

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Victory Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 4LE	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	St Edmundsbury and Ipswich
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Suffolk
Date of inspection	28 September 2017
Date of last inspection	14 February 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 124781
Headteacher	Janita Betts
Inspector's name and number	Judith Ruff 528

School context

St John's is of average size with 211 pupils currently on roll. It serves the area of North East Ipswich. The school is oversubscribed with admission criteria giving priority to residents in the parish of St John the Baptist. The percentage of pupils eligible for pupil premium monies and those with special educational needs is lower than the national average at 4% of the school population. Pupils are predominantly from a White British heritage, with 19% of the school population coming from other nationalities. The church of St John the Baptist is within walking distance.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The centrality of the school's Christian vision is firmly encapsulated in its strapline 'Growing with God'. This results in Gospel values being deeply embedded within the life of the community, where all strive on a daily basis to become more Christ like.
- The strong and effective partnership with the local church communities enables pupils to understand first-hand the diversity and richness within the Christian faith.
- The high-quality leadership provided by the headteacher, religious education (RE) and collective worship leader, incumbent and key foundation governor provides high levels of support through pastoral care and guidance as well as subject expertise to the rest of the staff, governors and pupils.
- The importance given to prayer and reflection results in pupils who are confident and open to the spiritual dimension of their lives and able to share with others the comfort and courage that having a relationship with God can bring.
- The creative, engaging and inclusive way in which RE is taught across the school enthuses and engages pupils to understand the importance of faith and belief in people's lives across the world.

Areas to improve

- Continue to review and refine assessment practices in RE, providing clear evidence for judgements through whole school tracking systems, which enable both senior leaders and governors to understand the impact of high quality teaching on pupils' outcomes.
- Safeguard the future sustainability of this outstanding church school by ensuring that all senior leaders and governors fully understand how this level of excellence is achieved.

