

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Folkestone St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy

Warren Road, Folkestone, Kent. CT19 6QH

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Canterbury
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	2 March 2013
Date of inspection	2 February 2017
Date of last inspection	March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Academy – Voluntary Aided Equivalent – 139310
Principal	Trevor North
Inspector's name and number	Canon Linda Burton 462

School context

St Mary's is a larger than average-sized primary school with a nursery unit. It took on academy status in 2013. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average, and the proportion of pupils for whom extra funding is received due to social disadvantage is above the national average. Ofsted judged the school as satisfactory in 2012 and as requiring improvement in 2014, three days after the current principal had taken up post. In September 2016 Ofsted judged the academy as good. The part-time chief executive officer (CEO) is its previous headteacher.

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

- Relationships in the academy are good, and are shaped by the academy's core Christian values, as shown through the excellent care and guidance offered to pupils by support staff, teachers and senior leaders.
- Collective worship is a central part of the academy's life and, through it, pupils develop a good understanding of biblical material and Christian teaching.
- Standards of teaching and learning in religious education (RE) are good, and lessons are characterised by imaginative and creative experiences and opportunities.
- The commitment of senior leaders, driven by the academy's mission that all pupils should be able to fulfil their 'God given' potential, has ensured that standards of attainment have improved rapidly since academisation.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that the academy's Christian character has a high profile by making more explicit the links between the academy's values and the gospel parables from which they are drawn.
- Improve the rigour with which governors monitor and evaluate the impact of its Christian foundation on the academy's strategic plan.
- Develop a shared understanding of spirituality and ensure this is reflected in curriculum planning across the whole academy in order to increase its impact on pupils' lives.
- Involve all stakeholders, particularly pupils, in the planning, delivery and evaluation of collective worship, so that it clearly meets the needs of the academy community.
- Embed a formal assessment procedure in RE to enable pupils' attainment and progress to be tracked effectively across the academy and to be aligned with other core subjects.

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

The heart of life at St Mary's is its Christian ethos. Its mission, that all pupils fulfil their 'God given' potential, is lived out in all aspects of its daily life. A number of years ago, pupils chose the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son to summarise its core Christian values (inclusion, care, forgiveness, social responsibility, fairness and equality). These values now distinctly underpin the academy's policies and practices well. The outworking of them has ensured that standards of attainment have improved rapidly in the years since the academy opened. Performance is above national floor standards across the academy. The difference between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is diminishing over time, with this group now making similar progress to their peers. Relationships in the academy are shaped by its core Christian values. This is shown in the unstinting personalised support and guidance given by a cohesive team of staff to ensure pupils' wellbeing and personal development. Close partnerships with parents have also been successfully developed. This leads to St Mary's being a happy, inclusive community where pupils feel safe and where attendance is consequently in line with the national average. The Golden Curriculum of tailored provision has been devised for pupils who cannot access the mainstream curriculum. Its impact is that pupils from differing backgrounds and with differing needs are able to achieve success and fulfil their 'God given' potential at St Mary's. Adults in the academy act as Christian role models for pupils in their behaviour and positive relationships, showing forgiveness, helping others and 'going the extra mile'. Pupils share a common understanding of the academy's Christian values and this is reflected in their good behaviour in lessons and in the playground. A number of systems exist, for example, playground buddies, school council, and house system, which encourage pupils to care for each other and to take responsibility for their own and each other's actions. There is a good range of opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development and strong evidence of pupils' commitment to care for others less fortunate than themselves, locally, nationally and internationally. The 'Improving Folkestone' project by Year 6 pupils demonstrates engagement with the local community and a commitment to improve the quality of life for all who live there. Whilst there are opportunities for spiritual development through RE and collective worship, the academy's provision for spiritual development overall is underdeveloped. There is little evidence of a shared understanding of what spirituality means for the academy. This means, for example, that opportunities for spiritual development are not an explicit feature of all schemes of work. As a result, not all pupils can talk confidently about its impact on their lives. Pupils enjoy RE and recognise its importance in helping them live happily with other people in the world. However, opportunities for setting Christianity in the context of a multicultural world faith are limited.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The daily act of collective worship is valued highly and seen by pupils and adults as an integral part of the academy's life. It is well planned and organised on a weekly basis in accordance with the Canterbury diocesan framework by the academy's CEO. Friday worship celebrates pupils' achievements. Links are made with the academy's core Christian values, but these are insufficiently explicit for all pupils to be able to articulate clearly how they can put the moral messages from worship into action in their lives. Through worship, pupils have a good understanding of biblical material and Christian teaching. This includes the importance of Jesus for Christians, as well as satisfactory age-related understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship includes some elements of Anglican liturgy and singing. This is further enhanced by seasons and festivals of the Church's year being marked by special services held in church or the academy. Whole academy worship is led most often by adults including the principal, other senior leaders, class teachers or, on a fortnightly basis, by the vicar or by the pastor of the Harbour Church (a local evangelical church). This provides good opportunities to experience and enjoy a variety of worship styles from different Christian traditions. Since September 2016, pupils' experience of age specific worship has been enhanced by each class in turn having their weekly class worship in St Peter's, a nearby church. There is evidence of how, through the CEO's monitoring and evaluation of class worship, teachers' confidence and skills as worship leaders have grown. Suggestions made by the school council and in pupil surveys about how to develop worship further are acted upon, but otherwise, pupil contribution to the planning, leading and evaluation of worship is limited. There is no formal evaluation of whole-academy worship. The prayer life of the academy has improved since the previous denominational inspection, with more creative opportunities for personal prayer and reflection apparent through the ongoing work to develop indoor and outdoor prayer areas. A worship committee was formed in the autumn term 2016. Its work is beginning to impact positively by enabling a wider involvement of stakeholders from across the academy in planning, organising, resourcing and reviewing the worship programme.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE is taught in accordance with diocesan schemes of work and the Kent Agreed Syllabus. This ensures that pupils have an appropriate opportunity to study Christianity and other world faiths. RE is taught as a discrete subject

