

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Groombridge St Thomas Church of England Aided Primary School			
Address	Corseley Road, Groombridge, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN3 9SF		
Date of inspection	12 February 2020	Status of school	Voluntary aided primary
Diocese	Chichester	URN	114559

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Excellent
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Excellent
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Good

School context

Groombridge St Thomas is a primary school with 203 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. No pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below the national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national averages. The headteacher has been in post since 2000. There have been significant changes to the governing body and staffing since the previous denominational inspection.

The school's Christian vision

'Flourishing in the love of God, we love others as ourselves.'

Following the Greatest Commandment to 'love God and love our neighbour' we aspire for excellence following Christian/British values and teaching to enable children to fulfil their potential. A holistic, nurturing ethos reaches out to families where caring relationships pervade every corner supported by our core school values.

Excellence Compassion Enthusiasm

Key findings

- The inspirational leadership team ensure that the Christian vision and supporting values holistically infuse and shape the strategic and operational direction of the school. These are fundamental to the school's success and results in pupils and adults alike being able to grow and flourish.
- The rich curriculum has been designed and shaped with the pupils at its heart. It is driven by the belief that every child is unique. Whilst the school meets the needs of all through its commitment to striving for best practice, pupils do not have a deep knowledge of a range of cultures.
- 'It takes a village to raise a child' encapsulates the exceptionally strong bonds between the school, the church and the wider community. This has resulted in a mutually beneficial harmonious union where all flourish.
- Religious education (RE) makes a considerable contribution to school life. The school draws on a range of strategies to ensure all pupils enjoy their learning, but not all pupils are consistently challenged to deepen their thinking in RE.
- There are a wealth of opportunities for reflection, including in worship, as a natural part of the school day. This leads to further opportunities for spiritual development.

Areas for development

- To deepen further pupils' awareness and understanding of a range of cultures, diversities and beliefs.
- Provide opportunities to develop and embed higher order enquiry and thinking skills in RE.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

An ambitious, passionate and inspirational leadership team ensure that the Christian vision is deeply woven throughout the school's operational and strategic development. Relationships within and beyond the school are firmly rooted in Christian values which ensure that everyone is given support, encouragement and opportunity to flourish. Parents acknowledge that leaders create a climate where 'Jesus is at the centre of all that they do.' Exceptionally strong bonds between the school, the church and wider community are recognised as being a harmonious union. The impact of this union is spoken of, by all, in terms of an African proverb, 'it takes a community to raise a child.' The school actively provides opportunities for its community to engage with the Christian faith, for example, termly family services and teaching about the Eucharist from Reception to Year 6. The impact of these is seen in the flourishing Sunday school, communion and confirmation programmes. Clergy, staff, governors and parents recognise that the school, 'deeply nourishes' the community it serves. Due to this holistic approach Groombridge enables the growth of pupils and adults, academically, socially and spiritually to 'be the best they can be.'

Leaders' monitoring and evaluation systems are rigorous and effective in developing the school as an excellent Church school. School leaders are nurtured and valued by governors. Coaching future church school leaders, both from within Groombridge and as outreach in surrounding church and community schools, is a strength of the school. Governors' commitment to professional development both equips staff to teach and respond to pupil needs in an innovative way and provide guidance and support to the wider community.

The curriculum, informed by the school's Christian vision is tailored to meet the needs of every pupil. Leaders prioritise the inclusion of the most vulnerable. Parents acknowledge the inclusive nature of the school, 'the school gets to know each child as a unique individual.' Pupils achieve exceptionally well and disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress from their starting points. Extra-curricular opportunities richly support the range of experiences pupils receive. Leaders make bold ethical arguments for inclusion and ensure that Groombridge is a champion for respect and empathy, recognising diversity and difference. But, pupils do not have a deep knowledge of diversities in a range of cultures. Behaviour in the school is excellent. Parents appreciate that pupils are taught problem-solving skills and are empowered to resolve friendship issues, when they occur. Responsibilities such as play leaders and being buddies to younger pupils are taken seriously.

The headteacher is instrumental in enabling the entire school community to live out the vision and associated values. She is ably supported by staff and governors, who share her passion of creating a school which is a window of what Christian faith can look like. Everyone is loved and valued as a gift from God. Staff acknowledge the importance of pupils seeing them live out their own faith journeys. The deep sense of teamwork created by this is powerful.

RE and collective worship make substantial contributions to adults and pupils' spiritual development.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are fundamental to the school's success. Within Year 1 pupils' understanding of friendship, peace and forgiveness is enhanced through using drama in the church with the vicar facilitating their understanding. Whilst the biblical parable work in Year 5 results in pupils' appreciating how they, 'needed to be opening their hearts to people who are different'. The school is a beacon in its commitment to supporting the well-being and mental health of its community. As a result pupils and adults feel safe, listened to and know that leaders will help them.

Pupils apply the vision beyond the school to benefit others locally, nationally and globally. By choosing charities and projects to support pupils are developing as exceptionally active advocates for change. They are growing, 'their voices for good and inspiring others.' For example, pupils were invited to a climate change meeting to give a presentation on reducing single use plastic waste, and met with the local parochial church council. This led to a school and village-wide declaration to reduce plastic waste. Sustained partnerships include the sponsorship of two children to attend a Brazilian school because, 'we want other children to experience school like us.' As a result, pupils think deeply about global issues whilst challenging injustice.

Collective worship is intrinsic to daily school life. It enables pupils to deepen their understanding of Christianity as a world faith. Pupils value the importance of experiencing different approaches to worship, consequently, their knowledge and theological understanding of Bible stories and Anglican traditions is exceptionally strong. They talk about how these are applicable to their daily lives. Prayer and reflection are given the highest priority by the school, including the vicar leading Christian meditation to deepen pupils' understanding of the importance of silence and stillness. All opportunities for spiritual development are embraced particularly through questioning and meaningful prayer and reflection areas within the classroom. Pupils appreciate the different opportunities to

pray and talk to God, knowing they can, 'turn to God in times of trouble.' They talk confidently about how the person of Jesus is central to worship. Pupils speak articulately about the Christian belief of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and can explain, through examples, the associated theological concept of Trinity, three persons in one.

RE is very well led and the subject has a high profile across the school. The RE leaders shares their expertise to support the delivery of high quality, relevant and stimulating RE. New staff are supported well as the leaders, 'walk alongside them' in their development and understanding.

Some pupils raise challenging questions which are explored in the classroom, with the parish vicar contributing to the discussions. Assessment informs planning and is increasingly drawn upon by teachers to ensure learning experiences are accessible, challenging and creative for all. Pupils are enthusiastic about RE and its value. They speak maturely about how it is important to understand that we don't all see things the same way. The need to appreciate the choices others make, 'so that we can make the choices we believe in'. Pupils have an age appropriate understanding of major world religions. Statutory obligations for RE are fully met.



The effectiveness of RE is Good

Teaching and learning in RE is consistently good with significant examples of excellent practice. Evidence shows that the school regularly and accurately monitors the impact of RE. Across the subject an effective range of teaching and feedback strategies are employed. Books indicate that pupils of all abilities make at least good progress, but not all pupils are challenged in developing or deepening their thinking skills in RE.

Headteacher	Angela Nicholls
Inspector's name and number	Jacqueline Cobb 926