



## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Thomas' Church of England Primary School, Winchelsea	
Address	Friars Road, Winchelsea, TN36 4ED

### School vision

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’  
Matthew 22

We are a caring, nurturing, inclusive Christian community; each person is offered the opportunity to fulfill their potential, in being happy, confident and thoughtful learners who flourish, academically, physically, socially, spiritually and creatively through a meaningful and challenging curriculum supporting all our children in pursuing excellence. They know, are prepared to take their place in and be contributing members of the modern world.

Wisdom Hope Community Dignity

### School strengths

- The outworking of the Christian vision of love is clear in the day-to-day actions and interactions within the school. This means that the daily living of this school community leads to the flourishing of adults, pupils and their families.
- Warm and trusting relationships enable pupils and adults to thrive. They form the basis of a loving community where all are cared for in their uniqueness. In this way, each pupil is encouraged to grow into the person they are meant to be. Adults flourish professionally and are supported personally.
- A strong culture of inclusion and nurture means that particular needs are quickly identified and are addressed well. This culture is based on fostering the whole child, in order to build and fulfil each individual’s potential at primary school.
- Religious education (RE) has been creatively developed. It is built on an enquiry approach and gives pupils the confidence to express their own ideas and opinions.

### Areas for development

- Develop spirituality across the whole life of the school through a more explicit and consistent approach. This is so that current practice is brought together and enriched.
- Extend the leadership roles of pupils within collective worship in ways which contribute to the spiritual flourishing of their school community.
- Incorporate a wide range of religious and non-religious worldviews into the RE curriculum. This is to broaden the critical thinking of staff and pupils about faith and belief.

### Inspection findings

St Thomas’ lives out a Christian vision that requires a love of each individual child and a love of each

other. The basis for this stems from the biblical instruction to love God with one's whole being. Understanding of this basis is deepening over time as the school reflects upon its context and its mission. By doing all things in love and through their Christian values, the community enables the development of each child's unique gifts. School leaders have created a close-knit team to support the nurturing of adults and pupils. They are able to rely upon support from the diocese as they continue to grow together as a Church school. Governors increasingly understand their roles in monitoring and evaluating the school as a Church school. They listen to staff, pupils and families so that their decisions are made with love for those whom they serve.

The culture of the school is one of inclusion and wholehearted welcome. By considering a pupil's heart, soul, mind and strength, school leaders strive to 'teach the whole child'. Visiting families well before their child starts school builds a firm foundation for trusting and positive relationships from the very start. Specific needs are identified quickly and rapid interventions are put into place. For parents and carers, loving nurture means that their children are not made to conform but 'are allowed to be themselves'. They say that the school helps them to grow together with their children and offers support in many different ways. They describe how a 'gentle' approach to making Christian teaching link to everyday life for them is helpful.

The depth of supportive relationships is apparent at every level within the school community. Pupils say that 'teachers are good at dealing with things' and that there is always someone to talk to if needed. As they live out their school values, they demonstrate very positive behaviour and attitudes. The value of friendship is shown, in particular, through the buddying system and in the discussions between groups of different ages. Parents and carers are confident to approach staff and school leaders, knowing that they will be heard and helped. Governors fulfil their role by communicating well with pupils, staff and families. Staff are extremely well supported professionally and personally, describing a working environment that is characterised by approachability and understanding. The adoption of some mindfulness practices has been helpful in supporting the wellbeing of pupils and adults, including parents and carers.

Teachers describe how they 'make the most of our local community'. Pupils are often seen, for example, out and about on welly walks or exploring their church as part of the curriculum. They contribute to the local art festival and lay a wreath for Remembrance Day. In terms of thinking about their role as agents of change, pupils have made their own decisions about how to make a difference by advocating for slower traffic locally. They have also campaigned to increase plastic re-cycling and to raise money for lifeboats. This helps them to start to make a contribution to the wider world. Their understanding of injustice in the wider world is developing as they advocate for change.

The school has developed a curriculum fit for its local context, meaning that pupils are developed as fully as possible. The knowledge of the staff about each child means that their interests and talents are celebrated. School leaders speak passionately about growing but 'not changing' the children that come into their school. In this way, they nurture that which is special about that individual. Parents and carers choose the school because their child's needs are met through and beyond the curriculum. The spiritual development of pupils is fostered in a number of ways at present. Opportunities for exploring the wonders of the natural world are evident. There are also times for experiencing periods of stillness and reflection, for example through music, reflection areas and reflective storytelling. However, the approach to spiritual development is not explicit and consistent across the life of the school.

RE is led very well. The subject leader has been supported effectively through diocesan training. Developments of the RE curriculum over the past three years have resulted in a broad and balanced offer for pupils. Teachers are confident in the classroom, which means that teaching and learning is secure. They are encouraged by school leaders to provide a variety of opportunities for pupils to

demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. This means that staff are able to assess progress effectively, based on a range of evidence. Pupils particularly enjoy the creative approaches to RE, when they can present their learning in the form that they choose. They can speak about why RE is important, saying it helps them ‘to think about beliefs and ‘to respect differences’. Designated RE days enrich and deepen learning, with a focus on answering the ‘big question’ from the RE unit for that term. Personal reflection within RE lessons helps pupils to develop their own ideas about their place in the world. They can share these opinions with others and know that they do not always need to agree with each other. One pupil said that ‘no-one judges you’ for your opinion, even when it is not the same as others think. A breadth of religious and non-religious worldviews, beyond the major world faiths, is not included within the current curriculum plan.

Collective worship provides a time of gathering and togetherness. There is a daily pattern which gives pupils a sense of security and familiarity. They talk about the importance of being able to just ‘think my own thoughts’ in this time. This is echoed by staff and school leaders. Time is provided each day to invite everyone into some moments for quiet reflection. This means that those present can choose to apply what they hear to their own lives ‘even in very small steps’. Pupils particularly enjoy those acts of worship in which their class learning, their achievements and their loving actions are celebrated. This underlines the importance of each child fulfilling their full potential. Although older pupils help in practical ways in worship, they are not able to contribute to spiritual flourishing in this context. They want to interact and to take part in a more meaningful way. Local clergy and church members support the worshipping life of the school on a weekly basis. The church building is used for worship throughout the year and to enrich the curriculum. Pupils, staff and families, therefore, value the local church for walking alongside them.

The inspection findings indicate that St Thomas’ Church of England Primary School is living up to its foundation as a Church school.

Information			
Inspection date	17 June 2024	URN	114563
VC/VA/Academy	Voluntary aided	Pupils on roll	134
Diocese	Chichester		
MAT/Federation			
Headteacher	Carol Gardiner		
Chair	Jonathan Murphy		
Inspector	Virginia Corbyn	No.	86