



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### St Mary's Island Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

Island Way West, St Mary's Island, Chatham, Kent ME4 3ST

**Previous SIAS grade: Good**

**Current SIAMS grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese: Rochester**

Local authority: Medway

Date of inspection: 9<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Date of last inspection: February 2011

School's unique reference number: 132056

Headteacher: Christine Easton

Inspector's name and number: Pamela Draycott 161

#### School context

Most pupils in this large primary school come from White British backgrounds. There is also a small but growing percentage of children from minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage is below the national average as is the percentage with some sort of special educational need. A higher than average number of pupils enter or leave school at times other than the usual due to the school's proximity to the nearby Army barracks. There is a church based in the school building.

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

- The inclusive and nurturing Christian ethos which successfully and deeply influences school life and work. This impacts positively on the very good attainment and progress made by pupils.
- The well-established and strong links between the school and the parish church which is mutually enriching in expressing their joint service to their local community.
- Pupil behaviour is exemplary and powerfully reflects the school's explicit Christian values.
- The sense of community and high quality of relationships enhance the quality of school life for both pupils and staff.
- The school's worship and prayer life, along with religious education (RE), makes a significant and positive contribution to pupils' deep spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

#### Areas to improve

- Utilise further existing links with local Church primary schools in order to ensure and support a collaborative Christian presence in education in the area.
- Ensure that teaching and learning in religious education (RE) consistently and appropriately reflects the multi-cultural, world-wide nature of Christianity.

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

There is a productive emphasis on driving forward school improvement based on a clearly embedded, high profile Christian ethos. This effectively underpins school life and work. Consequently, the school is successfully meeting its pupils' personal and academic needs. This is shown in pupils' very good attainment and progress. These are on a continued upward trend and are above national averages. Reflecting deeply the school's Christian values of respect, trust, hope, compassion, forgiveness, thankfulness and service, the school is a happy and welcoming place with a strong sense of belonging and of community. Consequently, attendance is very high and pupils' behaviour is exemplary. The quality of relationships at all levels is strong. The school's motto of, 'Anchored in God - on course for excellence' is well embedded and impacts positively on learning. Pupils reflect appropriately on and are confident in expressing how the school's Christian ethos impacts on their behaviour and learning, both in and out of school. As one pupil reflected, 'We are anchored in God so we can't move in the wrong direction therefore we can keep focused in our learning'. The high quality of display celebrates the school's Christian values and enriches the learning environment significantly. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a real strength. The worship programme and RE successfully enhance and play major roles in leading this provision. Pupils are successfully helped to express their personal opinions and beliefs whilst recognising diversity and respecting others' beliefs and practices.

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

The rich and varied worship programme is central to raising aspirations and providing spiritual and moral challenge within the school community. As rightly recognised by staff, governors, pupils and parents, it positively contributes to exploring the school's Christian values as well as to key areas of Christian belief and practice. Through worship, pupils have a good, age-appropriate understanding of key Christian beliefs such as that of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They also explore the significance of Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter very well. There is a detailed exploration of biblical stories and the importance of Jesus for Christians is clearly expressed through worship. Planning is comprehensive and ensures co-ordination between leaders who include staff, governors, local clergy, lay members of the church and other visitors. Pupils enter the hall with a sense of expectation and reverence. They take an active part including leading extempory prayer. A focal point for worship effectively helps pupils' understanding of Anglican traditions such as the use of different coloured cloths reflecting different times of the Christian year. Saying an opening and closing sentence with responses is very well embedded into practice. Governors, staff, pupils and parents are systematically involved in the evaluation process and feedback is acted upon. This is an improvement since the previous denominational inspection. Each class has a well used reflection and prayer area, there is a sensory quiet garden and a prayer labyrinth has just been added to the outside area. This is indicative of the high profile given to prayer in school life. Pupils know the Lord's Prayer and that there are different types of prayer. One pupil reflected that 'God sometimes says 'no' to a particular prayer either because it's the wrong time or because you've asked for the wrong thing'.

### **The effectiveness of RE is outstanding**

RE is given high status, being treated as a 'core subject'. The significant strengths in leadership, teaching and learning which have been instrumental in improving outcomes generally are also evident in RE. A wide range of appropriate strategies such as 'freeze-framing', visitors from Christian and other faiths and targeted paired and group discussion work are very well used. These engage and inspire pupils deeply in their learning. Consequently, pupils make at least good, and often very good progress in RE. Pupils' progress is accurately tracked. The percentage of pupils working at age related expectations in RE is at or above the averages for literacy and mathematics both in the school and nationally. The school's scheme of work follows diocesan guidelines, appropriately adapted to meet school needs. It provides a rich balance of teaching which focuses on Christianity and that which focuses on other world faiths such as Islam and Sikhism. The curriculum is very well extended by specific themed RE days. The world-wide nature of Christianity is well expressed during

the themed RE days but this multi-cultural dimension is less well explored during 'ordinary' lessons. Pupils reflect in a very detailed way on what they have learned and relate it effectively to their everyday lives at school and beyond. Pupils' written activities include, for example, poetry and extended writing. It is of a high quality. Assessment is very well used to aid learning. In line with whole school policy, pupils are consistently given opportunities to respond to teacher marking in order to improve their work. RE is very well led by an enthusiastic and effective subject leader who is successfully driving forward improvements. This includes providing detailed support for developing teachers' knowledge and confidence in teaching RE. There is also effective feedback to teachers based on regular monitoring of pupils' work. The subject leader has benefited substantially from being involved in a diocesan subject leader group and training. She has implemented elements from this involvement which has effectively contributed to improving standards and pupils' and staff enjoyment of RE. Some limited work has been undertaken towards the school applying for a national RE Quality Mark.

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

The resolute leadership of the headteacher has successfully focused on raising standards and strengthening the school's Christian ethos as 'two sides of the same coin'. In this, she is greatly supported by an effective leadership team, her staff and governors. As the chair of governors comments, 'The Christian ethos underpins all the school's work. It gives the pupils the right mindset for learning'. The school's self-assessment is detailed and accurate. Action planning is robust, with clearly delineated steps for improvement set out to meet agreed priorities. Advice from the Diocese and the Local Authority has been sought and acted upon. The school works increasingly effectively in partnership with other local primary schools, particularly, but not exclusively, those with a Church foundation. This encourages the sharing of expertise and enables cross-school monitoring of standards. There is recognised scope for deepening and extending the capacity of this collaboration. This has already started. The strong RE subject leader, who also co-ordinates the worship programme, is very well supported by the headteacher and by governors, particularly those on the 'foundation committee'. RE and worship meet statutory requirements. Links with the parish church, though clergy and laity, are very strong and evident across both school and parish life. Parents are very well included in their children's education, including through strong home-school links focused on the school's Christian values. Parents are very appreciative of the approachability and care of the staff towards their children. This is recognised as clearly being part of the school's distinctive Christian ethos. Staff at all levels are very well supported for working in a church school. Areas for development from the previous denominational inspection have been successfully addressed.

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