



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Aston St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

School Lane
Aston
Stevenage
SG2 7HA

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Date of inspection: 18 November 2015

Date of last inspection: June 2010

School's unique reference number: 117421

Headteacher: Julie Winwood

Inspector's name and number: Alan Thornsby 137

School context

Aston St. Mary is a smaller than average school where pupils are taught in mixed age classes. Almost all pupils are white British origin. There is a small number from minority ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, while those eligible for additional government funding, known as 'pupil premium' is below average. Some pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4 to join middle schools. Since the last inspection there have been significant changes to staffing and governance of the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The passion and commitment of the headteacher, staff and governors create a distinctive learning environment securely underpinned by Christian values.
- Each individual is valued and nurtured by the Christian ethos to achieve academic and personal success.
- The strong leadership of the coordinator ensures that religious education (RE) and worship are integral to the everyday life of school.
- The school and its links with the church are clearly the heart of the local community.

Areas to improve

- The inspection has identified no specific areas for development beyond those identified by the school as a result of the rigorous monitoring procedures, school development and action plans.

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

Christian values run through the practice and policy of the school 'like writing through a stick of rock', with the current value of the month displayed on the school gate. This results in a warm and caring ethos that is obvious to everyone. Christian values inform the behaviours and attitudes of everyone. Children, who recognise Christian values in action, reflect the staff role models. As a result, there is consistency in the practice and policy of the school and relationships and behaviour are excellent. Christian values drive the way staff care for and value each pupil as a unique individual. The needs of every pupil are met successfully because of the climate of 'having a go and taking a risk' that develops independent learning skills. Staff comment 'the way we teach embraces the whole child who is valued for everything they do. It is not just academic. We create a culture in which they can express their own ideas and know that everyday is a new day'. Attendance is high because pupils want to be in school. Regular meetings ensure that pupils make progress against their own targets. These may identify areas for accelerated learning. As a result progress and attainment are significantly above national averages. Children recognise their achievements in and out of school on their 'Pegs of Pride' displays. Pupils show their care for each other as 'peer mediators' who sort out problems. The school council 'helps to make the school a happier place' and is led by a volunteer friend of the school. For example, they have made suggestions for how to improve lunchtimes. The council also meets with a member of the church every month to create a report for the Parish News magazine. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is a strength of the school because Christian values and SMSC development are integral to all areas of the curriculum and thus a natural part of the lives of all. The Tree of Aston life reflects the values securely embedded in the school. Leaves have the names of every member of the school to reflect the impact of Christian values and God's love on the school and its community. Children are confident and articulate. They explain in a mature way that everyone is unique and different, but that love and care for each other is important. They recognise that Christian values are 'not just for Christians, but make you respect other faiths because everyone has the right to believe in their own religion'. The high quality RE supports pupils learning of other faiths, commenting that 'how a person behaves and loves is important'. Children are fully aware of the global nature of Christianity and other world faiths because of the strong link with St Mary's School in Darjeeling. The link, through a friend of the school, who visits India, allows the sharing of friendship, gifts and questions.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Daily collective worship is central to the spiritual life of the school. The committed leader ensures that everyone understands the importance of Christian values and the links between Bible stories and everyday life. The policy and guidance are regularly updated to ensure effectiveness. Children experience a range of worship formats and leaders. Monday worship and 'Superheroes of the Bible' themes give pupils a good knowledge of Bible stories and life of Jesus. 'Looking in' promotes independent thinking, spiritual development and reflection. 'Looking out' explores the impact of Christian values beyond personal life. Values are also linked to the liturgical year, with a focus on forgiveness at Easter and generosity at Christmas. Pupils recognise worship as 'a time for reflection and to put God first'. Worship is distinctively Anglican, with a greeting, response, engagement and time for prayer and reflection. The whole school, including non-teaching staff and the cook, join together for worship that leads everyone to the threshold of worship with opportunities for personal reflection. Pupils lead worship with confidence and involve other pupils and staff in contributions to make certain their message is understood. They readily discuss matters of faith and make informed choices including suggestion of 'things God would be proud of and things God wouldn't be proud of'. Pupils' knowledge of the Trinity is furthered during worship. Children have a good understanding of prayer, reciting the Lord's Prayer and Living God's Love prayer in addition to creating spontaneous prayers. They understand the inclusivity of prayer, commenting 'non Christians can say their own private prayer to their god.' They also recognise the value of reflection areas where 'you can go if you are feeling bad'. There are rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures involving the coordinator, headteacher and foundation governor that are shared with the whole governing body. The input of the new clergy team creates a sense of belonging to a wider worshipping community through the introduction of changes to Harvest gift, a travelling Crib and sheep spotting in church. Refreshments extend the links with church and community before children arrive at church for worship. The Remembrance service recognises the individual villagers killed in the Great War. The community uses the 'missing you' tree in the church grounds to remember loved ones. The links between school, church and village community are furthered by the use of the school for the

