

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John's Meads Church of England Primary School

Rowsley Road, Eastbourne, BN20 7XS

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Chichester

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

East Sussex

Date/s of inspection

27 April 2017

Date of last inspection

5 January 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided 114576

Executive headteacher

Alison Flynn

Inspector's name and number

Susan Thompson 714

School context

St John's Meads Church of England Primary is a voluntary aided school of 217 pupils. The majority of pupils are from a White British background. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs or in receipt of Pupil Premium is lower than national. The long standing headteacher has been an executive headteacher of a number of schools in recent years. Since September 2016 she has also lead three other church schools in a partnership. The day to day management of the school is the responsibility of a head of school who, at the time of the inspection, had been in post for eight days.

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

- The Christian values and ethos of the school underpin decision making and relationships in the school.
- All members of the school community understand that the school's values are founded in an explicit Christian ethos.
- Collective worship is valued by all stakeholders particularly because pupils are active participants in leading and planning collective worship.
- Religious education (RE) is treated as a core subject and outcomes are in-line with other core subjects. High quality learning opportunities, which challenge the pupils, are evident in the RE books.

Areas to improve

- Develop long term planning in RE to include 'Understanding Christianity' materials and greater opportunities for reflection within the study of world faiths.
- Ensure that the Christian mission and Christian leadership of the school inform decision making regarding future school leadership.

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

The school has a Rainbow vision which reminds the school of God's faithfulness and promise to Noah. It is comprised of seven strands, these are linked to Bible verses which are clearly understood by the community. Knowledge of all the strands is shared and deepened across school life through collective worship, learning opportunities and interactions. Stakeholders all agree that the vision runs through the school like a thread and makes a difference to school life. It supports positive relationships across the school; for example, one strand says 'developing our love of God and of others'. This was demonstrated when the school community worked together spontaneously to generously support a family who had lost everything in an accident. Pupils understand that support for charities springs from their love for each other and willingness to serve others like Jesus did, 'Jesus was a servant king'. The vision supports pupils' own reflections on their behaviour and learning. They seek forgiveness when things go wrong. Each week they have a challenge to develop one area of the vision at lunchtimes, such as talking quietly as an expression of care for others. The school has high aspirations for all pupils, term 4 outcomes show that the vast majority of pupils are reaching or exceeding targets. Where outcomes are less good, the school takes necessary steps to improve provision. The introduction of an annual Prayer Space event contributes to pupils' engagement in prayer and creates more thoughtful use of high quality reflection areas and a deeper understanding of prayer. Reflection areas are actively used by pupils to support their spiritual and faith development. Pupils responses include: 'God please stop war', 'help the pupils whose parents have split up' and 'we are all different and great'. They know that reflection areas link to collective worship themes and use resources in these areas to think further about the message from collective worship. Classroom reflection areas all had a pot containing a picture of Jesus overcoming the waves, if pupils had faced a difficulty they could take a picture from the pot and think about how they overcame that challenge. The school's embedded links with a school in Malawi contributes to the pupils' understanding of different cultures and provides meaningful opportunities for them to learn about others. This is extended to staff through teacher exchange opportunities. Respect for diversity is enhanced when considering different faiths and festivals in religious education (RE). For example, the youngest pupils spoke about Chinese New Year and food eaten during the celebrations. Learning in RE ensures that pupils have a good understanding of key Christian beliefs and Bible verses to support their understanding of the Christian character of the school. Writing tasks give opportunities to consider different responses for instance, diary entries about Christmas around the world. Such opportunities ensure the Christian ethos is evident across the curriculum. As opportunities across the school are given pupils become aware that 'in some countries it is very difficult being a Christian'. These examples illustrate the excellent opportunities the school gives pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship takes place daily, usually as a whole school. A focal table, candle and illuminated Lord's Prayer provide focus. The three year planning cycle of collective worship is comprehensive and is reviewed regularly. The plan gives opportunities for each aspect of the Trinity to be considered in turn, this helps the pupils understand this difficult concept. They talk about God the creator, God in human form as Jesus and the Holy Spirit helping Christians. Worship themes were recently adjusted to re-focus attention on the Rainbow vision and this has helped to ensure the vision impacts across school life. One pupil said 'If you are really kind – it's like God wanting to show Himself in your behaviour.' The pupils are active participants in leading and planning collective worship. They enjoy the time to come together and articulate how worship makes a difference to their lives. For instance, in learning to face challenges they say Jesus goes with them. Together, the church and school employ a Church and Families Link Worker who makes a significant contribution to collective worship and prayer opportunities in the school. These include supporting pupils to write collective worships they then lead for the school. Displayed in the hall is a very comprehensive evaluation system, through which all pupils express their views. They report that their evaluations have made a difference. For example, more pupils are now involved in leading worship which increases engagement and more costumes are worn to enhance role play opportunities. Key elements of Anglican traditions are included collective worship. Pupils often write and lead the gathering and dismissal sentences and prayers. They confidently read Bible passages, participate in singing with enthusiasm and can discuss the message accurately. Pupils know there are many opportunities to pray in the school. They know that these opportunities give time to talk to God, saying thank you, please and sorry. Pupils know that they can pray in different ways, including when they are having fun, 'God loves you having fun'. They are confident with the Lord's Prayer and familiar with other traditional prayers. Class prayer books are valued and used within class, before lunch and in whole school collective worship. An understanding of diversity in Christianity locally and globally develops through a range of church leaders and missionaries leading collective worship on a regular basis. For example, learning how Christmas is celebrated in Mexico. Provision is enhanced further by strong links with the local parish. The newly formed 'Open the Book' team is having a good impact on biblical understanding and engagement. The incumbent leads worship monthly and a termly family Communion service is attended by the school and a number of families.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Lesson observations, pupil voice and book scrutiny show that pupils have a range of challenging opportunities to learn about Christianity and other world faiths. These opportunities enable pupils to reflect on their own beliefs and those of others. Key stage 2 pupils speak with pride about their own Bibles and how they are used to support their learning in religious education (RE). Challenging learning tasks are evident across a range of year groups, for instance year 3 are asked 'why is the Last Supper important to Christians?' Young pupils grapple with the concept of conversion and conversion experiences whilst building on their knowledge of saints. Older pupils discuss who would go to heaven and look at different people's lives and biblical texts to inform their views. RE gives opportunities for pupils to develop reasoning skills and discuss their ideas with others whilst applying their growing biblical knowledge. Pupils are very knowledgeable about the Bible and make links between different Bible stories. For example, a pupil could talk about how numbers have meaning in the Bible. They linked the forty days of rain in the story of Noah with the length of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness and the length of time Jesus spent on earth after the resurrection. Book scrutiny and overall attainment information shows that outcomes for RE are in line with the high levels of attainment in literacy. The school moved away from class RE books earlier this academic year and introduced individual RE books. Whilst this change is still quite new, evidence shows that individual books capture more successfully the high quality of pupils work and the rigour expected in their responses in RE. There are robust mechanisms in place for tracking attainment in RE, including a separate analysis of outcomes for both strands in RE. Outcomes when learning facts about faiths are comparable between other world faiths and Christianity. Whilst data shows that learning from religion is slightly less strong when studying other world religions compared to the study of Christianity. One of the strengths of RE subject leadership is the use of data to identify this as an area for further development and training has been put in place to address this. Pupils' books evidence teachers' high quality feedback to and responses by the pupils. Plans are in place to launch the Understanding Christianity Project with all members of staff from September 2017. Handover meetings have taken place to ensure the continued development of the subject under new leadership. Information regarding RE is widely shared with parents through the news-stream on social media, the newsletter and website and in the annual report to parents.