alongside the academy's creative curriculum structure. It has a higher profile across the academy than at the time of the previous denominational inspection. Pupils' levels of knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other world faiths are good. The specialist subject leader is in her second year in the post. She is enthusiastic and committed to 'bringing RE to life', and ensures that teaching and learning opportunities in RE throughout the academy are imaginative and creative. The classroom environments reflect the importance of RE with dedicated display space celebrating pupils' work. This addresses the development point from the previous inspection to give displays of pupils work in RE a higher profile. Learning which focuses on developing knowledge and understanding and that which provides opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning is well planned for. Consequently, pupils find RE interesting and challenging. Standards of teaching and learning in RE are good across the academy. For example, in Year 1, through a focus on Jesus healing the blind man, pupils are able to gain an appropriate age-related understanding of the wonder of this healing miracle. In Year 6 they focus on the Sikh Guru Granth Sahib. Here effective and challenging questions and close support enables pupils to evaluate their learning and respond reflectively to it. Through effective systems for matching activities to pupils' abilities, and marking that develops their learning appropriately, pupils make good progress. The subject and senior leaders monitor RE on the same basis as other subject areas, to ensure that common standards apply across the whole curriculum. Following a thorough subject audit, a priority in the current RE action plan has rightly been identified as being the need to design and create a formal assessment procedure. This is to enable progress in RE to be tracked effectively across the academy. Progress has been made on this. Work is ongoing to gather strong evidence of how closely attainment and progress in RE aligns with other core subjects, such as literacy. Last Easter's very successful 'Stations of the Cross' week of interactive workshops enabled all pupils to understand more fully key aspects of the Easter story about which they had learned in RE. Plans are well under way for RE to lead the whole academy in marking other significant Christian festivals. This indicates the positive contribution RE is making to pupils' religious and spiritual development. Positive feedback received from pupils, parents and members of the Harbour Church is evidence that RE is also developing its good contribution to the Christian character of the academy.

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

Senior leaders, including governors, faced serious challenges to reverse falling academic standards from 2012 onwards. Their response was rightly to ensure that structures were put in place to focus clearly on the wellbeing, attainment and progress of all pupils. This reflects their commitment to the development of each pupil's 'God-given' potential and to the academy's distinctive Christian ethos. They have worked successfully since then to transform the life chances of the academy's pupils. A development point from the previous denominational inspection was to 'identify and make explicit some key Christian values for the school, in order to strengthen all stakeholders' ability to articulate the school's Christian ethos.' Some progress has been made on this point. However, pupils cannot clearly explain how the academy's core Christian values relate to its chosen Gospel parables. The principal and part-time CEO have worked well together to develop its Christian distinctiveness as part of the academy's three year strategic plan. However, there is a lack of clarity and shared vision among senior leaders, which means that this has not led to a coherent and practical plan of action. Systems of monitoring and evaluation by senior leaders and governors are limited. For example, there is no formal system of evaluation of whole academy worship. This means that governors and senior leaders cannot analyse its impact on the academy community. However, regular reports on church school ethos, worship and RE are received by governors. These are reviewed in a sharply focused manner at their monthly meetings, leading to planning for further improvement. The leadership of RE and collective worship are prioritised and meet statutory requirements. The specialist RE subject leader is effective and well supported by the principal. She has appropriate opportunities to work with RE leaders in other schools, as well as taking part in professional development events provided by the Diocese. Satisfactory provision has been made for wider involvement in the planning, organisation, resourcing and review of worship in the light of the imminent retirement of the CEO. Relationships with St Mary and St Eanswythe's and with St Peter's churches are good. An informal partnership currently exists between St Mary's and two other Church of England schools in Folkestone. St Mary's is playing an important role in the formation of a Church of England based multi academy trust between all three schools. Relationships between the academy and parents are strong, with a real sense of working together for the good of the pupils. Parents are very appreciative of the level of support and encouragement given to their children and show an awareness of the impact the academy's Christian values have on their children's behaviour and learning.