Harvest supper. A church member teaches handbell ringing as an introduction to bell ringing in Church. The church presents a Bible to Year 6 leavers and a bookmark to children who leave at other times.

The effectiveness of religious education is outstanding

RE is well led by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable leader. She has introduced a new syllabus and made amendments to the units studied to meet the requirements of the school. 'Discovery RE' promotes the thinking skills of children to continually ask questions, always being aware that there is no right or wrong answer. All members of staff have the knowledge, skills and resources to deliver high quality lessons. They ensure that tasks suit the differing abilities of pupils. Good practice is shared across the school. There are comprehensive procedures to guide scrutiny and ensure consistency of high quality teaching and learning. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation, linked to twice yearly assessments show that attainment and progress in RE are in line with those in other areas and exceed national expectations. The school recognises that some pupils exceed expectations in RE because of opportunities to share thoughts and discussion, rather than literacy skills. High expectations from learning objectives, good rapport and questioning skills of teachers develop the thinking skills of pupils. Lessons are marked by good pace, questioning skills to deepen thinking and opportunities for children to relate their knowledge to new situations. This gives opportunities to explore subjects beyond the basic story. For example, children were given the question 'What sort of person was chosen to be the mother of Jesus?' Units of work are well developed across the school. Younger children use talk partners and objects to recall the Nativity story. This allows them to create a story stick to relate the story in order at a later date, as well as identify the most important part of the story. Older children identify symbolism in the Nativity story before creating their own symbol to reflect the links between their own lives and God. Pupils are also supported by effective marking strategies, with post-it notes indicating the need for a further response. This maintains high expectations. Regular enrichment days provide a focused study of aspects of RE, including Christian art, the Holy Trinity and Islam. Visitors also add to RE learning, such as Muslim student teachers who shared their culture and beliefs.

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

The headteacher has a passionate vision to provide a successful Christian learning environment in which the needs of each individual are met. This is achieved through high expectation and consistency of the impact of Christian values in every aspect of the life of the school. All adults in the school are aware of the importance of faith and the impact of Christian values on the life of the school. Diocesan training has ensured that governors fully understand what makes a distinctive church school. Frequent learning walks, reports from the headteacher and foundation governors and church school distinctiveness as a standing agenda item enable governors to keep up to date with developments. Regular meetings between the headteacher, RE leader and foundation governor ensure that RE and collective worship have a high priority with senior leaders and governors. Christian values drive decision-making and strategic planning. The school development plan has constant reference to 'maintaining the Christian ethos of the school'. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures inform accurate self-evaluation and on-going development. Foundation governors are active in the life of the school and with senior leaders, ensure the well-being of staff, for example in the siting of the staff room and opportunities for curriculum and personal development. There is very high staff morale and staff 'willingly go the extra mile because it is a privilege to work here'. Teachers readily comment on the support from leaders and managers that recognises the importance of personal family life as well as the school community. There are excellent relationships between parents and staff. Parents have great pride in belonging to the school. They recognise the impact of the Christian ethos that 'ensures children are happy in school because of caring staff. It's not just about academic progress'. Parents also recognise the determined support from staff and pupils, especially at times of difficulty. This is a result of children 'bringing values home and wanting to talk about faith and God'. Parents comment on how children are comfortable in church and understand its purpose. The school enjoys links with the diocese. The links with the local community are seen in the use of local field names used as class and room names in school. The proposed re-siting of the old village telephone box, currently in the school grounds to outside the school, to house a library and defibrillator, confirms the school as the heart of the village community