

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Bathwick St Mary Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Darlington Road
Bath
BA2 6NN

Diocese: Bath & Wells

Local authority: Bath & North East Somerset

Date of inspection: 12 February 2014

Date of last inspection: 9 February 2009

School's unique reference number: 109256

Headteacher: Kevin Burnett

Inspector's name and number: Andrew Rickett 201

School context

Bathwick St Mary is a single form entry primary school situated in a residential area on the outskirts of the city. The majority children are of a white British heritage and come from the immediate area. The school is usually oversubscribed with Key Stage 2 classes exceeding 30 in number. The socio-economic background of the children is favourable with most homes being privately owned. The number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average as is the numbers who receive support from the pupil premium. Children enter the school in Reception with standards generally in line with national expectations. There have been changes to staffing in recent years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Bathwick St Mary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- A strong emphasis on explicit Christian values and the development of a personal spirituality make a significant impact on the children's learning and personal development.
- There are clear links between the school's core Christian values, collective worship, religious education and the whole curriculum.
- The commitment from the leadership and management, including governors, ensures that the school is continually reviewing and developing its Christian vision.

Areas to improve

- To support the embedding of reflection areas within classrooms through the greater involvement of children so that they are enabled to explore in depth their understanding of spirituality.
- To build on the existing opportunities for children to use their creativity and originality in religious education (RE) to apply their skills and knowledge through deep enquiry, based on key questions.
- To support foundation governors in monitoring and evaluating the school's distinctive Christian values through more focussed discussions with children.

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

The strength of the school's Christian ethos and the reason for its outstanding impact on the children's learning and well-being is its clarity. The school's vision is to love God and your neighbour and that by doing so you will be the best that you can be. From this simple message emanates all school policies and practices which are underpinned by core values that have explicit Biblical roots. This is something that is shared and understood by all members of the school community. This simple message has become embedded in the everyday life of the school and is referred to in lessons and on the playground. The love of God and neighbour and being the best you can influences the school's approach to teaching and learning thereby contributing to the children's academic achievement which is consistently above national

expectations. It also underpins the school's approach to relationships as they are reflected in how the school deals with behaviour and how it cares for the vulnerable. The creation of reflection areas in all classrooms has helped the school to develop its understanding of what spirituality means to them as a school. The closer involvement of children in designing these areas is something that the school is keen to explore as a means of encouraging children to think even more deeply about the nontangible aspects of life. Relationships are excellent. Children treat each other with a great deal of respect and teachers model the Christian values that lie at the heart of the school. The learning environment is characterised by a sense of trust between adults and children in which children feel safe to ask questions and speak openly knowing that their views will be listened to.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Acts of worship at Bathwick St Mary are a vital part of how the school defines its Christian character. It is through the messages given in collective worship that the school promotes its explicit Christian vision and provides opportunities for children to encounter God. Children and parents understand this and appreciate its importance in helping to create 'the things that make the school a special place'. When asked about collective worship children are clear that it is a time to think about God and a time to pray to Him and that this makes it a distinct time in the school day. Messages given in worship are closely linked to the school's core values and its mission to love God and our neighbour and therefore have an explicit emphasis on the teaching of Christianity. Bible stories, prayers, hymns and time for reflection ensure that all acts of worship have the elements that help children to worship. The use of simple liturgical words of welcome and to send children out at the end as well as the saying of the Lord's Prayer, help children to understand the Anglican tradition of their worship. They have a very good understanding of the stories that tell the life of Jesus and can explain the place that He has at the centre of Christian faith together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. The school provides very good opportunities for children to develop their understanding of the Trinity. Children are very positive about collective worship and respond with enthusiasm. For example, during the worship observed children sang joyously accompanied beautifully by recorders and were attentive throughout. Children say that they enjoy the opportunities they have to be involved in planning and leading acts of worship particularly those that take place in the church to celebrate the major Christian festivals at Christmas and Easter. The school has effective procedures in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of collective worship and have used feedback from children and parents to inform their practice.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Standards of attainment in religious education (RE) are consistently above national expectations by the time children leave the school at the end of Year 6. A significant proportion of children achieve at the higher levels and this represents very good progress across the school. There are efficient systems to assess the children's progress and regular scrutiny of children's work by all teachers ensures that moderation levels children's attainment accurately. The school is in the process of refining its assessment procedures so that it has a greater ability to track the progress of different cohorts of children. This will bring RE more closely in line with other core subjects in the school curriculum. Religious education is outstanding because of the consistent very high quality of teaching and learning which places high expectations on the outcomes for children. Teaching seen during the inspection in both Key Stages carefully guided children through the investigation of challenging concepts that deepened understanding by skilfully encouraging children to explore their own thoughts about faith and belief. For example, in a Key Stage 1 lesson, children were given the opportunity to interpret psalms through music and mime. In a Key Stage 2 class, the teacher challenged children in their understanding of both Christianity and Hinduism by using their knowledge of these two religions in creative ways. The greater use of enquiry based key questions is an area that the school is exploring and one which would make an important contribution to the ongoing development of RE and its existing high status within the overall curriculum. Children have very positive attitudes towards RE and respond with enthusiasm in lessons. They are keen to take part in discussion and have the confidence to express their own views whether others agree or not. This is done because all children listen to each other in an environment of trust that no one will be less than respectful of the views

of others. Religious education makes a significant contribution to the promotion of the school's Christian ethos. Lessons refer to the school's emphasis to 'be the best you can be' and to love God and your neighbour. There are also strong links to collective worship and to other curriculum areas. For example, one RE lesson included prayers about the class topic on the rainforest. Another linked the children's work in literacy about similes when writing their own psalms. Subject leadership is of the highest quality. The deputy, in her role as RE leader, has enthusiasm and passion for her subject and understands the role RE has in the whole curriculum. She has accurately identified how to continue to develop the subject.

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

The headteacher, with the full support of the deputy headteacher, articulates with passion and commitment a strong vision which is explicitly rooted in Christian teaching. This vision is shared and understood by the school's senior leaders and staff. Governors also have a very clear understanding of the purpose of a church school and ensure, together with the headteacher, that its continuing development is a high priority as part of whole school development. The parents spoken to on the day of the inspection agree that the school's Christian ethos is a prominent aspect of school life and is approached in a way that allows their children to explore the meaning of faith and belief openly. All leaders and managers, including governors, have an excellent grasp of how the school's distinctively Christian values make a significant contribution to the well-being and academic progress that children make. This is evident in the quality of the leadership's ability to accurately reflect on what it needs to do to continue to move forward as a church school. The headteacher in particular has an outstanding capacity to think strategically about next steps for improvement as a church school. The school's leaders have a strong focus on meeting the needs of the individual child and have developed effective self-evaluation processes that place the uniqueness of each child at the heart of school improvement. Links with the parish church are a major strength of the school. Children, for example, say that the link with the church is one of the key ways through which they express their church school status. There is a very fruitful relationship with the church community based on mutual support and a sense of belonging together. A vicar has recently been appointed following a lengthy vacancy. He has already become involved in the school community. The vicar is keen to work with the school and other foundation governors to explore how, as they continue to explore the meaning of spirituality, they can gather evidence of children's spiritual development through discussions with them. The leadership of RE and collective worship is the responsibility of senior leaders in the school which is a reflection of the importance given to these two aspects of school life.