



YR EGLWYS  
YNG NGHYMRU



THE CHURCH  
IN WALES

## Gwella Inspection of a Church in Wales School

### **St. Mary the Virgin Voluntary Aided Church in Wales Primary School**

North Church Street,  
Butetown,  
Cardiff, CF10 5HB

**Diocese:** Llandaff

Local authority: Cardiff

Dates of inspection: 22<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019

Date of last Section 50 inspection: 22<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2012

School's unique reference number: 6813355

National Society registration number: 511

Headteacher: Mrs Nicki Prichard

Inspector's name and number: Dr David Ellis 101

### **School context**

St. Mary the Virgin Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School is in Butetown, which is one of the oldest multicultural areas of Cardiff and one of the most disadvantaged locations in Wales. There are 230 pupils in the school between the ages of three and eleven, taught in seven single age classes, plus two part-time nursery classes and one mixed age range class. Over the last few years, the number of pupils has remained relatively stable, but there have been consistently more boys than girls on roll. There are high rates of mobility in and out of the school. Around 93% of pupils are from an ethnic minority background and around 74% have English as an additional language. Fourteen first languages are spoken in the school and many pupils join with little or no English. Around 84% of pupils are Muslim with approximately 6% Christian, 5% Hindu and 6% of another or no religion. There are ten full-time teachers and three part-time teachers, supplemented by a number of support staff, some of whom are Muslim and speak languages other than English. A majority of pupils attend the school because they live in the locality; just over a half of the parents or carers say they specifically chose a faith school education. Data shows that on average over the last three years 45% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is well above the national and local averages. Around 33% are identified as having special educational needs, which is also above the national average; five have a statement. No pupils use Welsh at home as a first language. Three pupils from one family are looked after by the local authority. There is a Flying Start nursery provision for two to three-year olds on site. The headteacher has been in post since September 2013.

### **Established strengths**

- The school has a very special and distinctive Christian character that very successfully integrates and unites pupils and their families from a wide range of different faiths and backgrounds.
- All pupils and adults relate exceptionally well to each other and worship together, whatever their faith background.
- Acts of collective worship are a central feature of school life and are well organised.

- Nearly all pupils have a very good understanding of Christian beliefs and the meaning of faith.
- The headteacher, the senior leadership team and governors lead and manage the school as a Church school very effectively.

### **Focus for development**

In order to build on its existing good practice, the school needs to:

1. Develop the religious education (RE) scheme of work to build in the 'Understanding Christianity' programme and the story of faith communities in Wales.
2. Develop an effective process to assess the recently introduced Understanding Christianity units so that they contribute to the overall assessment of RE.
3. Refine the Section 50 self-evaluation report and development planning process.

### **Overall Judgement:**

The overall judgement of the school is **good**.

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

The school has a very special and distinctive Christian character that is very evident when entering the site and building. For example, there are Christian signs and symbols prominently on display and its Church in Wales status is clearly denoted along with its mission statement. There are reflective areas in each classroom and the hideaway in the garden is a special place that is used to enhance children's spirituality and learning experiences. No pupils are withdrawn from either collective worship or religious education lessons. All these characteristics have a significant impact on pupils' performance and wellbeing.

In particular, the school very successfully integrates and unites pupils and their families from a wide range of different faiths and backgrounds. All pupils and adults relate exceptionally well to each other. They are aware of the individuality of others and the need for equal respect, regardless of disability, race, gender, creed and home language. They recognise and celebrate the importance and significance of other faiths. As a result, nearly all pupils have a well-developed respect for people with different beliefs and customs. The school's 12 core Christian values underpin all aspects of school life and are well known by pupils; individuals develop their own values effectively and are regularly rewarded for demonstrating these in their daily lives. Pupils and staff make significant donations to charities.

Pupils make a major contribution to the life and work of the school through voicing their ideas and opinions freely. In key stage 2, every pupil belongs to a specific pupil action group. Nearly all take on responsibilities willingly and older pupils help those younger than themselves. Overall, pupils behave well, although a few can be boisterous at times. The behaviour policy is based on the Christian values of forgiveness and reconciliation, as well as respect for one another and the environment. Good behaviour is regularly rewarded. Bullying is rare and most pupils think that the school deals with any instances effectively. The school is working towards becoming a 'Rights Respecting School'. Consequently, nearly all pupils feel safe and happy in school.

