

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of E England Voluntary Aided Primary School

The Green, Long Newton, Stockton on Tees, TS21 1DL

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Durham and Newcastle

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Sunderland

Date/s of inspection

09 March 2017

Date of last inspection

15 March 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

111712

Headteacher

David Moorfoot

Inspector's name and number

David Taylor 895

School context

St Mary's Church of England Primary School is a small village school with 95 children on roll and a further 6 in a morning nursery. The majority of children come from an above average socio-economic background and the majority of pupils are of white British heritage; the number of children from an ethnic minority background is well below the national average. The percentage of pupils with an identified special educational needs and disability (SEND) is around the national average. There have been staffing changes over the last 12 months and two of the senior management team are now working part time.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's Church of England school are outstanding

- The strong Christian ethos of the school is lived and breathed by members of the school community and has impact in the wider community. This affects directly and positively on the quality of pastoral and academic provision leading to an improvement of standards and a nurturing, caring community atmosphere.
- Leaders have placed a high priority on collective worship and religious education (RE) since the last SIAS inspection. As a consequence the school has greatly enriched the experience of the pupils and staff which has had an influence on their lives within the school and wider community life.
- Links with local churches and the wider community are of substantial mutual benefit. Not only do they enrich pupils' understanding of Christianity and enhance their learning of Christianity and other faiths, but they also play a highly valued role in the local community bringing people together in worship and in community activities.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that assessment methodology is further refined in line with the diocesan assessment framework to allow the assessment of progress and attainment in RE to be more precise.
- Increase involvement of pupils in the evaluation of collective worship whilst further increasing the frequency with which pupils deliver this aspect of the school's life.

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

The Christian ethos of the school permeates every aspect of the school community and distinctively Christian values are central to the life of the school community. Staff, pupils and governors are consistently enthusiastic in citing the Christian values without prompting and readily articulate ways in which these affect their lives. 'Respect' helps pupils to achieve well academically, regardless of their ability or background because 'you can ask questions and you are not scared to put your hand up.' Another example was given in reference to the Proverbs 'Those who are wise want to be corrected'. Their belief in the power of prayer to help them learn may be exemplified by 'Dear God, please help me improve my writing'. Members of the governing body and staff talk of how 'deeply embedded Christian views' directly inform their stance on exclusion. 'Forgiveness' helps in the building of friendships and in addressing unkind words or behaviours amongst pupils. 'Compassion' is given context in the warm and open interactions between teachers, pupils and the wider school community. The message of 'behave unto others' is given context in the charitable activities of the school including their work with the Shoe Box Appeal, Harvest Festival collection for the local community and the links with the Teesside Hospice and local care homes, where pupils perform Christian songs. There is a strong acknowledgement of the need to give pupils the understanding of other faiths and cultures. This is within the context of the school's almost exclusively White British demographic. Pupils are taught about and explore other faiths and cultures through RE, assemblies and visits, for example to the Stockton tabernacle. Another example was given of a Muslim child giving Eid sweets to the class as he explained about the festival, and his beliefs. Pupils demonstrate a respect for and understanding of those of other faiths including Islam, Sikhism and Buddhism. Pupils' comments such as 'We respect other people of different faiths' exemplify this. Pupils engage in and value a wide range of experiences in RE, collective worship, assemblies and church services, and in particular through God Zone activities. These activities take place at St Mary's church and involve members of the school, wider community and Church. These experiences develop pupils' and staff's own spirituality based on the Christian faith. The physical environment of the school reflects the Christian faith in its display work across the whole school. Pupils are excited and challenged by RE and find value in it, for example a pupil explained in RE that 'Jesus wants us to be the best we can be'. The nurturing environment and warm relationships based on explicitly Christian values directly influences pupils' engagement with school and makes a significant contribution to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) development. The 'Golden Rules' displayed around all classrooms are familiar to the children and staff and underpinned with the message 'Love one another as I have loved you'. As a result of the caring and nurturing atmosphere attendance is above national average. RE makes a substantial contribution to the Christian character of the school as pupils take the teachings to heart, as seen in a typical pupil comment 'Jesus helps you know right from wrong'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Pupils' engagement in and enthusiasm for collective worship transmits to their life both within and beyond school. It is clear that collective worship is greatly valued and woven into the fabric of school life and the local community. In particular the God Zone services have been further developed since the last inspection. Pupils actively volunteer to be part of whole school worship and treat these occasions with reverence. A range of stakeholders, including staff pupils and the Church evaluate the collective worship provision and this leads to improvement. This aspect is being further developed. They are able to articulate their understanding of biblical references, confidently give Bible readings and sing songs based around Christian themes with gusto. Pupils and staff derive comfort from and ascribe value to prayer which is typically considered as 'part of the norm' by those across the whole school community. Collective worship is firmly rooted in Christian traditions and has been developed in partnership with St Mary's church around the Christian and church calendar. It gives learners an experience and understanding of Christian traditions and the seasons of the church. Pupils learn about the Holy Trinity in RE and collective worship as evidenced by a typical pupil explanation 'the Holy Spirit is what is inside of you' and 'the spirit went into the believers and then they could speak in many tongues and spread the word'. Pupils have a rich and varied experience of worship which is enhanced through regular services held at St Mary's and services from other schools including schools from York Diocese. This is further enhanced through a range of clergy assemblies and visitor, class worship and visits. Collective worship experiences develop the personal spirituality of pupils and staff. Pupils clearly see the value of public prayer and reflection. Prayer spaces have been developed extensively across the school since the last SIAS and these encourage pupils to write and display their own prayers and questions. Their messages demonstrate a development of personal spirituality. Examples include, 'Thank you for the world. We will live by your rules. We respect you because you died for us', 'Dear God, Look after the poor people and those less fortunate'. One prayer 'Dear God. Sorry for eating sweets, which I gave up for Lent' which was very timely around the time of the inspection. The vicar of the local St Mary's church is known well around the school and village and seen as a key figure. This has strengthened links between the church and school and God Zone services bring benefit to the wider community through increased participation of the community and school in the life of the Church. Pupils explained, typically 'God Zone teaches us about Christianity through worship and prayer' and 'We learn about worship through fun activities'. Parents are emphatic in their view that RE and worship spill into the everyday lives of their children, typically saying that their children 'repeatedly sing the Christian songs they learn in

