

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Margaret's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

The Mardens Crawley West Sussex RH11 0AQ

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Chichester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	West Sussex
Date of inspection	04 October 2017
Date of last inspection	12 and 13 March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VA Primary 126043
Headteacher	Jill Hine
Inspector's name and number	Susan Costa 902

School context

St. Margaret's is a larger than average primary school with an attached nursery and special support centre for children with physical disabilities. In January 2014 the school was judged to be Requiring Improvement by OfSTED. A further inspection in April 2016 maintained the judgement of Requiring Improvement. There have been significant changes in school leadership and teaching staff over the last two years. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average, but the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than national. The school has close links with St Margaret's Church, Ifield.

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

- The governors and leadership team have a shared and clear vision for the school as a church school. This has led a journey of improvement that has created a cohesive community.
- Explicit Christian values underpin the beliefs, behaviours and attitudes of staff and pupils. This has resulted in a calm, purposeful learning environment where pupils are nurtured as individuals.
- A range of opportunities for prayer and reflection enable pupils to grow as individuals, building their self-esteem and supporting their spiritual development.
- Links with the church and wider community provide valuable opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of Christianity and explore other faiths.

Areas to improve

- Improve the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation strategies to secure evidence of the impact of the church school ethos, collective worship and religious education on the attainment, achievement and well-being of all pupils.
- Secure greater consistency in the new approaches for religious education (RE) to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Develop pupil leadership so that they have increased responsibility for and greater ownership of collective worship.

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

The school's Church of England foundation is visibly explicit in all school communications, signs, and displays around the school. The distinctly Christian vision statement, 'Loving God – serving others – fulfilling our potential' underpins the ethos of daily life at St Margaret's. The staff team are united in leading by example stating, 'Our children deserve the best.' Relationships at all levels are strong, mutually respectful and supportive, and pupils learn in an environment which is calm and purposeful. Behaviour has improved as a result of the clear focus on distinctive Christian values. A recent focus on making biblical links with key values such as generosity, have enabled pupils to reflect on their own behaviour and attitudes. One child summed up this view by saying, 'Christian values help us to focus and change our mind-set. It has inspired me to help others.' Pupils' behaviour both in classrooms and around the school is positive and respectful. They enjoy the responsibility of caring for younger pupils, acting as peer mentors in the playground, leading activities and taking care of their environment. They have a positive view of their school and agree that 'it's a really happy place'.

Throughout the recent period of change in leadership and journey of improvement, the school's Christian foundation has been constant. It supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities where 'children grow as people'. Standards have improved and the school's inclusive approach has encouraged good attendance. Pupils' well-being has a high priority. Worship and RE both make positive contributions to pupils' SMSC development. Religious education contributes well to the school's Christian and inclusive ethos by exploring and appreciating the variety of faiths represented locally and across Great Britain, including a strong focus on Christianity. It helps pupils express and appreciate diversity and to understand what is important to others. As one pupil said, 'We are all different but we try to understand and encourage each other.' Another commented on the importance of learning about a range of faiths; 'RE is not just Christian, it's about other faiths too.' Pupils show interest and understanding in faiths such as Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. However, pupils do not express a secure understanding of Christianity as a world-wide faith. Outdoor learning makes a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Forest School activities enrich the curriculum and develop pupils' awareness of the natural world. One pupil commented that when they are outdoors they 'feel quiet and relaxed; it clears my mind so I can learn'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is an important part of the life of the school community. Pupils feel that it is important to learn about Jesus and, as one pupil said, 'Worship is an important time of the day to learn about God.' Worship themes explicitly promote the school's Christian ethos as they are firmly rooted in Bible stories and pupils have a good appreciation of the links between the school's values and the Bible. They explain how worship themes such as generosity help them in their lives and have a clear understanding of how the recent collection of provisions for Harvest will 'help people in Crawley who don't have as much as we do'. Daily collective worship has a positive impact on strengthening the school community and building positive relationships. The vicar and curate regularly lead worship at the school and are known well and valued by the school community. Pupils are respectful through participation in worship such as singing, praying and thinking of others. Aspects of Anglican worship such as the structure to gather, engage, respond and send are well established. Pupils talk about the significance of the special Eucharist service and say that it is 'like God is welcoming us in his world'. Parents join these services in school and special services are held in church. Worship in church celebrates the Christian year through marking the key festivals of Easter, Christmas, and Harvest, and these services are well attended by parents. Parents feel that worship has a positive influence on guiding the pupils' understanding of the school's values and appreciate being welcomed into school to join a parent's prayer group. Pupils have some understanding of the Trinity and write their own prayers which are shared in worship. Services at the church and in school provide children with opportunities to contribute prayers and readings. The potential for wider opportunities for pupils to lead daily acts of worship have not been developed. Feedback on worship is collected from pupils but does not indicate how further improvements may be made. Governors observe worship but current systems for the monitoring and evaluation of collective worship are not robust in enabling leaders to understand the impact of worship over time.

