

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Church of the Ascension Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

New Street
Kingswinford
Dudley
DY6 9AH

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Worcester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Dudley
Date of inspection	20 June 2017
Date of last inspection	21 June 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 103835
Headteacher	Steve Hudson
Inspector's name and number	C. Ann Stone NS812

School context

Church of the Ascension Primary School is a larger than average sized primary school with 306 children on roll. The vast majority of children are of white British heritage and numbers with special educational needs and those eligible to receive pupil premium funding is low. Attainment on entry is slightly above the national expected level. The headteacher, Key Stage 1 coordinator and a significant number of staff have been appointed since the last SIAS inspection. The school has close links with the Church of the Ascension parish church.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Church of the Ascension VC Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- The ability of all stakeholders to articulate and promote a vision for the school which is rooted in Christian values with the result that every member of the school community feels valued.
- The motivated headteacher has a clear vision and strategy for moving the school forward as a church school.
- Worship, linked to Christian teaching and values, impacts positively on the life of children and staff.
- The religious education lessons which challenge children to think for themselves leading to outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas to improve.

- Enable children to gain more detailed knowledge of the Eucharist so they can talk about it with a greater degree of understanding.
- Further develop the shared understanding of spirituality so that children are engaged in a range of spiritual experiences allowing them to deepen their own personal spirituality.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding.

Christian values permeate the whole life of the school and create an ethos that enables children to flourish in their potential as unique individuals. The motto 'Learn with love, flourish in faith' and the Christian values of honesty, respect, thankfulness, generosity, perseverance and forgiveness are clearly understood by all stakeholders. The children readily acknowledge the impact of the school's Christian values within their daily lives and confidently explain links to Christian teaching. When talking about perseverance one child likened it to how Noah had to persevere when building the ark. An example of how Christian values are incorporated into the school curriculum was seen in English planning which linked respect and the story of Pandora's box. Vulnerable children are nurtured particularly carefully with initiatives that clearly demonstrate the Christian values of care and compassion. The behaviour of the children is of the highest standard and relationships are consistently attributed to the Christian nature of the school.

The school has developed a definition of spirituality which was created by staff and is understood by all. Children are beginning to develop their understanding of spirituality through the use of outside space and experiences provided within the curriculum. The newly opened peace garden, which was a development point from the last inspection, is a beautiful area where children can reflect and pray. A child explained that a specific rose, planted to remember a child who died, wasn't sad but was a reminder that the life of that child wasn't forgotten.

The relationship between the local community, parish church and school is very strong and is characterised by mutual respect and a genuine sense of community. One example given was how the church invites children to participate in parish services such as Mothering Sunday, Harvest and Christingle. Parents comment that this involvement has led to them becoming involved in the church through attendance at other events and the parish priest believes this has been instrumental in improving the number of baptisms at church. The school is also involved in supporting local community events. Through varied experiences children understand the need, and have the ability, to put others before themselves. One child remarked that, 'We are fortunate and others don't have as much as we do.' In all these ways, the Christian character of the school has a significant impact on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all children.

Parents comment that the school feels like 'a family' where everyone is welcome and their views valued. One parent strongly believes the improvement in the behaviour of her child can be directly attributed to the commitment and love shown by all staff. Christian values and Bible stories are regularly discussed at home and this can be directly attributed to the Christian distinctiveness of the school.

The religious education (RE) subject leader is enthusiastic and well informed and ensures standards are high and lessons challenging. Children enjoy their RE lessons and are able to question and develop their understanding of the impact religion has on others. Children are beginning to understand that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith and are developing an understanding of the diversity and difference within and between other faith communities.

The academic achievement of all children can clearly be linked to the school motto and Christian values which provide children with a rich learning environment where children learn in a loving and caring ethos. One child commented that 'Maths and English are what we use in our daily lives – RE is about how we live our daily lives.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

Collective worship is central to the life of the school and its impact on individuals is readily and clearly articulated by all. Children speak with confidence about the way in which worship shapes their thinking and actions. Planning is detailed and refers to Christian values, Bible stories, the seasons of the church's year, church liturgy and relevant world issues. Symbolic artefacts and a coloured cloth to reflect the church's year are displayed on a worship table and children are able to articulate what they mean to Christians.

