St Mark’s Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School
St. Issells Avenue, Merlins Bridge, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. SA611JX
Diocese: St David’s
Local authority: Pembrokeshire County Council
Dates of inspection: April 25th, May 4th, May 10th.
Date of last inspection: November 2011
School’s unique reference number: 6683320
Headteacher: Revd. Mrs Heather Cale
Inspector’s name and number: Mrs Anne Murawski

School context
St Mark’s Church in Wales Primary School was built in 1982 in the village of Merlin’s Bridge on the outskirts of Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire. There are currently 148 pupils on roll between the ages of 3 and 11. Pupils are admitted on a part time basis, the term after they are 3, becoming full time after their 4th birthday. Aside from the headteacher there are 5 full time teachers supported by 11 learning support assistants. Nearly all pupils are of white ethnic background. No pupils speak Welsh as a first language.

Around 45% of pupils are eligible for free school meals and the school has identified 40% as having additional learning needs. Both are well above the national average of 19% and 25% respectively. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

The headteacher was appointed in September 2014.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Marks Voluntary Aided School as a Church in Wales school are GOOD. Prospects for Improvement are GOOD.

Established strengths
- strong Christian leadership and vision of the headteacher, leadership team and the governing body.
- Christian values deeply embedded into the daily life of the school
- inclusive Christian ethos in which all pupils are nurtured, valued and encouraged to reach their potential
- close links which have been formed with the church, local community and the school

Focus for development
- Enhance opportunities for spiritual reflection for all members of the school through the provision of a reflective area or prayer wall within the school
- Broaden pupils’ understanding of Christianity in the world by forming links with a Christian community or organisation overseas
- Develop a variety of approaches for a more structured evaluation of worship by all members of the school community
- Continue to review and develop the process for monitoring, assessing and tracking RE across the school

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

St Mark’s is a warm and welcoming primary school where distinctive Christian values are deeply embedded. Signage and documentation clearly define this Christian character as does the visual presence of church artefacts and displays. Its mission statement states, ‘We are a caring community, where everyone is valued and respected. Surrounded by God’s love, we learn, play, pray and grow together so that we can become the best that we can be’. This statement forms the basis of all that St Mark’s does.

All members of the school community have pupil wellbeing at the heart of what they do. The school has a nurturing and inclusive Christian ethos which reflects their emphasis on putting Christian values in action in the daily life of the school. Staff will go that ‘extra mile’ to ensure that children are happy in school. The school has embedded these
distinctive Christian values into the curriculum and promotes a calm learning environment. As a result, most pupils
make good progress against their own personal targets and based on school and national data.

Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. They ‘feel happy and safe’. Staff ‘listen to them and treat everyone fairly
and equally ’. ‘We have a daily ‘check in’ system and staff understand if we feel upset and are always willing to spend
time listening’ . Pupils show an understanding of the link between values and behaviour and readily speak about
concepts of forgiveness, giving examples of how they dealt with this in their everyday life where conflict or
misbehaviour had arisen. Although each classroom has a small reflection area the pupils spiritual growth would be
further enhanced by setting up a central area for reflection such as a prayer space or wall within the ‘tunnel’ and
refreshing the spiritual garden in the grounds.

From the questionnaires returned, more than 90%of parents recognised its distinctive character and felt that ‘it made
a significant contribution’ to their child’s education. One parent commented ‘St Marks school has shown me what a
positive impact a church school can have . The school has restored my faith’ One of the governors commented, “I am
pleased to be associated with the school. It has a culture of care and a strong Christian ethos underlying all elements
of its work”.

Links between the local church, diocese and school are strong. The clergy team are very much part of the school
community and provide both pastoral and spiritual support. They work with the headteacher in planning both worship
and RE and the curate also supports the teaching of Welsh in the school. Pupils are happy talking to them and feel
they are part of their school community. Church Army workers are also part of the clergy team and lead the after
school “Frog Club” (Fully rely on God). The school works with these workers to support families in need and in building
community relationships.

Each month a Family Service is held in the school with a growing attendance and the school has developed as ‘The
church within the community’ As there is no Anglican church within the close locality of the school it means that the
school is emerging as a ‘ base of church life’ for the local community.

