

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mark's Church of England Primary Academy

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| Albert Road, South Norwood, Croydon, SE25 4JD | |
| Current SIAMS inspection grade | Good |
| Diocese | Southwark |
| Previous SIAS inspection grade | N/A |
| Name of multi-academy trust | REAch2 Academy Trust |
| Date of academy conversion | October 2015 |
| Date/s of inspection | 31 January 2017 |
| Date of last inspection | N/A |
| Type of school and unique reference number | Primary Academy 141119 |
| Headteacher | Kate Wilson |
| Inspector's name and number | John Viner NS144 |

School context

St Mark's is a smaller than average primary school located in South Norwood and serving the parish of St Mark. Its 166 pupils reflect the rich diversity of the immediate area. A much larger than average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and those in receipt of additional government funding is well above average. Almost three quarters of pupils attend church. The school has had a turbulent recent history. It is now a REAch2 academy with the Diocese of Southwark. Although pupils now make good progress, reported standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are currently below the national average.

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

- The headteacher articulates an ambitious strategic Christian vision for the school that is bringing about rapid and sustained improvement.
- Christian values underpin the school, define its character and are evident in all aspects of its work.
- Daily collective worship is an important part of school life, affirming and uniting all who attend, regardless of faith.
- The effective alliance of Trust and Diocese has created a school that is clear about its Christian character and how it impacts on pupils' personal and academic development.
- The strong partnership of school and parish church unites them as an expression of Christian hope in the community they serve.

Areas to improve

- Establish a school-wide understanding of spirituality that enables staff and pupils to better engage with deep questions of meaning and purpose.
- Building on a deeper understanding of the spiritual, ensure that collective worship provides pupils with more memorable moments of deep reflection.
- Through better assessment of pupils' spiritual development, ensure that religious education (RE) lessons enable them to develop skills of reflection, enquiry and analysis, which deepens their learning and strengthens their understanding of the nature of faith.
- Provide teachers with the training they need to improve their subject knowledge of faiths and beliefs in order to bring accuracy and perception to their RE teaching.

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

The school is underpinned by a set of clearly expressed and explicit Christian values that are recognised, understood and articulated by stakeholders. These Christian values are evident in all aspects of the school and define its work. Pupils can explain what the school motto, 'Inspiring minds, achieving excellence, nurturing faith' means in practice and say that these values 'make a real difference to our lives'. Parents too recognise the impact that the values which the school promotes have on their children's lives, saying that 'the school values are something we can draw on and use in daily life'.

The school's Christian values inspire the warm, positive relationships between and among adults and pupils. They also inform its policies so that values are evident in practice. This is reflected in the pupils' comments that 'adults live out the values'. Pupils know that they are safe, valued and special and, as a result, attendance is improving and the majority of pupils behave well. Pupils know that, if they are living out the values that the school promotes, then they need to work hard and do their best. This is leading to an improvement in the progress they make and the standards they achieve.

The school's Christian character makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They learn attitudes of courtesy, value diversity and look out for each other. They say that they understand key ideas of forgiveness and saying sorry. However, because there is not a shared understanding of spirituality, opportunities for pupils' spiritual development are not always recognised or planned for. As a result, their responses to these experiences are limited.

Pupils understand that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith and recognise that there are many faiths and beliefs. Because they value diversity, they celebrate difference and similarity and develop positive attitudes of tolerance and respect. They recognise that religious education is an important aspect of the school and that it helps their personal and spiritual development.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

All members of the school community recognise the value of collective worship and understand its importance to the daily life of the school. The majority of pupils say that they enjoy worship and that it makes them feel close to God. Therefore, they come to worship respectfully, sit attentively and participate willingly. Because worship is well-structured, they learn its daily pattern so that prayer and reflection become a part of their regular experience. Many pupils comment on the value they find in prayer and they universally enjoy worship in song: one pupil commented that, 'it just warms my heart when we sing to God'. However, although older pupils say they enjoy prayer and worship, they find opportunities for reflection less fulfilling than younger pupils. The whole school community attends worship and both adults and pupils acknowledge that they are affirmed by it, whatever their personal faith. Some pupils of other faiths say that it helps them to deepen their own faith. Staff and clergy are regularly involved in careful planning so that there is a cohesive sequence of themes, drawn from the church's year and school values. Worship is regularly monitored by leaders and governors, who seek the views of pupils so that planned improvements can take place.