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

Acts of collective worship have a number of excellent features and are well established as a central feature of school life. All pupils and adults worship together on four days a week as a whole school, in key stages or in class, whatever their faith or background. The seamless and harmonious integration of Christian, Muslim and other pupils openly reflects the distinctive ethos of the school. Teachers plan and

organise worship sessions carefully and staff and pupils evaluate them perceptively. Every Wednesday, pupils from Christian and non-Muslim families attend a Eucharist service in the Church, while Muslim pupils attend their own assembly in the school. The Eucharist service is effectively conducted and relevant to the age of pupils, who participate by serving at the altar and by reading from the Bible. A very few pupils take communion. Nearly all pupils say they enjoy collective worship sessions and find them valuable. All teachers have the opportunity to lead the worship on a rota basis. The arrangements fully meet the criteria for a Church school, while catering for other faiths and traditions that are represented in the school.

Acts of collective worship appropriately follow a similar pattern, involving an altar as a focal point, the lighting of a candle, a Bible reading or story and reflection time. Pupils listen carefully, respond suitably and recite prayers regularly, such as The Lord's Prayer, a Muslim prayer and the school prayer. The Welsh language is used appropriately. The use of music creates a calm and reverent atmosphere at the beginning and end of sessions, although singing and praise are less prominent. Appropriate liturgical colours representing the Church's year are used for the altar, as well as the stole behind the statue of Mary and Jesus in the foyer. Important festivals and events in the Christian calendar are celebrated. Each week on a Friday afternoon, pupils receive rewards for their achievements and for being kind, helpful or hardworking. All classes contribute to school worship by performing a class assembly each year on a topic they are studying.

The school promotes the use of prayer effectively. Pupils say prayers in the morning, before lunch and at the end of the day. They also write and deliver their own personal prayers and use the reflection areas whenever they wish. As a result, nearly all pupils understand that they can pray to God at anytime and anywhere. In 2017, a pupil action group for collective worship was established to give pupils a voice in the development of collective worship with representatives from each key stage 2 class. The group evaluates the collective worship programme purposefully and has formulated a mission statement and an action plan to improve sessions inside and outside the building. All of these arrangements ensure that acts of collective worship promote pupils' spiritual development, understanding of Christian values and empathy for each other extremely effectively.

### **The effectiveness of religious education is good.**

In religious education, as in other subjects, most pupils make at least higher than expected progress across the school, often from a lower than average starting point. They produce work generally of a good standard, although at times they could present their work better. By the end of key stage 2, the majority are assessed as working at Level 4 with around a quarter attaining Level 5, according to the Church in Wales' core skills descriptors. Written religious education work is recorded alongside other traditional foundation subjects in 'Context' exercise books.

All pupils appropriately receive discrete lessons in religious education each week for at least 5% of their timetable, involving whole-class work, group work and individual tasks. In addition, they frequently undertake related religious education work across the curriculum and access religious texts knowledgeably, such as the Bible. As a result, they have a very well-developed background knowledge of Christianity, the Anglican calendar and the role of the church, as well as of other religions and the meaning of faith. Teachers use a range of teaching strategies and approaches to help pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of faith. Where appropriate, they use digital technology and make links to the cwricwlwm Cymreig. However, pupils only infrequently visit other churches and places of worship and their understanding of the concept of pilgrimage and of the story of faith communities in Wales are relatively underdeveloped.

The Church in Wales syllabus is followed overall. Elements of the 'Understanding Christianity' programme are beginning to be introduced and interwoven into the curriculum. This approach is in the early stages of implementation and, as a result, the scheme of work and teachers' planning are in the process of revision. However, there are indications that the programme is beginning to have a significant impact on pupils' understanding of religious concepts and ideas. In particular, opportunities for pupils to discuss, respond to and ask challenging and thought-provoking questions are enabling them to realise the similarities between different faiths and to reconcile stories, values and creeds from other traditions with their own beliefs. Pupils' work in religious education is displayed prominently across the school, accompanied by Biblical references and quotations. This links the work well to the school's Christian character and values. There are appropriate resources for the teaching of religious education.

