



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### **St Mark's Voluntary Aided Ecumenical Church of England/Methodist Primary School**

St Mark's Road,

Worle,

Weston-Super-Mare, BS22 7PU

**Previous SIAS grade: Outstanding**

**Current SIAMS grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese: Bath and Wells; Methodist District: Bristol**

Local authority: North Somerset

Dates of inspection: 21 May 2015

Date of last inspection: 24 May 2010

School's unique reference number: 109273

Headteacher: Helen Bath

Inspector's name and number: Daphne Spitzer NS No 37

#### **School context**

St Mark's VA Ecumenical Church of England/Methodist Primary School is located in Worle, on the outskirts of Weston Super Mare. It has 420 children on roll organised in 14 classes. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or physical disabilities is below the national average as are those eligible to be in receipt of Pupil Premium. The majority of children are from white British heritage families.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mark's VA as an Ecumenical Church of England / Methodist school are outstanding**

- The high quality of children's spiritual awareness promoted by collective worship has a strong impact on their achievement and personal development
- The strength of the partnership between the school and parents provides pastoral support for families and mutual benefits for all
- The visionary leadership of the headteacher, staff team, clergy and governors, drives the continuous improvement of the school's distinctive Christian character, thereby raising its impact

#### **Areas to improve**

- Sustain the priority placed on the development of the school's distinctive Christian character so that the children's academic achievement, personal and spiritual development continues to be of the highest quality

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

St Mark's Primary School is an inclusive, warm and welcoming Christian community. It has identified a set of five values underpinned by Christian teaching which are totally integral to the whole life of the school. These values are having a significant impact on children's academic achievement, personal and spiritual development. Children talk enthusiastically of the importance of these values in their lives and can identify how each one helps them at a personal level with their learning. For instance, they say showing perseverance with their work is crucial and closely link the value to Christ's parable of the Lost Sheep. Relationships at all levels are outstanding. The sense of a strong, closely knit community, understood as the school family, is palpable. It is evident in the way children describe the school family as their friends, being their friends' friends as well as teachers, and families. Children often work together in family groups which promotes friendship across the age groups. Children comment that the Christian value of forgiveness is central to their personal well-being and learning because they know that 'your teacher forgives you', in the same way as the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son forgave him. Another way that spirituality is developed very well is the school's work on families, promoting a good understanding that there are many kinds of families, different whilst at the same time being similar, because love is at their heart, as with God's family. The new school dog, Skipper is an additional friend to children providing a profound impact on their spiritual development and well-being. Supporting Christian charities, including Methodist ones, is part of the curriculum for all year groups; enabling children to identify with the aims and work of their charity as well as promoting a strong sense of commitment. In turn, this enables children to recognise that Christianity is a global faith which serves the needs of people of all faiths overseas as well as at home. A recent link made with a local school with a more diverse community is providing children with good experiences of meeting children from other faiths and cultures.

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

Collective worship is explicitly Christian and a time of central importance at St Mark's. It is inspiring and transformational. This is evident in the way children say that worship is a 'time to come together to praise God with singing'. Their singing, often with signing, helps them feel 'close to God' and singing with so many people together makes them feel they are 'singing with God'. This is an example of the highly effective way that worship promotes spiritual development. Their views strongly reflect the school's Methodist foundation. Times of prayer and reflection are integral to worship and the school day; noted in the reflective areas and prayer boxes in classrooms which are well used. Children talk with ease and confidence about their personal faith and how much they value and recognise the peace and tranquillity within school and in the Peace Garden. Children themselves seek ways to further enhance the school's promotion of spiritual awareness; evident in their desire to adapt an area of the Explore Room into a prayer space for lunchtimes. Distinctive Christian values are fully embedded in worship; children clearly understand their values are derived from Bible stories which are a feature of central displays within the hall. In a similar way children's understanding of the Trinity is very well established because it is explained through spiritual songs and sung prayers as well as the words clearly displayed on the hall worship wall. The leadership and management of worship are outstanding. The school's three year plan is fully understood, shared by clergy and monitored and evaluated by a range of people, including children, who feel a strong sense of ownership because they regularly plan and lead worship themselves. Local clergy, including Baptist, Methodist and Anglican regularly lead worship and contribute very well to the life of the school.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

Standards in religious education (RE) are outstanding. Children make exceptional progress from starting points, which are in line with the national average, to attainment at the end of Year 6 which is often well above and also currently above that of another core subject. This reflects the central importance of RE in the school curriculum and is evident in the way children talk with animation and enthusiasm about the subject. The subject leader's accurate monitoring suggests teaching is at least good and this was verified in lessons seen. Learning is of high quality because teachers use well-chosen activities, often based on enquiry methods, which are both challenging and exciting; questioning is open ended, challenging children to think deeply and reflect. Children's understanding of Christianity is outstanding; evident in their knowledge of Bible stories and the current school focus on Pentecost which is understood to be symbolised by the school vision statement which is part of the school logo, 'Igniting the fire for learning'. Religious education promotes a deep understanding of Christian values. This was noted in the way younger children were learning that the parable of the Lost Coin was related to the school's value of perseverance; at the same time identifying other stories that exemplified the same value. Spiritual awareness is promoted very effectively by RE. For instance, in an outstanding Key Stage two lesson, older children were reflecting deeply on the feelings of Jesus's friends at the time of Pentecost; insightful comments such as 'he'd just realised that Jesus was their friend and it gave them confidence' demonstrated a high level of understanding of the Holy Spirit. Children have a thirst for knowledge about other faiths as well as Christianity. They talk with respect, for example, of the inspiring commitment they recognise in the way Muslims live their lives. The leadership of RE is excellent; lessons are observed, work sampling undertaken and action taken as a result, to ensure standards are high. The school leadership team including clergy and governors monitor and evaluate the subject very effectively with children playing a full role in the process.

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

The school's distinctive Christian character is of the highest quality, is deeply embedded and has a significant impact on the whole school community. The headteacher's strong Christian vision, and the leadership team's commitment to this vision are the driving force at the heart of the school's success and ongoing improvement as a church school. Under her inspirational leadership, since the last inspection, the Christian vision has grown from strength to strength; for instance, by the selection of the school's core set of Christian values and forming a partnership with a more culturally diverse local school. The governors are exceptionally well involved in all aspects of the life of the school and as a result the church school's self-evaluation process is rigorous and very effective. The school's partnership with parents is highly effective and plays a pivotal role in promoting the school's success as a church school. For instance, the annual programme of Year Three Family SEAL led by the Parent Support Adviser has a profound impact; as does the pastoral care offered by the school to the whole family resulting in the school being described by one parent as 'a rock'. Professional development for school leaders and individuals is a priority and of mutual benefit to the diocese; since not only do staff benefit from training but the headteacher supports its work in a mentoring role. The strong partnership is noted in the role of the school choir at recent diocesan Wells Cathedral services. The school's close links with the local churches have a good impact on all aspects of school life. The Anglican vicar in particular, is planning to increase his visits to lead school worship thereby further strengthening the partnership with the local church. This is an example of a school that is continually seeking ways to improve its distinctive Christian character.