

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Birdham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Crooked Lane Birdham Chichester PO20 7HB

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Chichester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	West Sussex
Date of inspection	28 February 2018
Date of last inspection	18 May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary controlled Primary 125972
Headteacher	Mark McCadden
Inspector's name and number	Susan Costa 902

School context

Birdham is a smaller than average primary school with five mixed age classes. It serves the village of Birdham and neighbouring villages. There have been significant changes in teaching staff over the last two years. The proportion of pupils entitled to the pupil premium is lower than the national average, and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is broadly in line with national. The school works in partnership with St James' Church, Birdham.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Birdham as a Church of England school are good

- The headteacher is committed to developing the school as a church school. He leads by example, and the whole staff commitment to embedding the school's Christian ethos nurtures the well-being of the whole child.
- Christian values such as compassion, justice and perseverance are explored within a Christian context. They underpin the beliefs, behaviours and attitudes of staff and pupils. Pupils' behaviour both in classrooms and around the school is positive and mutually respectful.
- Distinctly Christian teaching and prayer in collective worship strongly contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- There are positive relationships between all members of the school community and there are strong links with the church.

Areas to improve

- Review and redefine the school's Christian vision and values so that they accurately reflect the school's distinctive ethos, and positively drive forward developments in the next stage of its life as a church school.
- Develop pupil leadership of collective worship in order to give them greater ownership over worship to make connections between Christian values, biblical teachings and the choices that they make in their own lives.
- Define the school's shared definition of spirituality so that it more clearly supports teachers in identifying opportunities to explore spiritual development throughout the school day.
- Improve governor monitoring to evaluate the impact of the school as a church school.

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

Birdham CE School provides nurture and support to its school community through a strong Christian ethos of compassion and respect. Parents value the family ethos where they say staff 'work with kindness like the love of God'. Values detailed in the Birdham Charter guide pupils how to behave well and pupils are positive about their school. They speak confidently about how some values such as friendship and forgiveness are important to them, how they make a difference to the community, and how they link with the teachings of Jesus. For example, one pupil explained that 'Jesus showed forgiveness to people when they had done wrong things and so we should forgive others if they upset us.' However, pupils do not express links between all the values listed in the Charter and biblical teaching with the same confidence. School leaders articulate how the Charter has supported the strengthening of the Christian distinctiveness of the school since the last inspection and it is evident that the values are explored and linked to biblical teaching in collective worship. Leaders have identified how they will use feedback from stakeholders to build, review and refresh the vision to take the school forward on the next stage of its journey. Religious education contributes well to the school's Christian and inclusive ethos by exploring and appreciating some of the faiths represented across Great Britain, including a strong focus on Christianity. It helps pupils express and appreciate diversity, and understand what is important to others. Pupils show interest and understanding in faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism. However, pupils do not express a secure understanding of Christianity as a world-wide faith. Learners talk with confidence about how their support of children in Sri Lanka and Peru, and their contributions to local charities, follows Jesus' teaching to 'Love my neighbour'. There are some good opportunities for prayer and reflection outside collective worship. For example, older pupils speak positively about how the big questions they place on a class reflection tree guide them to think deeply, but there is not a clear school-wide approach which provides opportunities for pupils to develop personal spirituality outside worship. A recent high-profile Prayer Spaces event has been transformational, drawing together the community to experience the power of personal reflection and connection with God. Parents explained the impact of the event through the way that learners' expressed a deep understanding with regard to the injustice of homelessness, and pupils explained their views that 'Life should be fair for everyone'. The school is proud of its eco-school status and pupils express how their learning outside, and opportunities to grow, harvest and sell fruits and vegetables are ways to 'care for God's world'. The school effectively provides an inclusive environment where the needs of all pupils, including vulnerable pupils, are met. The school's inclusive approach encourages good attendance and is helping to support improvements in academic achievement. Pupils' well-being has a high priority throughout the school and the staff work hard to build positive relationships with all families.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is valued by the whole school community. Pupils talk about the importance of collective worship bringing the school community together to celebrate learning about God and Jesus. Worship follows a pattern of gather, engage, respond and send which is established across the days of the week exploring themes which ensure a breadth of experiences linked to the Bible and the church year. Collective worship engages the pupils who relate some of the experiences to their everyday lives explaining how worship themes such as the miracles of Jesus show them that they too should care and help others. The school is proud of the way that the pupils respond to calls for action to support local charities including the Chichester-based homeless charity Stonepillow and Chestnut Tree Hospice. The rector from St James' Church leads worship on a regular basis and the pupils talk positively about these worship opportunities and the messages that they can take from them. Worship is also enriched through contributions made from a member of the Baptist church and Christian Youth Enterprises. An area from the previous inspection was to involve pupils more in collective worship. Pupils now enjoy greater opportunities to take part in worship through reading the Bible and reading prayers. They are keen to respond to questions in worship and take part in drama, but they still do not have opportunities to plan and lead whole school acts of worship on a regular basis. There have been some opportunities to explore the Trinity but pupils are at an early stage of awareness and understanding. Leaders have used different approaches to gather feedback from pupils on worship. Opportunities for prayer and reflection are established in worship, and there are some opportunities in other areas of the school day for pupils to reflect, pray and develop a personal spirituality, however, opportunities to reflect in classrooms have not been fully developed. Prayers are shared before lunch and before going home and pupils know the Lord's Prayer and Prayer of St Richard. Pupils, staff and parents were inspired by the recent Prayer Spaces event. Pupils were enthused by the creative ways that they were invited to engage commenting, "The bubble tube shows that our prayers always go up to God," and "I loved