A range of worship leaders offer children a rich and diverse experience of worship. 'Open the Book' assemblies, led by members of the parish church, are well received and the children enjoy participating. Visitors from other Christian denominations regularly visit school to deliver worship. Enabling children to experience moments of 'awe and wonder' during worship was observed when the headteacher appeared to turn water into wine!

The worship committee and Ascension worship for everyone (AWE) group meet regularly and are involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of worship. All children are actively involved in every act of worship through singing, sharing experiences and leading prayers. Informal and formal feedback from the children, parents, governors and staff provide an insight into how worship has a direct impact on the life of the school.

Every classroom displays a cross which acts as a constant reminder of the school's Christian distinctiveness. A prayer area in each key stage and a reflection area in every classroom allow children the chance to reflect and pray. Children have a clear understanding of prayer. One child remarked, 'God doesn't mind what we say because he

cares about us.' The 'Lord's Prayer,' the 'Grace' and prayers written by children are used frequently. A 'Trinity Day' involving the whole school has ensured that all children have an age appropriate understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Learning about Jesus Christ enables children to make a link between the Bible and lessons for their own lives. Children are able to talk about the 'Last Supper' but not yet able to link this to the Anglican practice of Eucharist.

Strong links exist with the parish church which is used to celebrate major Christian festivals and school events. Children new into Reception visit church prior to attending a service when they are all presented with a Bible. The parish priest and assistant curate are very supportive of the school and are often involved in leading workshops related to various Christian festivals. An example being the work undertaken by the associate curate and Year Five children relating to Valentine's day which enabled children to understand the religious significance of the festival.

Lack of space in the church limits the involvement of parents but when possible the services are well supported. Parents are invited to the weekly 'Praise Assembly' which acknowledges achievements of all and reinforces the Christian values needed to achieve.

The very capable worship leader ensures that the planning, delivery and evaluation of worship help to influence the life of the school, lead to continuous improvement and enhance its Christian distinctiveness.

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

Under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher and with a highly supportive team of staff and governors there is a clear Christian ethos within the school which is subject to continuous review and development. The excellent understanding of all adults of how Christian values and spiritual development make a difference to the whole school community ensures these are at the heart of the school's vision. Governors know the school and articulate well the understanding of their role as strategic leaders of a church school. As a result, governors monitor and evaluate collective worship, RE and the Christian distinctiveness of the school rigorously which leads to continuous improvement. Governors are an intrinsic part of school life, often involved in outings, informal visits and community events. The close involvement of a foundation governor with the after school Christian club is evidence of this.

Parents comment that the Christian values shared by the headteacher and staff contribute well to behaviour management and the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of the children. Any concerns are dealt with sensitively and efficiently and parents link this to the Christian distinctiveness of the school. Adults volunteer their time and talents enabling them to become totally involved in the life of a church school. An example of this are two creative wall displays painted by a grandmother and appreciated by all the children.

The school has worked hard at creating closer links with the diocese and the RE subject leader remarked that, 'Access to the diocese has made a huge difference to our knowledge, understanding and confidence.' The RE subject leader attends diocesan training, disseminates information to staff through formal and informal meetings and a clear action plan is in place to increase the effectiveness of RE within the school.

The development of all staff is achieved through individual support, the peer teaching deluxe programme, attendance at diocesan training and support of each other which leads to a positive impact on the Christian distinctiveness of the school. Governors support and encourage the development of staff as future leaders of church schools.

Since the last inspection, the school has established links with other church schools which has led to a sharing of good practice and ideas.

Mutual respect and support between the parish church and school enable them to flourish and fulfil their mission to the school, local community and beyond. For example, the donating of food for the local food bank links well with the spiritual, moral and social development of the children.

Leaders and governors ensure both worship and religious education meets statutory requirements. The supportive relationships between all members of the school community are clearly rooted in Christian values, providing an excellent example of a school which is both distinctive and highly effective.