Teachers provide feedback on pupils' work in religious education in line with the school's marking and feedback policy, although assessment procedures for the recently introduced 'Understanding Christianity' units are at an early stage. Teachers record pupils' progress thoroughly through the use of field notes, the Diocese's core skills document and, more recently, an electronic tracking system at KS2, although this does not directly relate to the scheme of work or the core skills that are taught. Nevertheless, it shows pupils' progress and helps the school maintain an accurate and detailed record of pupils' achievement in religious education. The school is in the process of refining its assessment procedures, particularly in line with the introduction of the 'Understanding Christianity' programme. Overall, pupils achieve well in their knowledge and understanding of religious education and the subject is effectively organised and taught, although there are areas for further development.

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

The school's leaders and governors promote the Church ethos of the school very successfully. They ensure the school's Christian character permeates all aspects of school life and is relevant to all pupils who attend the school. This is because the headteacher and all members of staff demonstrate a strong personal commitment to the school and its values.

Distributed leadership is well developed. All teachers are curriculum co-ordinators and have a responsibility for improving their subject areas. The religious education co-ordinator is also the collective worship leader and oversees both of these aspects very efficiently. She attends training events regularly and leads staff development in these areas effectively. She supports staff in their planning and reviews and updates the religious education, collective worship and spiritual development policies systematically. She monitors the subject frequently through scrutinising pupils' work, undertaking learning walks and viewing teachers' planning and displays, leading to an annual religious education action plan. All the identified targets in this plan have been successfully completed or are in the process of completion. The co-ordinator also leads the Worship Pupil Action Group, which has produced a similarly appropriate action plan for collective worship. However, neither of the action plans is referenced in the school's overall school development plan, where there is only indirect reference to religious education and collective worship. Moreover, there is no separate Section 50 development plan.

There is, however, a discrete Section 50 self-evaluation report, dated 2018. This is a comprehensive document distinct from the school's main self-evaluation report and supplemented by a 2019 update. Some of the statements in the 2018 document are repeated within the text and at times drawn from the main self-evaluation report, where, similar to the school development plan, there is no specific reference to religious education and collective worship. All four recommendations from the previous Section 50 inspection have been fully addressed.

The governing body, which reflects the local and wider community, is very supportive of the school and is fully involved in its development. Members have recently undertaken a rigorous self-evaluation process

and have started a four-module governance programme as part of the school improvement process. Many governors are parishioners and regular visitors to the school, for example by attending collective worship sessions.

There are close links with the adjacent St. Mary the Virgin Church and the parish clergy make a significant contribution to the life and ethos of the school. The parish priest is a member of the governing body and is the religious education and collective worship governor. He leads collective worship each week, including the Eucharist service, which parishioners can attend. He also provides pastoral care for staff, a few of whom are regular communicants at St. Mary's. Pupils visit the church as part of the curriculum and use the grounds to study wildlife. Only a very few families attend an Anglican church on Sundays and very few pupils attend any Sunday schools. A committee has been formed to celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Church.

Nearly all parents are very supportive of the school and many visit regularly for coffee mornings, assemblies and other events. Links with the local community are also strong, such as the two local Mosques and the neighbouring Greek Orthodox Church, although pupils do not visit these normally for educational purposes. However, the recent Year 4 Lead Creative Schools project gave pupils the opportunity to work closely with the local community, including interviewing religious leaders, which resulted in an animated film about the local area. The school has a partnership with a primary school in another local authority and staff work regularly with other schools within their cluster and with other Church in Wales schools in the local authority. Links with the receiving secondary schools are good and a minority of pupils proceed to a Church in Wales secondary school. Contact with pupils abroad is in the process of development through the Erasmus programme.

<b>The school meets the statutory requirement for collective acts of worship</b>	YES
<b>The school meets the statutory requirement for religious education</b>	YES

Gwella May 2019 St Mary the Virgin Church in Wales VA Primary School, Cardiff CF10 5HB