Worship is Biblical and very good use is made of scriptures that many pupils enthusiastically learn by heart. It is rooted in the person of Jesus and pupils understand His importance in Christian worship. It is also Trinitarian, so that pupils understand and can explain that Christians regard God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through worship, pupils experience and learn patterns of Anglican tradition and practice that prepare them well for the weekly acts of worship held in the church and led by the Incumbent. Because worship is varied in its pattern and there is a wide range of leaders, including school leaders, staff, the incumbent and visitors from other Christian traditions, it is kept fresh and interesting so that pupils engage readily. They particularly enjoy the many good experiences they have to take part in leading aspects of worship, especially those times when classes prepare and lead acts of worship that are shared with parents.

As pupils readily acknowledge, prayer is a key aspect of worship. It is regular and systematic, both within acts of worship and at the beginning, middle and end of each school day. There is a school prayer, which is used frequently and which reinforces the Christian values it promotes. Pupils know it and the Lord's prayer by heart and there are many good opportunities for their personal reflection and private prayer. They understand that praying for others is a part of Christian compassion leading to such actions as supporting the Croydon Refugee Centre. This understanding of the nature and purpose of prayer is especially important in the school's Christian witness.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

RE is regarded as a core subject and takes place every week. Standards of attainment for the majority of learners are approaching national expectations and pupils' progress, often from low starting points, is accelerating. This is in line with the improvements in performance in other core subjects. Pupils engage with RE well and say that they enjoy it because teachers make it interesting. Work in books suggests that they work as hard in RE as they do in other subjects, although there is an over-reliance on worksheets. This limits pupils' responses and does not challenge their thinking enough. The quality of teaching overall is variable and work that is set does not always meet the precise needs of the pupils. Teachers do not sufficiently appreciate that spiritual understanding does not always equate to progress in other subjects. While teachers have a general understanding of how well their pupils are developing, they do not focus enough on the skills of enquiry, reflection and analysis. Consequently, the feedback that pupils are given does not consistently promote deeper thinking as well as it should do.

The recent introduction of the new diocesan RE syllabus is helping to raise standards of engagement and achievement but teachers do not always have a deep enough knowledge of the full range of faiths taught. This limits their ability to stretch pupils' thinking or help them make important connections between key aspects of faiths. Sometimes, teachers' weak subject knowledge leads to teaching that is shallow or inaccurate. RE is regularly assessed but the systems for assessment and recording are still being developed. Consequently, teachers do not yet have a clear understanding of the progress their pupils are making or the steps that they should take to improve their knowledge and mastery of key concepts.

Through RE most pupils develop a secure understanding of Christianity and some key facts about other world faiths. However, this is inconsistent and sometimes the work is not at a high enough level. While the school understandably capitalises on opportunities in RE for pupils to engage in extended writing, there are times when teachers mark the work as English and neglect the RE. Nevertheless, RE is led by a knowledgeable and experienced subject leader who has done much to prepare colleagues for the introduction of the new syllabus. She recognises that she has considerable work to do to raise the quality of teaching and learning. However, she understands the priorities for improvement and has plans to address them, with the strong support of the school's leaders.

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

The headteacher articulates a clear and ambitious Christian vision for the school which is shared by key staff and governors and is leading to rapid and sustained improvement. This vision is rooted in a clear set of distinctively Christian values to which leaders and governors ascribe the raised aspirations, good behaviour and rising standards achieved by pupils. They have a good understanding of the school's performance with strong systems for keeping the school's Christian distinctiveness under review. As a result, leaders and governors know their school well, their self-evaluation is accurate and policies are informed by the Christian values they promote. In this, they are well-supported through the strong and effective partnership of the Trust and the Diocese, which has ensured that the school's Christian character shines through its work and has a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders, governors and trustees have secured the effective leadership of collective worship and religious education and ensure that there are good opportunities for the professional development of staff and the support of current and future leaders.

Parents play an active role in the life of the school; open days and special events are well attended and parents have good opportunities to attend the weekly act of worship in the church. Governors recently introduced a parents' forum, which gives parents a stronger voice in the school. Parents say that their views are welcomed and listened to and that 'parent forum is a confident place'. This good partnership with parents is complemented by that with the parish church. The incumbent plays a key supportive role in school and is known and trusted by parents. Parents say that there is a powerful relationship with the incumbent and that, even if they do not attend her church, they value her care. The work that the school does in partnership with the church engages pupils with local charities, such as supporting a nearby foodbank, national charities such as Crisis at Christmas and a developing global link with a parish in Zimbabwe. These are mutually beneficial as pupils make the connections between the values the school promotes and Christian love in action.

Leaders, governors and trustees, together with the parish church, ensure that St Mark's is a distinctively Christian school, living out its values in the service of its community.