



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Mark's (Voluntary Controlled) Church of England Primary School

Ramslye Road  
Tunbridge Wells  
Kent  
TN4 8LN

**Diocese: Rochester**

Local authority: Kent

Dates of inspection: 24 October 2014

Date of last inspection: 4 March 2011

School's unique reference number: 118613

Headteacher: Robin Dungate

Inspector's name and number: John Ross NS 476

#### School context

St Mark's is a smaller than average primary school. Due to its growing popularity it is being expanded to two forms of entry and significant new building is currently taking place. The headteacher took up post in September 2011. There have also been changes of staff at all levels since the last inspection. The majority of children are white British but with an increasing number speaking English as a second language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly higher than average. Only about 5% have an existing church connection on entry to the school.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mark's Church of England Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- This school has a very strong Christian ethos, based upon Christian values which are understood and acted upon by everyone
- Collective worship is inspiring and inclusive, reinforcing the school's Christian values and providing outstanding opportunities for spiritual development
- There are very strong partnerships with the local and wider community and especially with St Mark's Church
- Outstanding leadership at all levels ensures that all stakeholders work together in promoting the shared Christian vision and driving continuous improvement

#### Areas to improve

- Once the current building programme reaches completion, develop an outside reflective space, in order to provide further opportunities for spiritual development
- As the school grows, ensure that its Christian values and vision continue to be owned by everyone, in order that the school maintains its strong Christian character

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

The school's five Christian values of thankfulness, friendship, forgiveness, fellowship and trust are embedded in the life of the school. These values, introduced after extensive consultation with all stakeholders, underpin the Christian character of the school. This in turn has driven the academic achievement, personal development and wellbeing of everyone in the school. In the words of a governor, 'The school is on a rapid upward trend of improvement.' Gaps in achievement between different groups are closing. Attendance rates are rising. Relationships and behaviour are excellent and are based on Christian friendship, fellowship and trust. When there are disagreements, forgiveness and reconciliation play an important part. Pupils and staff are happy. One parent said that their child 'always leaves school with a smile on their face.' Pupils are confident, articulate and have a clear understanding of what makes their church school distinctive. A Year 1 pupil was able to name the five Christian values and explain each in considerable detail. Pupils can link these values to Christian, biblical teaching. Their knowledge of the Bible is extensive. Pastoral care is excellent. Vulnerable pupils are particularly well cared for. The Christian character of the school is proclaimed throughout the building. Attractive banners in the hall, reflection areas in every classroom and Christian displays throughout the school make an outstanding contribution to spiritual development. At the time of inspection, a substantial building programme was in progress. When this is complete, the school has exciting plans to develop an area of the outdoor environment as an area for prayer and reflection. There is a link with a school in Malawi. Pupils contribute to the shoebox appeal and write and receive letters to their link school, which promotes their understanding of and respect for diverse communities. A wide variety of sporting activities and clubs contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC). Pupils support various charities, showing care for the disadvantaged. Religious Education (RE) makes an excellent contribution to the Christian character of the school. Pupils are excited and challenged by RE. As RE co-ordinator, the headteacher has introduced comprehensive schemes of work, rigorous assessment procedures and has ensured that the subject has high status. Pupils can share their own faith and beliefs and make links between what they have learnt in RE with their own experience.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

This school is a worshipping community. Collective worship is central to its existence. Since the last inspection, a collective worship policy and comprehensive scheme has been put in place. This ensures that pupils know about key Christian festivals. The act of worship observed during the inspection had some excellent features and made a strong contribution to spiritual development. All pupils and adults present were engaged and enthusiastically joined in the singing and readily responded to questions. Pupils are clearly very familiar with different types of prayer such as the Grace, Anglican liturgical greetings and responses, Bible stories and Christian symbolism. A candle, lit by a pupil, an open Bible and a cross, placed on a table with an appropriate liturgically coloured cover, provided a focal point which was unmistakably Christian. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit for their age. Pupils in Year 6 are currently exploring the nature of the Holy Spirit in RE. Prayer holds an important place in the life of the school. As well as being used in formal acts of worship, prayers are said in the classroom during the day. Prayers in the prayer box are offered up weekly in collective worship. The vicar regularly leads worship, together with other local Anglican clergy and members of other churches. Special services are held at St Mark's Church. Visits to the church give further opportunities to become familiar with Anglican practice, for example the use of the font. All teaching staff attend and lead collective worship. A real strength is that members of the School Council lead collective worship weekly, using a clearly defined structure. As collective worship co-ordinator, the headteacher leads this area very effectively and ensures that high quality worship is delivered consistently.

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

Since his arrival in September 2011 the headteacher has driven a transformation in the Christian character of the school. He is strongly supported by senior and middle leaders, governors and clergy. At the time of the last inspection the school's Christian values were not clearly identified. Following wide consultation and discussion, a new set of Christian values was adopted. These are fully known and understood by everyone, including parents, staff and pupils. The school's distinctive Christian character features prominently in all relevant documentation and on the school's website. This too was an issue from the previous inspection. Another recommendation was the involvement of all stakeholders in exploring the school's fundamental Christian values and vision. This also has been comprehensively and successfully addressed, through questionnaires for parents and pupils and a training day for governors and staff. All issues for development arising from the last inspection have now become real strengths. The renewed Christian vision has, in turn, driven up standards of achievement. Evaluation and strategic planning of the school are strong because all stakeholders are now fully involved. There are many opportunities for preparing future leaders of church schools. The deputy headteacher works closely with the headteacher. The school supports a teacher who is studying for a certificate in RE. Another teacher is shortly to take up a senior post in another church school. Partnerships are very strong. Parents are very positive about the school and its Christian character. There are very close links with St Mark's Church. The regular St Mark's at School or 'SM@SCh' service attracts families with no previous church connection. The vicar is a regular visitor in school and another church staff member is responsible for links between school and church. Support from the diocese is strong. There is an annual trip to Rochester Cathedral for Year 6. There are strong links with other local schools. As part of community outreach, the choir regularly goes out to sing in local care homes. Governors provide the right balance of challenge and support and are regular visitors in school. Statutory requirements for collective worship are met. The school is rapidly becoming more popular, drawing families from a wider area than previously. The school will eventually double in size. Leaders are well aware of the new challenges that this brings and they are determined that the distinctive Christian character of the school is maintained.

SIAMS report October 2014 St Mark's Church of England Primary School, Tunbridge Wells TN4 8LN