

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St. John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled (VC) Primary School

Mill Lane, Wetley Rocks, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire ST9 0BN

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Lichfield
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Staffordshire
Date of inspection	8 February 2018
Date of last inspection	23 January 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	VC Primary 124283
Headteacher	Holly Shann
Inspector's name and number	Reverend Alison M. Morris 759

School context

This is a smaller than average sized primary school in a rural location within the Staffordshire Moorlands. There are 198 pupils on roll. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are lower than average numbers of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disability (SEND). The school has close links with St. John's church which provides a chaplain to the school. When last inspected by Ofsted in December 2017, the school was judged to be continuing its good standard of education. A substantive headteacher was appointed in January 2018.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. John's as a Church of England school are good

- Inspirational and astute leadership by the headteacher that demonstrates the capacity to develop a clear and focused Christian vision embedded with values which successfully leads this church school forward.
- The exemplar work of the school chaplain impacts upon the pupils understanding of the Christian religion and its influence upon the pupils' lives at this church school.
- The significant and purposeful relationships throughout the school community which reflect the Christian values and enables the Christian distinctiveness to be fostered and embedded.

Areas to improve

- Consolidate governance procedures to ensure that robust and formal systems are implemented, with secure evidence to accurately challenge, monitor and evaluate church school development.
- Review the religious education (RE) scheme of work to include a broader range of inter faith work which will also integrate with the Understanding Christianity resource.
- Revisit documentation on the vision and mission statement to highlight, clarify and embed even further references to Christian distinctiveness and provide focused points for developing the vision for this church school following the appointment of a new headteacher.

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

St. Johns is a good school which is in a period of transition as it explores how it can express and embody further its distinctive Christian character. Core Christian values, such as love and service which are rooted in Jesus' teaching are being successfully embedded. The present Christian vision, which is rooted in explicit Christian values, has impact upon the Christian distinctiveness, character and ethos. This shared vision is articulated by stakeholders in the school. However, the new headteacher is bringing a fresh approach to the Christian character. The vision, ethos and motto are being revisited for clarity and focus to ensure a firm grounding on Christian values so that they are more relevant to pupils. Specific expressions of distinctiveness are being revitalised to be more child centred

Effective intervention strategies and nurture provision provide appropriate support to meet the needs of pupils. This has an impact on pupils' learning and particularly those with specific learning challenges. Good use of outside agencies and intervention resources, such as the Accelerated Reader Programme ensure any differences between the achievements of groups are now being overcome. As a result, the rate of pupil progress has improved and is at or above national standards for all pupils including those supported by additional government funding. High expectations and aspirations have a significant impact upon pupils' lives because they positively influence their ambitions, behaviour and relationships. Pupils are valued as individuals, treated with respect and nurtured as children of God. They are also encouraged to enjoy their learning, to achieve well and to celebrate success.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development has a higher priority in the school development plan than previously and is being nourished and challenged through the newer approach to the Christian vision. Although staff identify time for pupils to improve their understanding of SMSC, leaders are aware that the impact is inconsistent. There is also an approach within the classroom to link Christian values with SMSC but it is too early to assess its impact. However, religious education (RE) makes a good contribution to pupils SMSC development, as belief matters in this school. For example, the school chaplain regularly uses the resource of Godly Play in both worship and the lessons which impacts significantly upon pupils' overall development.

Some pupils can explain what it means to be a pupil at a church school and make the link to Christian teaching in the Bible. Pupils enjoy RE which is taught using the Staffordshire RE syllabus. However, the school has identified the need to integrate further the Understanding Christianity resource so that RE becomes more challenging and accessible to both teaching staff and pupils. Pupils are aware that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith. They also have some understanding and awareness of other faiths such as Judaism. The school does recognize the need to enhance further pupils' knowledge and understanding of other world religions to prepare them to celebrate diversity and difference in a multi-faith society as well as raise their understanding of global issues.

An effective school council allows pupil voice to contribute to decision making which encourages pupils to flourish into confident young pupils. For example, pupils play a crucial role in the school's safeguarding practice through the creation of a safety questionnaire for their peers. Pupils are also encouraged to think about others and so participate in the mission of the wider community through fundraising, for example, Children in Need and Comic Relief.

Exemplary behaviour is supported by a reward and praise policy based on Christian values. Positive attitudes to learning by pupils are promoted within this caring Christian environment. They are keen to attend school because learning is fun, so absence is minimal. Pupils have good self-esteem and self-belief. They are happy, feel safe and secure. Harmonious staff relationships provide very good Christian role models which optimise learning for all pupils.