The school regularly participates in education programmes and activities organised by St Mary’s church and the
cathedral, developing their understanding of the Christian heritage in Wales. Pupils are encouraged to think beyond
themselves to the wider world and get involved in raising money for charities locally, nationally and globally.
Establishing a link with a Christian community or organisation further afield would further develop pupil’s awareness
of Christianity as a multi cultural world faith. Pupils have a good understanding and respect for other faiths through
their learning in Religious Education (RE) and worship sessions.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is GOOD.

Collective worship is seen as special time and makes a significant contribution to the life of the school. It is firmly
based on Bible teaching, the church year and the school’s Values for Life programme. Whole school worship takes
place on four days and class worship takes place on the other day.

Collective worship is carefully planned and monitored by the headteacher supported by the clergy team. The worship
rota is varied and organised to encourage all teaching staff to become worship leaders. The headteacher is herself
a priest within the diocese and is able to bring experience and vision to further develop this aspect within the school.
The planned structure of the daily worship offers teaching, reflection, prayer and praise time. A carved altar in the
multipurpose hall holding the Bible, candle and cross provides a focus for worship and displays the liturgical colour
of the season. A large calendar of the church year is prominently displayed in the hall. The use of ICT and music is
used to enhance experiences and pupils take responsibility for its delivery. A multi sensory worship is aimed at,
where all children can be actively involved, as well as learning to be still and reflective. Signing has been introduced
and used effectively to include all learners

Three whole school acts of worship were observed by the inspector. In all sessions children were encouraged to
participate fully and express their ideas, questions and feelings at appropriate moments. They were generally
focussed, sang with enthusiasm and engaged well with the leaders. Children were confident in saying both the Lord’s
prayer and the Grace and responded appropriately to other key elements of prayer. Pupils speak positively about
worship and prayer stating ‘ Prayer is a time to give thanks and think about others’ ‘Worship helps me feel calm
inside and I can think things through more clearly’

A celebration of St Mark’s day was led by the headteacher and was the starting point of a day’s activities and
workshops celebrating the saint. The worship was based on the life of St Mark and what was known of him as a
gospel writer. Special prayers were read and a song about St Mark had been adapted by a member of staff especially
for the service which the pupils were very proud of and sang enthusiastically.

Each week a member of the local clergy team leads a worship session. Pupils were focussed and eager to participate
and they clearly have an impact on them. They have a good rapport with all the clergy and are happy in their presence.
They eagerly recounted worship sessions where members of the clergy team had talked about the Jesse tree or
explained about the vestments they wore. The visit from the new bishop was recalled with great enthusiasm and had
obviously been a highlight of the school year.
One day a week the Criw Cymraeg lead a Welsh assembly supported by the Welsh coordinator. This included a bilingual Bible story, Welsh prayers and songs which gave an excellent opportunity to promote the Welsh language and heritage. Awards were given out by the Criw Cymraeg for good use of the language during the week.

Some evaluation of collective worship is done by the headteacher and by listening to learners. This could be further developed by setting up a more structured process to gather regular and consistent feedback from all members of the school community.

The effectiveness of Religious education (RE) is GOOD

Religious Education (RE) is well led and managed by the headteacher who is the RE co-ordinator. She is supported very effectively by the link RE governor who is a member of the clergy team and they have worked together to review, develop and improve the delivery of the subject. It has a high profile in the curriculum and is treated as a core subject. Pupils enjoy their RE lessons and understand the value of the subject and its links to the distinctive character of the school.

Book scrutiny showed that coverage of the scheme of work is good. A variety of activities are taught in a range of different styles. Children are given opportunities to write in different ways in relation to the topics covered and there is evidence of progression from Foundation Phase to Key Stage 2. Poems and prayers written by pupils in different year groups showed a deeper understanding of religious concepts and development of their spirituality. Coverage of major events in the church year together with work on other faiths and cultures was clearly evident. The inspector had the opportunity not only to look at books but other aspects of RE work in the form of drama, news interviews, animation and art work which had been recorded using ICT.

