- Pupils and adults at the school reflect deeply on their lives and on the world around them, this leads to strong spiritual, moral social and cultural (SMSC) development.

Areas to improve

- Extend the leadership roles of pupils in worship in order to embed their sense of ownership of this aspect of the life of the school.
- Ensure that all stakeholders, including parents, fully understand the Christian teaching underpinning the school's Christian values.
- Challenge the more able to achieve higher standards in religious education (RE).

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

Clear Christian values of fellowship, trust and peace are well known and used by most stakeholders. These values are applied to both behaviour and to learning. Weekly awards are based on the values. This has resulted in improved achievement, which is now at or above the national average, and also in good behaviour. Leaders, including governors, base the school values on Christian teaching with ease. This addresses a development point from the previous denominational inspection. Pupils understand that the values are based on Jesus' behaviour and attitudes to others, but not all stakeholders understand the Christian basis to the values. Relationships in the school are mutually supportive. Teachers feel supported in their role and they are committed to constant improvement. As a result, pupils feel cared for and secure, so that they can learn effectively. Although there are only a few pupils who do not speak English as their first language or who have significant disabilities, they are very much an integral part of the school community. Pupils understand that all people are different, yet they are all equally valuable to God. This is aided by links with other schools with more diverse populations, and by visitors belonging to other world faiths. As a result, St Mark's is a highly inclusive and welcoming school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and therefore attendance is good.

Most pupils show real interest in RE. Teachers encourage pupils to think deeply by skilful questioning and they ensure that all pupils contribute. Pupils are able to apply their learning to their own lives. However, the most able are not always challenged sufficiently, so they do not achieve as highly as they could. St Mark's is a very reflective school. Pupils are helped to reflect on their lives and on events in the world around them. Time for reflection is built into the curriculum and some pupils choose to pray about the issues they discuss. This means that spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The school community gathers respectfully for worship each day. The environment for worship is enhanced with large 'stained glass' windows, created with the pupils, displaying biblical quotes. Pupils say that these help them to think about God. Pupils' prayers are written on leaves of the prayer tree in the school hall, and these are read by the worship leader. This means that pupils feel that their prayers are important, and they enjoy sharing them with the rest of the school. There is a range of worship leaders, including class teachers, the vicar and other Christian groups. As a result, pupils experience different worship styles. Worship themes often include the school's Christian values and they encourage pupils to apply the message to their own lives. This sometimes results in support for charities, such as Demelza House and a local charity for the homeless. Pupils also apply the worship themes to their daily lives in school, particularly in how they treat others. A range of Anglican traditions is used, such as changing the coloured cloth to reflect the seasons of the church's year. This, together with stories in worship, and displays around the school, ensures that pupils have a good understanding of the significance of Christian festivals and of key beliefs. Most pupils understand that Christians believe that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and they know about the main events in Jesus' life.

Pupils participate enthusiastically in worship and often volunteer to light the candle or to act out the stories told. The new worship group takes responsibility for aspects of worship, including choosing songs and the 'gather' sentences. This means that pupils have a growing sense of ownership of worship, and it addresses a development point from the previous denominational inspection. Pupils say that they enjoy the greater involvement that they have in worship, but they would like to extend this active involvement. As a result of their views, there are plans for each class to lead worship regularly, but this is not yet happening. Monitoring and evaluation of worship is, however, effective and considers the views of all who attend worship, including parents. For example, pupils felt it took too long to light tea-lights with matches and so now electric candles are used.

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

Leaders have a vision of a Christian school, driven by fellowship, trust and peace, where everyone is inspired to learn. The headteacher and governors are clear that these values are driving school improvement and that they result in an inclusive, welcoming school. Self-evaluation is impressively honest and accurate. The views of all stakeholders are gathered regularly and are used to inform action plans. This has helped the school to deepen its

Christian character. For example, monitoring identified that RE did not always help pupils to learn from religion. As a result, teachers discussed how they could improve this, and pupils can now apply what they learn to their own lives. The headteacher currently leads RE and worship. This ensures that these have a high priority in the school and that they are discussed regularly in staff meetings. This helps teachers to build their expertise and understanding, and to develop as future leaders of church schools. Statutory requirements for RE and worship are met. Effective partnerships exist with the diocese and with the local church, even though the church building is at a distance from the school. Parents are welcome visitors to the school and their views are taken seriously. The school works closely with other local church schools. The headteacher currently chairs the Medway Anglican Schools Headteachers' group. This group enables school leaders to share expertise and ideas in order to strengthen their schools' Christian character. Leaders are pro-active in pursuing ways to enhance the Christian character of the school still further by exploring ways of formalising their partnerships with other local schools.

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