

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's Clophill Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School

High Street
Clophill
Bedford
MK45 4BE

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Bedfordshire
Date of inspection: 5 March 2013
Date of last inspection: 13 July 2007
School's unique reference number: 109617
Headteacher: Mrs Christine Spurgeon
Inspector's name and number: Mrs Lizzie McWhirter MA 244

School context

St Mary's Clophill serves the village community of Clophill and the surrounding area. Currently there are 120 pupils who are mainly from a White British background. The school is a short distance from the parish church of St Mary. The headteacher has built up a strong team around her. The school was recently awarded the Values Mark for a further three years.

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

St Mary's has a very strong sense of being a worshipping and welcoming community with Christian values and prayer well embedded in school life. Everyone feels they belong and are encouraged to achieve highly.

Established strengths

- The strong sense of Christian community, modelled and embraced by all.
- The positive attitude of these young pupils who reflect deeply on the high quality experiences offered to them in collective worship and religious education [RE].
- The importance of prayer and reflection in the life of the school.

Focus for development

- Establish a forum for clergy and governors to discuss the deep questions of life and faith with pupils.

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

St Mary's sustains an excellent learning environment where pupils are proud to belong. This inclusive cohesive community demonstrates Christian love and service and is much loved by its pupils and much appreciated by its parent body. Christian values are deeply embedded here throughout a creative curriculum with staff 'living the values and reflecting those values to the children'. Pupils say they value their friends and their teachers, saying 'God is in the good deeds that we do. If we live our values, he is with you.' Here there is an active sense of forgiveness where pupils are encouraged to write sorry notes if they have hurt someone. The school is seen to value the widest range of achievement in this school where music is a strength and pupils feel able to make a positive contribution, for example through the choir. They enjoy giving to charitable projects through which they experience the Christian values of service and gratitude. Their sense of global awareness is enhanced through links with a school in Zambia. As part of the national Celebrating RE events, the school planted ten cherry blossom trees in the school grounds, dedicated to those affected by the Japanese tsunami. Bright, prominent displays and interactive spiritual areas nurture pupils' spiritual development. Pupils acknowledge, 'God is around all of us in the classroom but the spirituality place is where you go to think about him'. The school grounds and opportunities to engage with the activities of the gardening club as well as the quiet area; and the values trees planted around the village for Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee, greatly contribute to pupils' engagement with the natural world.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The attitude of the pupils to collective worship is excellent because the quality of worship offered to them involves them and greatly supports their spiritual development. Pupils say, 'we like it when we worship together as it makes it more closer and holy'. Parents speak highly of the 'prayerfulness, peacefulness and thoughtfulness' shown by the children who enjoy praying in their own words, whether in school, home or church. Parents also speak of the children really believing in their chosen values. Pupils especially enjoy the calm and peace in church and feel closer to God in church as 'the things around you represent God and remind you of God and that you are in a holy place'. Additionally, these young pupils have the opportunity to be part of a Eucharistic community with Oak pupils involved as acolytes or crucifer in the serving team, marking for example Ash Wednesday and Candlemas when the Bishop of Bedford presided. Thus pupils experience what it means to be part of the wider Anglican communion. One very young pupil said, 'I like going to church as we get to go up to communion and that's what I like'. Children receiving a blessing say they 'feel close to God'. Pupils plan and lead worship themselves on a regular basis and share their reflections on worship which feeds into school evaluation on worship. One member of the school council suggested a helpful and effective way for pupils to share their reflections and questions about worship and school life on an interactive board in the hall. This is well used. Pupils welcome more opportunity to experience worship outside.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils clearly enjoy their RE lessons which greatly help them to understand their own spiritual journey. RE has a very high profile in this school and is very effectively led by the Key Stage 2 Phase Leader who was a member of the group writing The Bedfordshire and Luton Agreed Syllabus for RE. Teaching and learning is very good with standards in RE often higher than in other core subjects. In lessons, Year 4 pupils are given opportunities to ask puzzling questions about God and life, such as 'Why did God create evil?' whilst Year 2 pupils reflect on the value of the month and Mothering Sunday considering 'How much is love worth?' They enjoy learning about other faiths and can explain what is distinctive for the three great Abrahamic faiths. They are clear about the different ways in which Christians and Muslims pray. Pupils show they understand the symbolism of The Eucharist, acknowledging that at communion services 'people in Oak carry wine and water, candles and the cross and wear special costumes'. A systematic method of assessment and tracking informs planning and demonstrates achievement. Marking is purposeful, with pupils recognising what they need to do in order to improve their work. Next steps include enhancing the programme of visits and visitors. Many pupils show a good level of theological literacy. An excellent example to support this is the annual Gifted and Talented RE Day at St Alban's Abbey which some Year 4 pupils attend. These young pupils welcome a time to discuss deep questions of faith and life with adults, saying 'if one of the priests or governors that come in have any spare time, when they are having a drink, they could talk with us and we would enjoy what they say'.

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

St Mary's distinctive Christian vision is clearly evident and effectively promoted by the headteacher and her staff. This is embraced by the clergy and governors so that the school's Church of England foundation is articulated and celebrated by all. An excellent partnership exists between the school and the diocese, not least because the headteacher is a member of the Diocesan Board and represents the diocese at many events. Pupils' work has been displayed in church and the school features in the village magazine, 'Clophill Spotlight'. Parents speak highly of the headteacher for being so 'warm and welcoming' and her staff for their approachability. The school secretary is praised by parents for being 'a loving presence in reception'. Pupils have a voice through the school council. Foundation governors are active in their support for the school. They ensure areas from the previous inspection have been addressed by maintaining high standards. They appoint effective teachers and give them opportunities for leadership experience. They have developed clear areas for future development, especially in their monitoring and evaluative role as well as striving to ensure a close partnership is maintained between school and church. The staff are praised by the governors for being supportive and standing together, even in the face of difficulty. Parents praise the commitment and support from the school for village events. In all these ways, St Mary's maintains excellence in everything in this 'happy school where the children shine'.

SIAS report March 2013 St Mary's Clophill Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School, High Street, Clophill, Bedford MK45 4BE