There are good opportunities for pupils to reflect and develop their personal spirituality outside worship. A thought for the week links the theme of worship to class reflection areas where pupils express their thoughts. Questions in reflection areas, such as 'How have you shown generosity in your words and actions?' prompts pupils to consider their own behaviour and relationships with others. The outdoor environment offers further opportunities for spiritual development. Pupils connect with the natural world through Forest School learning and have had the opportunity to express their thanks for the world through writing prayers with charcoal on wood. A dedicated space known as God's Garden offers an area where pupils meet and share quiet activities at break-time.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards in religious education have improved following a dip in standards. Senior leaders and governors rightly identified RE as an area for improvement and prioritised the training of all staff in delivering the 'Understanding Christianity' resource. Investment in improved resources and the provision of a dedicated space for Godly Play have further supported this drive for improvement. As a result, inconsistencies are being addressed and outcomes are rising quickly. A curriculum team has raised the profile and expectations of RE, and a new leader has been appointed to build on this to strengthen the cycle of teaching, learning and assessment. New approaches to planning RE are thorough and lesson observations, pupil voice and book scrutiny show that pupils have a range of rich opportunities to learn about Christianity and other world faiths. These opportunities enable pupils to reflect on their own beliefs and those of others. Book scrutiny and overall attainment information shows that outcomes for RE have improved rapidly, and compare well with the levels of attainment in literacy. Learning is captured in class RE books alongside individual books. Individual books enable pupils to express themselves more deeply through writing their own responses to learning. For example, older pupils are proud of their personal creeds, created to express what is special to them following a class study of the Nicene Creed. Pupils talk with confidence and show wide and secure knowledge of Christianity. Marking of books follows school practice, and feedback in some books leads children to think more deeply posing further questions such as 'Why was it important that God sent angels?' Best practice in books challenges pupils to reflect on what they have learned, but this is not consistent. Teachers feel well-supported and inspired by the training they have received in 'Understanding Christianity' which they recognise is supporting pupils to deepen their understanding of the Bible. Visits to St Margaret's Church and from the clergy make good contributions to pupils' understanding of faith. Pupils enjoy learning and expressing themselves in creative ways including drama and art, and recent training in Godly Play has further enhanced opportunities for pupils to explore Bible stories. Religious education makes a good contribution to pupils' understanding of the school's key values; exploring Bible stories encourages a change in pupils' attitudes and behaviour. A Year 2 pupil described clearly how Zacchaeus changed his ways and became generous, going on to link this value with himself to say, 'I am generous when I help my mum because she broke her foot.' Pupils express good knowledge of other faiths including Islam and Judaism. Parents from diverse faith backgrounds are welcomed to share how their faith is important to them, and pupils have benefited from visits to other places of worship including the local Sikh Gurdwara. As a result pupils show a very good understanding of how beliefs affect people's daily lives. Leaders have correctly focused their actions on improving standards and supporting staff to deliver quality teaching of RE. This has been effectively communicated with positive outcomes and some formal monitoring has been completed. However, the cycle of monitoring is not robust in recording the impact of the actions and does not identify plans for future improvement.

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

The headteacher, staff team and key governors clearly articulate a strong understanding of how their Christian vision gives direction for the whole school community. They have worked with determination to raise standards based on distinctive Christian principles; one member of staff summed up the feeling that 'the new leadership has pulled us together so that we are now walking the same path'. Parents speak warmly of the school and are proud that it 'first and foremost nurtures the children'. Supported by the Diocesan Improvement Partner, school leaders prioritised Christian distinctiveness as an area for focused improvement. A curriculum team has successfully led improvements in RE, and the headteacher has ensured that collective worship has been central to the improvement of church school distinctiveness, behaviour and relationships. Leaders consider worship and religious education to be essential in a Christian school and statutory requirements regarding their provision are met. Professional development has supported leaders and teachers to improve the teaching of RE. A key governor has supported staff by identifying biblical links for the values and has conducted monitoring visits that have prompted further action for improvement. Full governing board minutes evidence that church school distinctiveness is regularly discussed but the cycle of monitoring and evaluation of a church school by all leaders and governors is not well developed. There is no clear action plan for improvement related to its distinctive Christian characteristics. The school has established links across the wider community. Through a whole school study based around 'Interesting lfield' pupils have learned from people at the local museum and lfield mill, as well as the church. Gifts from the Harvest worship are donated to a local charity, and other fund raising by children supports charities more widely. Strong links with St Margaret's Church are valued in worship and RE, and the school has benefitted from lfield Education Trust which has provided funds to improve resources for class reflection areas and Godly Play. Parents play an important part in the life of the school. They are invited to contribute to the creation and maintenance of flower and growing beds around the school, as well as enriching RE through their contribution to learning about other faiths. Parents feel proud that they are welcome to join a prayer group that meet in school and feel that one of the strengths of the school is its inclusion of all.