the fizzy forgiveness because it made me feel better after.” Pupils, staff and parents agree that elements of this experience should become a regular feature in their classrooms to enhance the class reflection areas. Worship in church celebrates the Christian year through marking key festivals such as Christmas and Easter, and these services are well attended by parents. Parents also join the school community on Friday mornings for reflection and celebration. The outdoor environment offers rich opportunities for spiritual development. Pupils connect with the natural world through eco-school learning and they have the opportunity to give thanks and harvest the fruits of the earth through the school orchard and growing areas.

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

The headteacher has strong ambition and vision for the school as a church school and has led good improvements since the last inspection. One area for improvement from the last inspection was to formalise the systems for monitoring and evaluating the school as a Church school and in response school leaders and governors have worked together to create the school’s self-evaluation ‘toolkit’. Senior leaders know the strengths of the school’s Christian distinctiveness, articulate what has been successful, and are aspirational for the next phase. Systems and structures are in place so that evaluation is a planned item for governors’ meetings and governors have started to formalise evaluation of the school’s Christian distinctiveness, but monitoring by governors does not inform how successfully worship messages have been put across so that they understand the impact that worship has on the school as a church school. As the headteacher is the leader for both collective worship and religious education, governors have recognised that they must start to ask more challenging questions about the Christian foundation of the school to ensure that their monitoring and evaluation role is robust. Leaders and governors have recognised that succession planning in leading these key areas will be planned in to the next cycle of improvement so that other staff are involved. Leaders consider collective worship to be an essential attribute of a Christian school and statutory requirements regarding its provision are met.

Staff recognise the improvements of the school since the last inspection and say that there is now ‘more of a focus on the identity of the school as a church school’. They explain that this is evident in the biblical teaching in collective worship and the visibility of artefacts such as crosses and biblical texts around the school. Staff value the Christian ethos of the school and express that it is a school where ‘staff genuinely live out the values’. The focus on the Christian values has impacted positively on the achievement of pupils and the well-being of the school community. The journey of the school in developing its Christian character has been well supported by the Birdham Charter, but the Christian distinctiveness is not explicit in policies such as the Behaviour Policy.

The close relationship with the rector and other members of the church enriches the Christian character of the school and the life of the church. The school plays a key part in village life and the school contributes to community events such as an annual exhibition, ‘art in the aisles’ at church. Pupils make visits to Chichester Cathedral to support their learning and join the leavers’ service arranged by the diocese. Other Christian leaders and youth workers are welcomed in school and pupils benefit particularly well from the regular visits from a Baptist schools’ worker who makes a strong contribution to RE and collective worship. Links with local charities enable pupils to gain appreciation of how others live and provide them with a wider understanding of national and global issues.

Parents speak highly of the school. They appreciate the care and love provided for their children and the way they are valued and supported as parents. Leaders engage positively with parents to address, support and resolve concerns. Parents were pleased to be invited to join the Prayer Spaces event in school. They commented on how it offered the opportunity to connect with God through the experience of creative and hands-on activities. One parent said that she ‘witnessed a heartfelt tranquillity amongst the children’ as they explored the space.

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