school, such as My Lighthouse' and 'Children do not feel embarrassed talking about Jesus and the scriptures as prayer and worship are so normalised'. Staff talk of the low staff turnover being as a direct consequence of the Christian and that 'none wants to leave because it is such a special place'. The impact of staff and the local community is also typified by a comment from the local vicar that 'pupils are far more fluid with the Christian narrative'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The teaching of RE is very good and is continuing to improve, with new staff bringing in fresh ideas. This leads to clear evidence of progress over time in the pupils' written work, as well as their ability both to articulate and contextualise Christian values in a number of scenarios. Feedback from teachers is designed to deepen thinking in RE and this is typified for example by a pupil stating 'Teachers ask hard questions to make us think'. Teachers consistently use a system to ensure progress across lessons that pupils explained as 'What you know, what I want to know, and what I have learned'. An assessment framework based on the diocesan model is in place to allow progress tracking and staff use this identify and address underachievement to keep standards high. The school acknowledges that this is a priority for further development and refinement. Governors hold the RE leader to account through governors' meetings and teachers are held to account through regular work scrutiny and informal drop ins. The diocesan framework for RE is delivered in such a way as to provide opportunities for SMSC development. For example pupils talk of how 'the parables and Christian stories explain how to be a good person' and 'see things in a different way'. Pupils make up their own psalms and 'choose the Commandments that mean most to them'. Provision is further enhanced and augmented by for example using pupils' presentations of their own prayers to help deliver ICT and numeracy. Pupils and staff plan engaging activities that bring the Christian message to life, for example in the re-enactment of the Sermon on the Mount. A lesson in which pupils enacted a church Christening is typical of the activities which embed the distinctly Christian message. As a consequence, it is clear that the pupils have an increasingly good understanding of Christianity and the Trinity as well as other religions. The integral use of biblical teachings ensures that collective worship assemblies are used to offer opportunities to consolidate the RE curriculum. They increase theological understanding and give pupils a further opportunity to articulate and develop that understanding. Pupils can relate the idea of 'passing on the Holy spirit' at Pentecost or 'the light of a candle', to the Holy Spirit. The headteacher has taken on direct responsibility for RE and this is indicative of his passion and commitment to very high standards in RE where attainment is in line with and in some case above national expectations.

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

The headteacher, staff and governors live out and role model strong Christian values. Parents report 'the lovely family atmosphere' and how the school has 'stuck to its ethos' and 'not watered down its Christian values'. The development of staff as teachers and leaders in church schools has been planned strategically, through the governors' resources committee. This is supported by the strong relationship between the chair of governors and headteacher who has announced his planned retirement in 2018. This announcement has allowed for progression training through appropriate recruitment in a manner commendable for such a small school. The school conducts thorough self-evaluation which leads directly to improved provision. A drive on the part of the small senior management team and governors since the last SIAS inspection of 2012 appears to have moved the school forward in terms of evaluating and planning God Zone services and worship themes. The governing body is being further developed as it pursues 'Governor Mark', a national award which provides external evaluation of the quality of governance in the school. The impact of the Christian ethos on the behaviour of pupils is typified by the example of pupils from the school choir, giving performances at the Stockton Hospice. This and similar acts are explicitly linked to the school's Christian character. Christianity and other religious themes are used across the curriculum. This helps to deepen understanding whilst contributing to overall pupil attainment. For example, the meaning of prayer, which pupils described as 'a telephone line to God' was used in literacy and ICT lessons. Governors have an active and increasingly developed role in the evaluation of provision, and talk of staff 'going the extra mile, in the Christian tradition'. The church benefits from display work produced by the pupils used within church and the greater community participation and support for St Mary's church from parents, staff and pupils. Church attendances are swelled by such occasions as dedicated Sunday Family Services, Christingle, Easter and Harvest services. The wider community contributing to the school is exemplified, for example, by the direct involvement of Church members in the planning and delivery of worship as part of the God Zone work. This has a positive impact on both the school and the wider church community. It is clear that the passion and efficacy of the leadership team, as well as the progression planning which is being instigated, suggest a desire and capacity to sustain improvement.