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

'In this school there is a really lovely and lively environment where the faith aspect is deeply valued and appreciated'. This parent's view is fully supported by the inspector. It is clear from the communications that the school places on its website, in newsletters and in signs and symbols around the school, that teaching the Christian faith through a series of Gospel values is of central importance to school leaders. The school strapline, 'Growing with God' is lived out on a daily basis through teaching the word of God and living lives that are shaped and impacted by the teaching of Jesus. Pupils' personal development is shaped by values such as 'respect', 'compassion' and 'generosity'. They confidently link these to Bible stories such as 'The Good Samaritan' and Matthew, the tax collector. Academic achievement is supported by listening to stories of courage taken from the Old Testament such as David and Goliath and the importance of perseverance demonstrated through the friends of the paralysed man taking him to Jesus to be healed. Academic achievement remains exceptionally high, amongst the best in the country. Pupils really enjoy and are proud of their school. Attendance rates are well above national averages and there has been just one fixed term exclusion since the previous inspection. The school has focused very successfully on developing pupils' spirituality and this is woven through the curriculum as well as being further developed through initiatives such as 'Prayer Spaces'. Many pupils spoken to during the inspection were able to share their personal spiritual journey. As one child said, 'It gives me a time to be quiet and think about God. Sometimes, if I am worried about things, I find that prayer helps a lot. It gives me a way out of difficult situations'. Moral, social and cultural development is also excellent. Pupils respond to God's generosity to man by wanting to raise money for a range of different charities. The recent harvest festival gave donations to the local food bank. The school council identifies a range of local, national and international charities to support each year and these are fundraised for with great earnestness. Behaviour of pupils is excellent. They take on a number of roles and responsibilities, such as 'Work Buddies' and classroom 'Meeters and Greeters' with great pride and commitment. They demonstrate high levels of respect for each other and to visitors to the school. They take notice of other people's views and listen with attention and interest. The school's behaviour policy is built around the centrality of the school's Christian character and values. Pupils do explore and learn about Christianity as a multi-cultural faith successfully through the Diocesan 'Kagera project' and links with a Christian community in Nepal. The local church of St John the Baptist involves a team of people in the school and there are productive links with a local Baptist and evangelical church. Pupils are excited and challenged by RE. 'It teaches them about becoming good and responsible human beings, who understand that tolerance, justice and respect encapsulates who we are as Christians. That it is our responsibility to behave as Jesus would want us to', said the headteacher. An aspiration that the inspection findings showed clearly is coming to fruition amongst the school community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a central and greatly valued part of the school day. It has a significant impact on both adults and pupils alike. Staff value the opportunity on a daily basis, when the school comes together as one, to focus on God and the values promoted and taught through the Gospels. They appreciate the sharing and reflecting on spiritual values and beliefs. 'We can take the message back into the classroom' said one teacher. It supports staff to work as a united team and 'puts me in the right frame of mind' to go through a school day. Pupils enjoy being involved with collective worship. They love the 'rejoicing' aspect demonstrated very clearly on the inspection day by the joyful singing of 'Bless the Lord, O my soul' where the power of communal voices raised in worship was very evident. However, as well as praising God, pupils also value the opportunities to be still and consider 'how God makes me special' and the importance of having 'a calm time to listen to God and say your own thing to God silently'. The incumbent-led worship on the inspection day provided a wonderful visual aid through coloured balls in a tube. Each one represented God, 'stuff' and 'people'. Through the skill of the worship leader the balls constantly changed position in the tube. The profound message to the school community centred around the importance and inclusion that each Christian gives to God in the way in which He is acknowledge and recognised in their own lives. Collective worship is extremely thoroughly planned, ensuring that values are central to the worship, told through Bible stories and other inspirational people who have embodied and exemplified these values in their lives. Short phrases from the Anglican liturgy give worship a firm shape and structure, with candles being lit to show that worship has commenced. Pupils have worked hard to design and produce altar frontals which remind those present of the current value or time of the church year. Prayer and reflection time is an important part of worship. For example, 'How am I going to respond to God and how can I show Him that He is important in my life?' Pupils know the Lord's Prayer and an impressive banner in the school hall reflects a study unit completed with clergy support. They enjoy opportunities to write prayers and the 'prayer boxes' in the school's entrance encourage both parents and pupils to post their prayers so that these can be taken up by clergy representatives. The recent appointment of a school chaplain is further supporting pupils' understanding of how they can fully live out the Christian values, both within school and at home. The incumbent has led a series of talks about 'The Trinity' with Key Stage 2 pupils. These have been very well received and pupils' understanding, particularly of the Holy Spirit is further developed

