

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

### St Mary the Virgin Church of England Primary School

High Street, Hartfield, East Sussex, TN7 4AA

**Current SIAMS inspection grade**

**Outstanding**

**Diocese**

**Chichester**

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Satisfactory

Local authority

East Sussex

Date of inspection

24 January 2018

Date of last inspection

10 May 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary aided 114553

Acting executive headteacher

James Procter

Acting head of school

Frances Taylor

Inspector's name and number

Gillian Bradnam 935

#### School context

The school is a smaller than average-sized primary school serving the village of Hartfield and the surrounding area. Currently there are 92 pupils, taught in 4 classes. The proportions of pupils who are disadvantaged and those requiring special support are lower than average. The majority of pupils are White British. There have been significant staff changes since the previous inspection. The acting executive headteacher and acting head of school, who is also the leader for religious education (RE), have been in post since September 2017, when the school entered into an informal collaboration with the Pioneer Federation.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary the Virgin as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The distinctively Christian vision, values and ethos underpin all that happens at the school which impacts significantly on the daily lives of all members of the school community.
- The executive headteacher is an inspirational leader, who with the head of school, lead with great commitment. They model consistently the Christian distinctiveness of the school's vision and values to all, which leads to a warm, highly supportive and inclusive church school community in which all pupils achieve their potential.
- Pupils and staff value highly the many opportunities to reflect and pray during the school day and readily articulate how they benefit from this.
- The excellent behaviour of pupils, demonstrating respect and care for one another across all year groups, reflects the distinctively Christian values and ethos of the school.

#### Areas to improve

- Governors to consistently hold senior leaders to account to ensure that all church school developments are addressed in full, in a timely manner.
- Consolidate rigour in the assessment of RE to show that it is effectively informing teaching and learning and demonstrates at least good pupil progress in relation to the requirements of the agreed syllabus.

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

The school's strong and unmistakeable Christian distinctiveness shines brightly through the vibrant displays and interactive reflection areas throughout the school. Deeply Christian values have long been established as the basis of the school's ethos. The vision and values are linked strongly and consistently to the school's termly Christian themes by biblical references and Bible stories and as a result all members of the community are clear about the Christian distinctiveness of the school. Pupils speak powerfully of the impact of the school's core Christian values on attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and a commitment to learning. Love, strength and faith (LSF) champions are highly effective in promoting the Christian distinctiveness of the school and give weekly awards to pupils showing 'love, strength and faith, just as Jesus taught us.' They are also proactive in gaining feedback from pupils and initiating change, such as increasing the amount of pupil led collective worship. Behaviour is excellent, with high expectations clearly and consistently linked to the school values. The school uses a wide range of approaches to support pupil wellbeing and holistically is highly effective in addressing the needs of individual pupils, including those with special educational and emotional needs, so that they achieve as well as their peers. The Christian vision and values are lived out by children and adults, in how they care and respect each other. The attendance of the vast majority of pupils is good because children enjoy school and there is very effective follow-up when necessary. Parents are enthusiastic about the learning and the Christian pastoral care that the school provides and see it as 'like a family,' that 'provides a rounded education' for their children. They value that all pupils have opportunities for responsibilities and that achievements that link with the school's core values are celebrated regularly and not just academic achievement. As a result, the Christian ethos in which pupils learn raises their self-esteem and, consequently, learners are confident and current data suggests that overall academic achievement across the school is good. Children's social and emotional skills develop rapidly because Christian values are taught from the beginning of Reception and they quickly learn to use times of quiet reflection. Prayer and reflection have a high place of importance at the school, with a significant number of spaces and opportunities for prayer and reflection throughout the school day. For example, the children enjoy going to the outdoor reflection den and speak enthusiastically about how they use the newly opened prayer garden to write prayers and think about people who are special to them. The use of 'big questions' in collective worship, in class and whole school activities is helping to prompt the children's thinking about Christian values and their relationship with God, for example, 'what does God mean to me?' Religious education contributes strongly to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of each pupil, with high quality opportunities facilitated across the curriculum, through a thematic approach to teaching and learning that is linked securely to the school values. Parents and carers are also included in weekly discussions about the school's current Christian theme through the weekly reflection question that is sent home as part of the homework for all pupils. Different aspects of diversity are explored through whole school topics, and across the curriculum, so that pupils develop an understanding of and respect for diversity, particularly through their enthusiasm for learning about variety in religion in RE. Their horizons are widened globally through links with a charity in Africa and their sense of social responsibility developed more by links with local and national charities.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship is engaging and transformational, making a significant contribution to children's spiritual development. It is kept relevant, creative and dynamic with consistent links to Bible stories, Bible references, everyday application and the school's vision and values. Due to the high quality of collective worship there is full engagement by pupils and all class teachers; who readily share how much they enjoy collective worship. Collective worship is regularly monitored and evaluated but there is scope for pupil feedback to be more specific to help with future improvement. LSF champions make a significant contribution to planning and leading collective worship. They have been proactive in designing and implementing a success criteria for the collective worship they lead, showing their ability to initiate helpful systems to monitor effectiveness. In sharing this with the head of school, as well as suggestions from their peers, it is evident that two-way leadership is in place and helping to shape developments. Pupils regularly share Bible stories, songs and prayers at home prompting meaningful discussions in families where there are mixed attitudes to religious faith. Pupils understand the distinctive nature of worship and can explain how what they learn impacts positively on their actions. Set prayers are used as well as prayers that link to the current theme, with pupils regularly writing and reading prayers. This enhances further the relevance of prayer and collective worship as a whole. Prayer and reflection extends beyond collective worship across the whole school with class led and individual opportunities for personal reflection time. Pupils and adults alike value daily reflection time and readily share about its benefit to their everyday lives. Prayer cards are regularly used by pupils as a helpful prompt for their prayers, linked with the school's core values, when they need some additional support or comfort from God. Teaching in collective worship is explicitly Christian and embraces a range of Anglican church traditions; making collective worship rich and memorable through different styles of

