



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### St Mary's Church of England (Aided) Primary School, Bitteswell

The Green  
Bitteswell  
Leicestershire  
LE17 4SB

Diocese: Leicester

Local authority: Leicestershire

Dates of inspection: June 11<sup>th</sup> 2014

Date of last inspection: 26<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009

School's unique reference number: 120193

Headteacher: Mrs Hazel Maher

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Sheila Grice (No 165)

#### School context

St Mary's Church of England Primary School is a small village school, with 111 children on role. Most pupils are White British, with a very small number starting school at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below average and very few pupils are supported by the pupil premium. St Mary's is a popular, oversubscribed school, with 40% of pupils coming from outside the catchment area.

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

- This is an extremely effective church school, where the Christian ethos is at the heart of everything that is done
- Excellent leadership is provided by the headteacher, who is well supported by staff and governors
- Excellent relationships exist between children, staff, parents, governors and the local churches
- Children's spiritual development and understanding is very well developed

#### Areas to improve

- Continue to develop assessment of RE so that children are aware of the next steps and what to do to improve
- Consider ways to provide evidence to show progress made by pupils in RE currently and year on year

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

St Mary's is a warm, welcoming school where pupils and adults feel valued and cared for within an atmosphere of Christian love and understanding. Children have high aspirations and they

are encouraged to achieve their very best. Standards are high throughout the school and children make good progress. Distinctively Christian values are clearly expressed by all members of the school community and these values have a significant impact on children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As one child said, 'They help you along in life and teach us how to live, like Jesus did'. Even the very youngest children are able to relate Bible stories to Christian values. The Ethos group provides excellent opportunities for younger children to learn more about Christian values and they offer helpful insights into the teaching of Christian values. The wealth of high quality displays in classes and around the school affirm that this is a church school. As one governor explained, 'This schools feels qualitatively different, staff talk about a dependence on God'. Outstanding relationships between all members of the school community enable children to thrive and become confident, articulate, reflective, responsible individuals. High quality experiences are planned which develop children's spirituality. An example of this can be seen in the artwork produced by the older children when they were asked to represent their spirit. Each class has an area for reflection and a quiet area outside also provides the opportunity for calm reflection. An older child commented they liked to go there often, 'To sit and think about God, and be peaceful'. Excellent links with the local churches with activities such as Super Sunday, Prayer Spaces and Journey through Easter deepen children's understanding of the Christian faith, which children can relate to their own lives. Children show a good understanding of cultural diversity and differences and they appreciate and value their own lives. Strong links with a school in Croatia and charity work for Books for South Africa, Link Romania and Foodbank all help deepen children's understanding of differences in our society.

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

The school is committed to the provision of high quality collective worship that enriches the lives of the whole school community. It is clear that worship plays an important part in the life of the school as it enables the school community to worship and pray together. Collective Worship is well planned (by staff and local clergy) linking in with the Christian value being taught each half term. Children develop a good understanding of the church year and Christian festivals and they appreciate the opportunities to visit local churches for special services. Children speak enthusiastically about collective worship and they value the opportunity to 'Learn more about God', who is, 'Awesome'. Pupils are keen to take an active part in assemblies, giving thoughtful and mature responses to questions, reading poems, prayers, choosing music and blowing out the candle. Members of the Ethos group plan and lead assemblies regularly, (as do the Eco-Warriors and JRSOs), and they do so independently. The school prayer is used frequently by children and by governors at meetings. Children appreciate visitors who lead assemblies with the Open the Book team being a particular favourite. Worship is consistently and recognisably Christian with singing, prayer and reflection playing an important part in the worship. In the act of worship observed, the children's wonderful singing of the Lord's Prayer was particularly uplifting. There are opportunities outside collective worship for children to understand the value of prayer and reflection. As well as writing their own prayers, which are used before lunch and at the end of the day, children also talk about praying, 'Outside on a lovely sunny day to be thankful to God' and 'Just before bed when I talk to God about the day I have just had'. Collective worship has a strong focus on Jesus who, 'Healed people, was raised from the dead and got killed so we can have a new life'. Monitoring and evaluation by staff, children and governors is used effectively to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Collective worship is now more interactive for children and staff are more aware of its purpose, following monitoring in the past.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good**

Religious Education has a high profile within the curriculum with planning following the Leicestershire Agreed Syllabus and linked to curriculum planning in other subjects wherever possible, especially literacy and art. Children are achieving a good understanding of Christianity and other major world religions. There is a good balance between learning about religion and

learning from religion and children are developing skills of empathy, comparison and personal reflection. Visits and visitors are now planned so that children have the opportunity to experience various places of worships, so learning first-hand about different religions. The good teaching observed during the inspection was characterised by a lively, interactive approach which challenged the children to think about their own experiences whilst also comparing and contrasting different religions. Children worked thoughtfully and confidently as a result of excellent relationships between staff and children. Planning for children with different learning styles ensured all children were on task and highly motivated. The youngest children were learning about Buddhism and were rightly proud of their writing and lotus flowers which they had created. Year 1/2 children were comparing different places and practices of worship and they gained a good understanding of the importance of showing respect when we pray. A year 5/6 lesson on Sikhism challenged learners to reflect on the value of money and wealth. As one child explained, 'Being greedy isn't the right way to act. We should think about other people more and share what we have and be more generous'. Standards are in line with national expectations and sometimes higher. A newly appointed RE co-ordinator has gathered the views of staff and children about RE and also monitored teaching and standards in RE this year. He has a very good understanding of strengths and areas for development and is enthusiastic to bring about further improvements quickly. Assessments are made which inform planning, teaching and learning and internal monitoring has identified that children now need to be more involved in their own learning.

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

There is a strong Christian vision, based around the school's motto of 'Learn, Love, Believe', which is clearly articulated by all members of the school community. This vision is communicated effectively through policies, displays and the school's website. Christian artefacts and symbols are evident throughout school and children talk confidently about what it means to attend a church school. There are robust systems in place for evaluating St Mary's as a church school involving staff, governors and children. Both RE and collective worship have been identified in the school development plan as priorities for improvement this year and the RE co-ordinator and foundation governors have been actively involved in monitoring through learning walks and more formal observations. Parents are fully involved in the life of the school and they feel particularly welcomed and included in the weekly family assemblies. They describe the Christian ethos as being, 'Always present and integrated into everyday life in a gentle way'. Parents are very pleased with the education their children receive, as evidenced by questionnaires and discussions. They appreciate the explicit teaching of Christian values, which help their children become, 'Non-judgemental, accepting of others and caring, responsible individuals'. Areas of development identified at the last inspection have all been fully addressed and staff have worked hard to establish links with other schools. Children enjoy writing to their pen pals in Croatia, preparing the Romanian boxes and learning more about children living in Africa, all of which encourage them to be more caring and generous and deepen their understanding of other cultures. Very strong links with the local Anglican and Methodist churches enrich the lives of children, who speak very enthusiastically about Open the Book, Journey through Easter and Prayer Spaces.