



Date	May 2015
Key stages	EYFS– KS2
School type	LA maintained, primary
Themes	Leadership, governance, Ofsted outstanding

# A team effort: effective leadership that also encourages pupils to be leaders

## Welwyn St Mary's Church of England VA Primary School

### Context

Welwyn St Mary's Church of England VA Primary School is a larger than average primary school in the Welwyn/Hatfield district. The majority of pupils are from white British backgrounds and the remainder are from a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium grant is below average.

### Brief description

In September 2013, Welwyn St Mary's School was judged by Ofsted as outstanding. According to Ofsted, Welwyn St Mary's is 'extremely well-led and managed' with a 'relentless drive for continual improvement' within the school. The leadership at the school has worked hard to achieve this outstanding status and has worked together with governors, staff, parents and pupils to generate the school's clear vision of 'Learning Together for Life'. All outstanding elements of the school have been embedded into everyday practice. In addition the senior leadership has demonstrated effective practice by allowing pupils to lead a team and become part of the schools shared efforts to improve. Headteacher Mary Westley believes that everyone at the school is valued equally and that everyone in the school leads a team, rather than only her.

### A whole school approach to leadership

#### Effectively distributed leadership

Leadership is effectively distributed at Welwyn St Mary's and each leader has clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The school has recently built a larger senior leadership team which consists of seven members of SLT that is divided into three groups, foundation stage, key stage 1 and key stage 2. Tasks are shared within SLT which means that there is always plenty of support available.

#### Supportive governors

The school has extremely supportive and encouraging governors who are actively involved in school life. Governors play a key role in the school and are fully aware of what is happening. Each year the governors spend

a whole day at the school to discuss school improvement, talk to children and gather their own evidence from visits. Governors often help raise money for the school and get involved with school projects.

### **Strong self-evaluation processes**

The leadership team at Welwyn St Mary's firmly believes that their job as leaders is to help colleagues improve. The school has strong evaluation processes put in place which keep all its systems and processes under review.

The school's leaders hold regular pupil progress meetings to ensure that staff performance management targets are always linked to the school improvement policy.

There has recently been a whole school lesson observation pro forma put in place which rates certain elements of lessons with Ofsted grades. Areas of the lesson which need to be improved are always carried over to the next lesson observation form in order to track progress. This method recognises the positive elements of the lesson as well as negative, which is something that colleagues welcome.

There is also a whole school common planning pro forma in place which teachers send to the headteacher weekly and to subject coordinators every month. Subject coordinators play an active part in the management of the school and are held account for the standards of achievement in their subjects.

### **Hertfordshire Improvement Partner programme**

Welwyn St Mary's has been working with Herts for Learning through the Hertfordshire Improvement Partner Programme. This programme brings a valuable external perception to school self-evaluation and involves meetings with the headteacher to discuss their performance against the relevant professional standards and previously set objectives. The HIP works closely with the governors and the headteacher to promote a supportive and open dialogue that is focussed on improving achievement for pupils.

### **Supporting other schools**

Welwyn St Marys has supported another school, which is currently on Ofsted category, through an Educational Improvement Partnership (EIP). The headteacher provided three days a week of support to this school, and other senior and middle leaders support teachers by sharing best practice and moderating their teacher assessments together.

### **Motivating projects**

The school's leadership is aware of the challenges that staff face in their jobs and believe that positive reinforcement is important for staff as well as children. For that reason, motivating projects are held for the whole school in order to unite everyone, keep things fresh and ensure that energy levels do not drop.

Examples include a whole school writing moderation project on buried treasure and a Bible quotation project enabling the school to incorporate its Christian ethos and aims into its curriculum.

Recently the school celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, which involved staff and children having to dress up in costumes from different decades. The local press were involved in this event where pupils sealed a time capsule which is to be opened in 25 years' time. Every time the school holds such events, all members of staff are actively involved and even take part in dressing up. Karen, a member of the SLT, believes that humour keeps the staff resilient and that overall 'it takes a whole school community to make a school outstanding.'

