



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Mark's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Morwenstow

Shop, Morwenstow, Bude, Cornwall
EX23 9PE

Previous SIAMS grade: good

Current inspection grade: good

Diocese: Truro

Local authority: Cornwall

Date of inspection: 25 June 2015

Date of last inspection: 17 May 2010

School's unique reference number: 111992

Headteacher: Carol Nesham

Inspector's name and number: John Rudge (704)

School context

This small school, with 86 children, adjoins a pre-school unit, taken over by the school in 2013. It serves small centres of population in rural North Cornwall. Since the previous inspection it has changed status from voluntary controlled to voluntary aided. With other local schools it now forms part of a Co-operative Trust. A new headteacher has been in post for just over a year, following the retirement of the previous head.

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

- The school's ethos strongly supports children's progress in their learning
- The new headteacher is having a positive impact on the development of St Mark's school as a church school
- Religious education (RE) and collective worship both contribute effectively to children's spiritual and moral development

Areas to improve

- Extend understanding, across the whole school community, of the Christian teachings which underpin the school's values
- Ensure that children are aware of the cultural diversity of the wider Christian community
- Develop approaches to marking and feedback in RE so that children are clear about the next steps they need to take to improve their learning

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

Children at St Mark's enjoy their learning and make good progress in their work, including children with identified educational needs. Their progress is encouraged by high standards of behaviour and supportive relationships both in lessons and throughout the daily life of the school. In turn, this is a reflection of the school's ethos, which is based on its aims and underpinned by its twelve core values. They are the outcome of discussion between children, staff and governors, and are 'owned' by the school community. They feature prominently in the life of the school and provide a sound foundation for the quality of children's learning, their sense of well-being and their spiritual and moral development. They are recognised both as the shared values of the whole school community and values which also have a distinctively Christian basis. Thus values such as respect and forgiveness, linked with 'faith stories' from the Bible, provide a framework for good relationships and behaviour. Children are becoming more familiar, through collective worship and RE, with the links between the values and their Christian basis. These now need to be more widely absorbed and embedded across the whole school community. Children do have an inclusive sense of what they all share together and a developing familiarity with the underlying principles related to the school's Christian foundation, through values such as 'peace' which was a focal point for reflection during the visit. A further feature of this school is a strong historical link with its Christian founder, Parson Hawker. This continuing link is celebrated annually and provides common ground between the school and its surrounding community. These features and the school's values are visually represented around the school, and children are familiar with, and can explain, the very striking inter-active displays, for example through different Christian symbols associated with peace. Children also have a wide and inclusive awareness of people's needs and enjoy joining in and supporting various charities. Through the strong support of the church children gain a sound understanding of Christian faith and practice. They also learn to value diversity as an expression of the inclusive ethos of their school, so that they are able to talk about other peoples' beliefs and values in an open and respectful way. However, they still need to widen their understanding of the cultural diversity of the Christian Church as a worldwide community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship and other expressions of prayer and reflection are a natural part of the ethos of the school. They provide a firm foundation for other elements of the children's spiritual development. Collective worship is a focal point of the school day. This is because all children, whatever their age and ability, feel included and drawn into the atmosphere of the occasion. This was evident during the visit when the occasion of collective worship engaged the children both educationally and spiritually at their own level. Afterwards they were able to talk about the experience, based on the theme of 'peace' and how it related to their own experiences of life in school. Worship took place 'in the round' and children were keen to answer questions and to put forward their own ideas. Different groups had particular roles to play, and did so enthusiastically. The visual element was particularly strong, helping to explore the theme by linking it with various symbols of peace. The sharing of 'the peace' provided a fitting conclusion to the occasion, and a striking link with one of the aspects of Christian worship. Elements of Anglican worship are woven into the various activities. As a regular feature of worship in school, children particularly appreciate visitors who lead worship, both from the parish church and other local Christian churches, including those who help them to 'Open the Book'. They also recognise the importance of the weekly award, in collective worship, of the 'kind and helpful' cup recognising children's achievement and expressing the school's values visually and actively. One of the strengths of collective worship is the way in which the school consults the children at all levels about the quality of their experience of worship. This has led to a greater involvement of children in leading worship, particularly on those occasions when it takes place in classrooms. Overall, children gain a good understanding

of Christian worship both in school and through the church.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The curriculum for RE is broad and balanced, based on the locally Agreed Syllabus but reflecting an emphasis on understanding Christian teaching, practice and celebration. This element is given added emphasis through the links with the church. Both visitors from the church, and visits to the church help to make aspects of Christian practice, such as baptism and marriage, come alive. However, in spite of awareness of Christians elsewhere in the world, such as that which they gain from the school's link with Kenya, children need to develop their awareness of cultural diversity in Christian faith. At the same time, children do develop an awareness of other faiths and ways of life. This contributes to the school's inclusive approach which values diversity and encourages all children to develop and express their own ideas. The quality of RE teaching is good. A particular strength lies in the way learning in the subject is closely linked with literacy. Children have a growing awareness of the way in which religious ideas are linked with their everyday experiences and other aspects of their learning in school. They are starting to recognise, for example, the importance of symbolism and metaphor in expressing ideas, and some of the older children can now move beyond a literal understanding of religious ideas. Younger children benefit from engaging in the 'philosophy for children' approach. This helps to give many of them enthusiasm for exploring ideas in greater depth and confidence in putting forward and discussing their own developing ideas. The children know that 'it's alright to say what you think' in RE, and that their contribution is properly valued. Consequently, they make good progress in their learning and their attainment, as seen in their written work, is broadly in line with other areas of the curriculum. The school is currently exploring more effective ways of helping children to understand what they need to do next to take their learning forward. Teachers are aware of their own need for greater confidence in their own subject knowledge. They are, however, well supported by the headteacher, who co-ordinates their planning and monitors their teaching effectively.

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

Leaders are successful in ensuring that the school's ethos and distinctiveness, including its Christian foundation, are kept at the forefront of the school's development. This happens particularly through the school's governing body and the school's own Church Distinctiveness Group. Their development plan reflects this emphasis. The drive of the headteacher, and of other leaders, has ensured that well targeted strategies are in place for linking together the spiritual life of the school, and social and emotional aspects of learning, with personal, social and health education and children's spiritual and moral development. It is one of the focal points for review and action by the whole governing body. They have responded effectively to matters identified for development in the previous report. This has led, for example, to children having a much higher profile in the planning of collective worship. In particular, arrangements are in place for monitoring and evaluating the school's role as a church school. Governors, children and staff are all involved in this process. Training through the diocese has helped to take this further. Helpfully, this entails close co-operation between stakeholders, for example in reviewing the school's mission statement. Thus, management is coherent and leaders work well together to carry forward and further enhance the school's Christian ethos. There is a helpful and supportive relationship between the church and the school, and children are well aware of, and benefit from this co-operation. Parents are increasingly being drawn into this partnership, and surveys indicate that there is broad support for the school's distinctive ethos as well as confidence in the quality of teaching and learning. Future planning shows that the school is keen to move forward, for example through devolving the leadership of RE, having established a firm basis for moving forward. Over time, the leadership has successfully secured the role and prominence of the school, together with its ethos, in the local community.

