

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Redinnick Place, Penzance, Cornwall TR18 4HP

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Truro
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Cornwall
Date of inspection	4 October 2017
Date of last inspection	18 October 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided Primary 111998
Headteacher	Hilary Tyreman
Inspector's name and number	Penny Burnside 772

School context

St Mary's is smaller than most schools and has 170 pupils. Numbers are rising. Although the number of current pupils who are entitled to receive the pupil premium is just below the national average, the area of Penzance served by the school has some significant deprivation. In 2014 the governing body took on the running of the pre-school and most children from the pre-school now join the school in Reception. The school experienced a drop in standards in 2015. By 2017 standards were broadly in-line with the national expectation and an inspection by Ofsted in February 2017 judged the school to be good. The governing body has experienced a number of changes in the last two years.

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

- The passionate and aspirational leadership of the headteacher and her consistent embodiment of Christian values has created a very special inclusive ethos where every child can experience hope.
- The highly effective partnership with the church makes a substantial contribution to the well-being and aspirations of pupils and their families.
- The high profile of religious education (RE) and skilled leadership of the subject has resulted in highly effective teaching which is enabling pupils to develop a deep understanding of the Christian faith.

Areas to improve

- Further develop pupils' knowledge of a Christian understanding of hope, creativity and perseverance so that they can make links with more parts of the Bible.
- Continue to develop provision for the most able pupils in RE.

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

The school's passionate commitment to inclusion is rooted in the three core values of hope, creativity and perseverance. Leaders are profoundly aware of the significant levels of deprivation and vulnerability in the community and they are relentless in their determination to make things better for children. The vision, 'Learning with hope,' drives everything they do. The school's three core Christian values have been well taught over several years and are now deeply embedded and making a significant impact. Pupils talk about them naturally, explaining how the values encourage them to do the right thing and to treat others as they would like to be treated. They can make links between the values and a number of individual Bible stories, although they are less sure about linking them with wider biblical themes. Leaders make clear connections between the school's Christian character and pupils' good behaviour, and they acknowledge that Christian values played a crucial part in helping staff to raise standards following a difficult period in the school. Pupils talk about the ways in which the school teaches them to treat people equally. Pupil voice is strong. Children know that adults will listen to them and consider their ideas seriously. The pupil leaders have a real expectation that they will be able to improve things for other children. Opportunities for spiritual development are planned strategically and in depth and in a way that ensures that pupils of different faiths and no faith have felt included. This is monitored by governors. The school has a small number of pupils from different faith communities and it makes effective use of the experiences of these children to help pupils appreciate and understand the diversity of faiths and backgrounds. One parent commented in a recent questionnaire that they particularly valued the school's 'building understanding of diversity and how we can all contribute to our communities and support others'. Relationships are of very high quality, with many examples of quiet but consistent support being provided by adults and by children. Behaviour is exemplary. There is a high expectation by all groups in the school community that the school values will be put into practice – in all aspects of the school's work.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is outstanding because it is central to the life of the school. Pupils talk about worship enthusiastically and many say they look forward to it for several reasons. They particularly enjoy coming together to sing. For some pupils it is clearly transformative. One pupil, for example, said that going to worship helped him to treat other people better. Worship is highly inclusive. Leaders constantly reflect on ways of making worship more inclusive, acting on their analysis of survey findings and responding to pupils' suggestions. One example is in the way in which provision is adapted for new Reception pupils. The incumbent will sometimes conduct a separate act of worship for these children in their own classroom, adapting her approach for the Early Years, and enabling them to participate more spontaneously. This makes it possible for more children to interact with the vicar and as a result she has been able to establish a relationship with them from the beginning of their time in the school. Teachers respond sensitively to the needs of some older children, finding creative but quiet ways of encouraging their involvement in whole school worship without drawing attention to them. A teacher invited one child to help her take pictures on her tablet during the act of worship. A number of pupils come from other faith communities but none are withdrawn from collective worship. Pupils respond thoughtfully and individually when offered choices, as for example, when during the Lord's prayer they are invited to choose how to sit or place their hands. Pupils have opportunities to pray before lunch and, in some classes, at the end of the day as well as during collective worship. School leaders and the incumbent have created a large reflection area in the hall where pupils have opportunities to write their own prayers. One pupil explained how she sometimes thinks at home about the prayers from the day's collective worship and then makes up her own prayers on a similar theme. The incumbent invests significant time and energy into leading worship and working with the headteacher and RE leader to plan the programme for collective worship. Her very close involvement ensures that worship is distinctively Anglican. Visitors from local Baptist, Methodist and Elim Pentecostal churches provide pupils with a rich experience of other Christian traditions. Pupils speak enthusiastically about particular visitors from Mumbai. The incumbent is skilful in providing experiences which are appropriate for different ages of children, for instance simple liturgical responses, such as 'The night has passed, and the day lies open before us,' in which even the youngest children can participate, and the Eucharist which is offered only to the older pupils. The weekly acts of worship led by the incumbent are particularly creative and memorable. Children's understanding of the Trinity is currently being developed well by effective teaching in RE, and in particular, by the Understanding Christianity project. This is highly effective in supporting pupils' learning about Jesus Christ in collective worship. A team of pupil leaders helps in leading and evaluating worship. They know the school well and have an astute understanding of what needs to be improved. The school's work in developing pupil leaders has an impact which goes beyond the school. A number of examples are given of former pupils continuing to help lead worship in church. Governors have most recently focused their monitoring on spiritual development and the implementation of the school's Christian values. They attend worship on many occasions although their monitoring role is limited.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils are excited and inspired by RE and they talk enthusiastically about their experiences of the subject. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and it is often outstanding. Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2 are consistently as high as achievement in English and are often significantly higher. The co-ordinator has already identified as an area for further development the detailed assessment and focused teaching of the most able pupils. RE has a very high profile in the school and leaders are very clear about its crucial role in underpinning provision for Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education (SMSC) and its contribution to the school's ethos. Pupils talk about its importance in helping them understand others and respect their beliefs. RE is extremely well led by a very experienced co-ordinator who is well supported by the headteacher and the RE governor. Monitoring of RE includes moderation of work, scrutiny of teachers' planning, reviews of the end of year assessments, questionnaires and pupil conferencing. Action-plans for RE are written each year by the co-ordinator, headteacher and governors, and these are detailed and well-focused. The school's work has been used as examples of good practice on training for other schools in Cornwall. The RE leader's analysis of pupils' work is detailed and rigorous and she responds creatively. For example, she is currently encouraging teachers to look in detail at those areas in the programme of study where pupils show particular ability, as she believes that pupils are unlikely to demonstrate deeper ability in every aspect of RE at the same time. She has developed a new system for assessing pupils' understanding which will help teachers 'explore what a child is *really* thinking' and then focus their teaching more specifically on what each child needs to learn next. Teachers have for some time expected pupils to use skills of enquiry, analysis, interpretation, evaluation and reflection in RE. The introduction of the Understanding Christianity project has built on this and is helping teachers to extend children's thinking still further. It is also deepening pupils' understanding of key concepts, such as the Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and there is evidence of their using their new knowledge. For example, pupils quite naturally used the word 'incarnation' when talking together about whether Jesus was present at Creation.