Classrooms have reflection areas, which when used, make a significant contribution to pupils' understanding and spiritual development. A stable and purposeful atmosphere is promoting a Christian learning environment which has the capacity to raise achievement for all pupils.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is important and makes a good contribution to this church school. It is distinctively Christian and evokes a sense of belonging and gathering in God's presence. Worship also has a strong focus on the person of Jesus Christ and the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As a result, pupils show some understanding of the Trinity. Worship is planned to use a range of resources based on Christian beliefs, festivals and Christian values. It is rooted in the liturgical year so that key Christian festivals such as Easter and Christmas are always celebrated in the church. This reinforces the spiritual relationship between the church and the school community. It has also improved the pupils' knowledge of the broad range Anglican tradition and practice. However, the school has identified that the co-ordination of worship needs to be reviewed so that the school vision and Christian values are consistently embedded with all pupils.

Worship, through its moral messages, influences the pupils' actions and behaviour, creating a good supportive environment. Using pupil centred approaches, worship regularly uses Bible stories to help pupils to understand the relevance of Christian values. For example, the school chaplain used a puppet and drama with some pupils to tell the story of the paralysed man. This illustration on the theme made the worship engaging and relevant to the pupils. As

such, attitudes to worship are good because the school chaplain provides meaningful experiences rooted in Christian beliefs and festivals which are appropriate and significant to the pupils' needs, age, development and interests. However, the school recognises that further development in classroom-based worship is needed to ensure consistency in approach.

Pupils are very attentive because effective use is made of stories, music and prayer. They are keen to sing and pray. Visual images, symbols and lighted candles are used to encourage awe and wonder. Pupils speak positively about worship and its impact upon their lives. There is some pupil involvement in worship, but this needs to be quickly embedded further.

Prayer and reflection are integral parts of daily worship which allows pupils to explore a relationship with God. Pupils value its impact upon their lives. As a result, some pupils speak confidently about their own faith and personal prayer. One pupil explained that prayers are 'messages to God for the whole of the world'. Appropriate use by pupils of spirituality corners and the Millennium Garden demonstrates their understanding of the purpose of prayer and provides time to reflect beyond collective worship.

Evaluating the impact of collective worship to inform future planning is now in place but is not sufficiently rigorous and consistent in approach by governors to ensure the continuing improvement of high quality worship. The school recognises the need to involve a wider range of stakeholders in the evaluation process to ensure worship is engaging and relevant to pupils' lives and their spiritual development.

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

The headteacher, supported by the governors and staff has a strong personal vision for the future and a commitment to the further embodiment of Christian distinctiveness. Her inspirational and dynamic leadership style provides a clear strategic direction for the challenges facing this school. As such, school leaders and governors are on a journey of exploration about what it means to be a church school. New management processes are being infused slowly and are impacting positively upon the quality of pupils' church school experience. This has a positive impact upon the way that everyone promotes the vision and ethos throughout this family orientated school.

Governance is strong and very supportive of the headteacher's leadership and her commitment to improve academic progress through raising aspirations. Governors have an honest and challenging view of the future development needs for school improvement. They show the capacity to undertake very effective evaluation on pupil performance and achievement. Planning is strategic, and decisions are informed by the school's Christian mission to the community. But the process needs to be more robust. Purposeful and effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the Christian distinctiveness have been limited in their impact because of the lack of formality and precision. This does not always generate secure and consistent evidence against which to challenge and evaluate judgments on church school development. Succession planning is improving and identified professional development has been highlighted by the headteacher so that governors and staff are being given training to fulfil their responsibilities. Issues identified in the previous inspection have made some progress but are yet to be fully addressed.

Substantial links with the local church and the newly appointed vicar are strengthening the link between the parish and school. Together they are ensuring that Christian values are being interwoven between the church and school in this rural community. Through the substantial work of the school chaplain, both in pastoral matters and in the classroom, a significant difference has been made to the Christian distinctiveness within this school. This relationship has impacted positively in how the school sees its distinctive character and understands its Christian vision.

Statutory requirements for both RE and collective worship are met. The headteacher has already identified a need to review the provision of RE in relation to the revision of the school vision and its Christian values. RE has a higher priority and is being strategically planned within the school development plan. As such, RE does have some impact upon Christian distinctiveness and makes some positive links to SMSC provision. The need for RE to have greater impact within the school and for improved outcomes with its pupils has been acknowledged by the school leaders.

Strong partnerships exist with the diocese, multi-agencies and the wider community. For example, the South Moorlands Learning Community is based on mutual respect and trust as pupils, staff and parents work co-operatively together for the benefit of all. Parents recognise the 'welcoming and supporting Christian faith' that underpins the school. They also appreciate the distinctive Christian values and ethos where their children feel safe and secure. They also believe that pupils' academic and personal need are being met and are enhanced through extra-curricular activities. For example, pupils participate in a range of experiences, including, science club, eco club and the choir. As a result, the school has a very good reputation, reflected in the many awards gained including the Excellence in Music Provision – Gold award and School Games – Silver Mark Award. Parents appreciate and acknowledge the leadership of the new headteacher. One parent felt that the headteacher had a 'fresh pair of eyes' which was beneficial to the school. Both governors and parents stated that she was already making a substantial and positive difference to how the staff lead and manage teaching and learning in this school. This was summed up by a parent - 'The future of the school is looking bright!'