### **Pupil leadership**

Performance Manager for years 3 and 4, Helen believes that Welwyn St Mary's is 'a school which is a team effort'. There are several opportunities at the school which allow children to take up roles of leadership and responsibility. Roles of pupil leadership within the school include house captains, who lead the four houses within the school and encourage their houses to do well, and sports leaders, who encourage younger pupils to take part in

activities. Peer mediators, or 'fix-it friends' help solve problems between other children on the playground while 'yellow-banders' look after children on the playground and involve them with activities. There is also a 'green group' at school who are concerned about recycling and saving energy.

Welwyn St Mary's is currently the only school in the UK to have started a 'K Club' inspired by similar American clubs. This involves a group of children who often read to children aged 4 to 5. The school also has a school council in place which consists of representatives from all classes.

## Impact

### Outstanding school leadership and teaching

Leadership and management at Welwyn St Mary's was judged as being outstanding by Ofsted, with the headteacher being recognised as 'an excellent role model who provides inspiring leadership and has created a strong sense of teamwork within the school.'

Leaders at the school are given opportunities to develop their leadership skills by taking on important leadership roles. Governors are fully involved in school developments and are well-informed.

The actions and hard work of the school's leadership and staff has resulted in a high and increasing percentage of outstanding teaching within the school, which was also recognised by Ofsted as consistently good and outstanding.

**'it takes a whole school community to make a school outstanding'**

### Pupils are responsible for their own learning

At Welwyn St Mary's pupils are given responsibility for their own learning. Pupils have the option of choosing which level they will work on in each lesson because teachers believe that they know the best about how they are performing in certain topics. Pupils at the school often mark their own and each other's work, which allows them to receive instant feedback. They can also use green pens to respond to teacher's marking or edit their own work.

### Pupils enjoy having responsibility

Allowing pupils to take on roles of leadership has had a positive impact in the school. Overall the behaviour and attitude to learning in the school is of a very high standard. Pupils believe that what they are doing is really important and are proud to take on extra responsibilities that allow them to motivate others. Year 6 pupils, acting as 'yellow-banders', take their roles in ensuring that younger children are playing happily, very seriously. The school council ensures that each student has a voice which has been successful as many of their ideas have been implemented.

### Strong academic results

The headteacher believes that the joint efforts of leaders, staff and pupils to successfully follow the school's tagline of 'Learning Together for Life' has had a positive impact on the attainment of pupils. In 2014, 83% of pupils at the school achieved a level 4 or above in reading, writing and maths. This was 5 ppts higher than the national average. 38% of pupils achieved above the expected level for most pupils by achieving a level 5 reading, writing and maths.

In each subject the proportions of pupils achieving more than expected progress are well above the national average. 98% of pupils make at least 2 levels of progress in writing and 88% make at least 2 levels of progress in maths.

## Achievements in the Educational Improvement Partnership

The school currently supported by Welwyn St Mary's has made huge improvements in the leadership capacity, quality of teaching and pupil outcomes as recognised in the Ofsted reports. The report stated that 'staff benefit from the strong link that has developed with the executive headteacher's other school' and that support from professionals from other schools 'has been useful in helping them inspire practice.'

Contact	Mary Westley, Headteacher at Welwyn St Mary's School
Related documents and links	<a href="http://www.welwynst-marys.herts.sch.uk/">http://www.welwynst-marys.herts.sch.uk/</a>

If you have an aspect of interesting practice that could be shared or are interested in finding out more about a case study please get in touch by emailing [exchangingexcellence@hertsforlearning.co.uk](mailto:exchangingexcellence@hertsforlearning.co.uk)

Herts for Learning is a not for profit company dedicated to improving standards of education in Hertfordshire and beyond. HfL publishes these case studies to share examples of interesting practice which schools believe have worked well for them.