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

The headteacher's passionate and aspirational leading is underpinned by her belief that a church school, as a 'supremely hopeful community', can make a difference in 'helping to mend brokenness.' Along with other leaders, she lives out consistently the school's core Christian values of hope, creativity and perseverance, summed-up in the school's distinctively Christian vision: 'learning with hope.' These values played a significant role in the school's response to the dip in its standards in 2015. Through 'courageously honest' conversations, school leaders worked with integrity and rigour to review governance and to create a new leadership structure. Standards have risen and are now broadly in-line with national expectations. By creating a 'leading learning' team, the headteacher has developed more teachers as potential leaders of church schools and strengthened leadership within the school. Their involvement this year with the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership has taken this further by increasing opportunities to work with other schools. The school was invited recently by the diocese and local authority to take on the support of another church school. The governing body's commitment to implementing the school's vision is evident in its strategic deployment of staff and resources to support the most vulnerable children and families, for example, in its investment in a full-time inclusion co-ordinator. Governors are highly reflective and often creative in targeting support and improving things for this particular school community. When they reviewed the effectiveness of the well-established breakfast club, for instance, governors recognised that some families found early mornings difficult and that it might be more beneficial for more children if the school provided food later in the morning. By taking on the running of the pre-school, leaders have ensured much greater continuity and consistency in curriculum expectations and understanding of the school's vision, and outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved. Evaluation systems, including pupil conferencing and regular surveys for all groups in the community, are very strong and have been in place for several years. In her drive to inspire and lift aspiration, the headteacher is very well-supported by the incumbent. Relationships with the church and the wider Penlee Cluster of churches are exceptionally strong, resulting in substantial benefits for children and families, such as the St John's playzone and holiday clubs. A wide range of visitors from other local churches lead worship, providing opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of the wider Christian community. Visitors from Mumbai have helped support children's developing understanding of the world-wide Christian church. RE and worship are highly effective because both are given very high priority. The governing body has supported the RE leader as a local leader for the 'Learn, Teach, Lead RE' initiative since it began four years ago. The school's practice is recognised by the diocese as highly effective and shared across the region and the subject-leader continues to support a number of teachers in other schools. Arrangements for religious education and collective worship meet statutory requirements.