Three lessons and a series of workshops and activities on St Mark’s day were observed. In all sessions, teaching was good and a variety of different teaching styles were used effectively. Teacher-pupil relationships were good, enabling pupils to be responsive to the activities which were introduced. Lessons were well organised and pupils moved seamlessly into the different activities. The active involvement of Teaching Assistants enhanced pupils’ learning in a positive way in all observations.

The scheme of work has been adapted to include more creativity and this was demonstrated in one of the Foundation Phase observations where the theme was the story of Jesus having breakfast on the beach after the resurrection. The session included a role play session together with art and literacy work and concluded with their very own preparation and sharing of a breakfast of bread and fish. A member of the support staff enthusiastically took on the role of Jesus in this scenario which reinforced the delivery of the theme. Pupils were thoroughly engaged and enthusiastic throughout the session.

A circle time session with lower KS2 was led with great sensitivity with pupils sharing their feelings about their own ‘talents’ thoughtfully and the teacher carefully linking their responses to Biblical references.

In the upper Key Stage 2 lesson pupils were working on various ways the resurrection could be recorded or retold. Groups had been organised sensitively to allow for differentiation and pupils worked cooperatively at all levels. The teacher and teaching assistant encouraged and supported pupils in their research activities using Bibles and multi-media methods whilst more able pupils demonstrated their independent research skills using ICT. Some very moving poetry was produced together with newspaper articles and animation scenes of the resurrection.

The school was a hive of activity for the workshop sessions to celebrate St Mark’s day. Pupils were engaged in a variety of activities linked with the saint from decorating cakes and designing bunting with the lion symbol as associated with the saint in the Foundation Stage to mapping his journeys and writing passages from his gospel with quill pens in KS2.

RE is taught in line with the Church in Wales’s syllabus. The Headteacher and link governor have worked together to plan and adapt this for their own school considering differentiation and levels of creativity and incorporating different aspects of learning through drama, art and music. Children make good progress in Religious Education (RE), given their low starting point when they join the school. Their progress is in line with the progress made in the other core subjects. RE is reported on in annual reports to parents and is discussed at parents’ evenings. There is a whole school assessment and tracking process for RE in place which has recently been reviewed and developed by the headteacher and link governor to link in with the revised scheme.

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

The headteacher, staff and governors know their school well. The headteacher clearly articulates and promotes a distinctly Christian vision for the school and as a result, she has established a community grounded in Christian values. This vision is shared effectively with all stakeholders.

School leaders share this explicit Christian vision, which influences all aspects of daily school life. Children feel nurtured and supported by caring staff who make a big impact on the wellbeing of the children and whole school community.
The staff work well as a team and show a personal commitment to each other and the pupils in their care. An experienced and dedicated support staff work effectively with staff in both pastoral care and curriculum development. Parents feel at ease in approaching the school with any queries and feel the school works effectively within the community. One parent said ‘all the staff are willing to make time to speak to you if you need to see them’ ‘staff are very caring and attentive to the needs of the children and of us as a family’

Governors are actively involved in supporting the activities of the school and are a visible presence in and around the school on a regular basis. The majority of the governors are from the church community. The chair of governors (a retired Bishop) has a clear understanding of the distinctive nature of the school and a well informed grasp of the work of the school in the community. The governors recognised the need for an ELSA/FLO (emotional learning support officer/ family liaison officer) to work alongside the school and local clergy in supporting children and families both at school and home on a variety of issues and needs. This is proving to be a valuable asset in consolidating home/school relationships.

The school's self-evaluation process leads directly to the school's improvement planning and involves all groups in the school community. This ensures the Christian impact on the school and its Christian influence on the pupils. All members of the school community are involved in the self-evaluation process and the priorities which emerged have been carefully linked to the school's improvement planning. Aspects for development in Religious Education (R.E.) and worship are included on the school improvement plan.

The committed clergy team are an asset to the school. They are regular visitors, supporting RE teaching, worship and pastoral care.

The ethos of St Mark's School epitomises the school motto 'Learning, playing, praying and growing together to become the best that we can'

| The school meets the statutory requirement for collective acts of worship | Yes |
| The school meets the statutory requirement for religious education | Yes |