worship. Consequently, pupils talk confidently about the person of Jesus and of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and how they represent the Trinity through their artwork.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good**

The rich variety of approaches in RE teaching underpins pupils' enthusiasm for the subject. Lessons have an appropriate focus on Christianity and pupils enjoy exploring a range of different world religions. They share with confidence how they consider issues in terms of 'how Jesus would deal with things, so we can be like him and follow his example,' clearly demonstrating how the school's vision and values are central in RE. 'Big questions' are used effectively to help pupils reflect about ideas linked to faith and spirituality, not just in RE, but also across the curriculum, in collective worship and other times of reflection. As a result, pupils gain a good understanding of the concepts of faith and the importance of RE for them as they grow up in today's society. Pupils have developed a good understanding of biblical stories and teachings that illustrate the school's core values. In these ways RE makes a very strong contribution to pupils' SMSC development. The introduction of RE books since the previous inspection has helped to evidence pupil progress. Religious education assessment has been introduced and Understanding Christianity is being used as a key resource from this academic year. Assessment now informs teacher's planning more precisely by identifying where pupils need support or are ready to be moved on to greater depth. Pupils clearly understand the new systems of assessment and feedback, and how this aids their progress. The school's assessment data from the autumn term shows that in RE pupils reach standards in line with the agreed syllabus expectations. However, these good systems and practices have not been in place for sufficient time yet to show their full-intended impact. Also, due to a significant number of new staff joining the school this academic year, secure evidence to show consistently good teaching over time has yet to be gathered. Against this background of change there is capacity for rapid improvement. Staff support one another with planning so that knowledge and expertise is shared and highly effective RE training was delivered by the RE leader in September. New staff have benefitted from thorough induction and support since joining the school. The addition of moderation of teaching and learning, with staff from a school in the Pioneer Federation, is contributing to a consistently high standard of delivery of RE across the school.

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

The acting executive head and head of school speak with passion about the distinctively Christian vision, rooted in the example of Jesus and consistently model this to the children and adults that make up the whole school community. In addition regular examples of activities reinforcing the strong Christian distinctiveness of the school are shared via blogs on the school website and in newsletters, ensuring that parents and prospective parents are up to date with initiatives and news. The executive headteacher, working with the head of school, was very quick to identify exactly what was working well, where improvement was needed and why. This had led to a more focused school development plan, with all aspects of the school's Christian character, and pupils' SMSC development, continuing to be stranded through the document. The scope and speed of progress has been swift and demonstrates the decisiveness and highly effective senior leadership that is in place. Wise decisions had been made regarding priorities and timing in working in an informal collaboration with the two schools in the Pioneer Federation. When considering partnerships with other schools, the governors' commitment to maintaining the Christian ethos of the school was pivotal in their decisions. Currently, sustained senior and middle leadership needs are being addressed to ensure that secure leadership at all levels continues to be in place for the future of the school. Developing assessment in RE was a focus for development from the previous inspection. The school has recently begun to address this and precise data on pupil progress began to be reported to governors last term. Robust moderation of teaching and learning and assessment in RE was undertaken last term, but this has yet to develop over time to gather data that securely validates pupil achievement and progress and supports rapid development in this area. Partnership with parents/carers is strong with excellent communication between school and home. Parents/carers value that the individual needs of pupils continue to be identified and supported strongly, so that all pupils enjoy school and thrive. Strong links with St Mary's church have been sustained by the executive head and head of school; with mutual benefits for the school and church. The rector is very involved in school life, including leading collective worship weekly and working with the LSF champions as they prepare to lead services to celebrate major Christian festivals at the church. In addition, the pastoral support provided regularly for pupils by the children's worker for the church is highly beneficial. Links with the Diocese are strong and were particularly supportive last term. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.