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

The school motto is 'Light in Darkness'. Pupils understand this mirrors Jesus being the light of the world. This supports the pastoral and academic support for all pupils. Governors are committed to the Christian mission and Rainbow vision of the school. They speak of the development of the whole child as being central to all they do and their core belief that "all are God's and are loved by Him". The impact of monitoring resulted in the introduction of the 'Open the Book' team to lead collective worship and promotion of the monthly 'Big God Breakfast' (to which children and families are invited). Full governing board minutes evidence that church school distinctiveness is regularly discussed. Recent monitoring by governors suggested the development of the revised Rainbow Vision display in the hall; this has been implemented very swiftly. Monitoring also demonstrates the positive impact of the Big God Breakfast in engaging the parent body with Christian distinctiveness. Prayer is central to the work of the governing board and each meeting starts with prayer. Governors have expressed their desire for the new leadership of the school to be committed to the Christian faith and are exploring structural options following the resignation of the executive headteacher and two unsuccessful attempts at headteacher recruitment. Explicit references to the vision are included in policies when they are reviewed; an example is the Spiritual, Moral Social and Cultural Policy. Church school developments are a key feature of the whole school development plan, including the full implementation of the areas for development from the last inspection. Effective handover and succession planning is being deployed to support new staff undertaking key roles. This is reflective of the way the school prepares leaders at all levels for future leadership. The joint employment of the Church and Families Link Worker by the school and church further illustrates the priority given to supporting teachers and developments as a church school. The executive headteacher is committed to the development of all the staff, particularly in the area of Christian distinctiveness. Furthermore, she actively seeks to support the leadership of other schools through partnerships. She sees this as embodying the vision in taking responsibility and developing potential in others. School leaders use support provided through the diocese, other church schools in the diocese and particularly those in Eastbourne to share practice and develop the school further. For instance, ideas from a school visit impacted on how the school vision has been shared across the school in the environment and how RE books are being used. Staff and parents comment very positively about the clarity of the Christian values and the way faith and personal development are nurtured throughout the school community. Parents know that on the very rare occasions when issues arise the school leadership acts decisively to address concerns. Children's gifts are celebrated through a range of celebrations and creative opportunities. St John's Meads fulfils the statutory requirements for collective worship and RE.