through the celebration of Pentecost. The range of worship leaders is a very clear strength of the school. Pupils are exposed to a wide variety of styles of delivery and presentations, which retain their interest and engagement with the messages being communicated. Pupils are given opportunities to participate in worship through 'Open the Book' visits, where they role-play Bible stories. The 'Worship Leaders' and 'Music Monitors' are actively engaged with the leading of worship. Thoughtful power point presentations on each of the focused values demonstrate how much care and attention the pupils give to researching suitable quotations and pictures to deepen others' understanding of the importance of each value's practical applications. Worship at the local church further provides pupils with another dimension to worship and this is special to both pupils, staff and parents. Monitoring and evaluation of collective worship has had clear foci across the years. The outcomes of this are clearly shown across the school. For example, the 'refection areas' within each of the classrooms have been developed to enable pupils to continue to explore the chosen value through writing prayers or reading Bible passages. The school has also recently invested in home 'values activity' sheets which encourage parents to look up relevant Bible stories, talk and discuss more about each of these in their own home. This initiative has been welcomed by parents.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Standards of attainment in RE are high. School records show that 43% of the current Year 6 cohort are judged to be working at 'greater depth' in RE when they are assessed according to the Suffolk Agreed Syllabus for RE, as set out within the Emmanuel Project. Attainment throughout the school is high and progress as judged when looking through the 'Big Books' for RE is at least good. At present the school is continuing to work on the way assessments and progress are tracked across the school so that both senior leaders and governors can fully understand the impact of high quality teaching on pupils' outcomes. Pupils' attitudes and responses to RE are extremely positive. They display thoughtful, considered responses to visual stimuli. For example, the work centred around the picture of Jesus on a London tube train, evoked responses such as 'He's showing humility through how he's chosen to travel' and 'He mixes with ordinary people'. Pupils are given excellent opportunities to analyse, interpret and evaluate. Through these they develop a deep understanding and appreciation for how religion impacts people's lives. In the Year 2 class, outstanding teaching guided pupils through the Jewish festival of Rosh Hashanah, with excellent pace, use of recall and skilled open-ended questioning to probe levels of knowledge and understanding. 'Big Book' outcomes show the range and depth of creativity and enquiry based approaches which are skilfully deployed to empower pupils to weigh up evidence, research texts and come to conclusions, either individually or within pairs or groups. End of year report comments show how well teachers know the achievement levels and attitudes of their pupils in RE. Each taught unit is assessed through written outcomes, oral responses or pictorial representations. Classroom support staff are used effectively to record individual pupils' responses during whole class discussions and debates. RE has a very high profile within the school. The incumbent is on hand to provide the depth of theological understanding of key Christian concepts, which is much appreciated by the teaching team. Other faiths are taught well, with good levels of first hand learning opportunities provided through visits such as to the local gurdwara and to the Jewish museum in London. Resource levels are high and funding made available to support specific requests to further enhance the taught curriculum. The subject leader has worked hard with the headteacher and other staff to produce high quality planning which incorporates the school's chosen values and highlights where these could be included in the various RE units. Also included within the curriculum are opportunities to reflect on current moral dilemmas, such as the plight of displaced peoples across the world. For example, one unit of work posed the question 'What good news could these people be waiting for?' encouraging the pupils to empathise and be aware of the growing refugee crisis in countries such as Bangladesh and Syria. Good, rigorous monitoring of RE by senior leaders and governors has led to improvements in practice such as the joint discussions around further developments in sharing information on progress and attainment in RE and the strengthening of teachers' theological understanding of key Christian concepts.

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

Leaders in St John's School successfully and with great levels of drive and conviction, articulate the importance of keeping Christ at the centre of all that is done and achieved. There are high levels of confidence and ability amongst school leaders to articulate the impact of Christian values not only on the lives of pupils, but also, through careful surveying, of other stakeholders within the school. Leaders are passionately aspirational for all pupils to be able to achieve their own God given potential. Exceptionally high outcomes are shared and communicated effectively with both existing and prospective parents. New parents are left in no doubt about the centrality of the school's Christian foundation and the values-based teaching that pervades the whole school. Self-evaluation is accurate, supported by regular and well-focused visits to the school, followed by helpful and constructive discussions around how provision can be still further improved. This is not a school that 'sits on its laurels', but is proactive in looking outwards to seek new ideas and approaches. Regular surveys of stakeholders have brought useful information from a range of perspectives, which have enabled the school to improve practice further. A good example of this is the

use of the home values sheets. Excellent, well thought through policies for collective worship, RE and behaviour inform parents of the approach the school takes, based on Christian values such as love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is seen as a key contributor to the school's distinctive Christian ethos. Leaders have ensured that these aspects of development are firmly embedded within and across the curriculum. Leadership of both RE and collective worship are excellent. Strategic planning this year has focused on RE, in particular the preparation necessary to be re-accredited for the RE quality mark award (REQM) award. The RE subject leader has worked hard to progress RE work throughout the school since the previous inspection and post the REQM gold award in 2015. She has shown ambition and drive in her approach to the subject, including building effective networks with other local schools to share practice and outcomes. The partnership with the local church is a considerable strength. The incumbent and his church leadership team are regular visitors to the school, well respected, familiar and approachable, whom the children greatly enjoy listening to. Parents are effusive in their praise of how closely the work of the school and the church align, enabling them to see how leaders can work successfully and committedly across both settings. Links with the diocese are good, strengthened through training opportunities, networking with other church schools and visits to Bury Cathedral to the 'Discovery Centre'. The development point and challenge to the school is how to safeguard the future sustainability of this outstanding church school by ensuring that all senior leaders and governors fully understand how this level of excellence is achieved.

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