

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant school

Sandrock Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 3PR

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Rochester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Kent
Date of inspection	28 February 2018
Date of last inspection	14 February 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary aided 118725
Executive headteacher	John Tutt
Inspector's name and number	Patrick Boughton-Reynolds 897

School context

St James' Church of England infant school is a three form entry school situated in the town of Tunbridge Wells. It shares the same site as St James' junior school and the executive headteacher is responsible for both schools. The majority of pupils are White British. The numbers of pupils with special educational needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are significantly below the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average. These pupils come from a range of different ethnic groups.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Saint James' as a Church of England school are outstanding

- St James' Christian ethos provides a nurturing, caring environment that enables learners to thrive.
- Collective worship is pivotal in forging the school's identity as a Church of England school.
- Excellent leadership in RE ensures that there is a highly effective and engaging curriculum in place, especially in regard to the teaching of Christianity.
- The effective partnership between the school and St James' church builds a strong sense of community among stakeholders.

Areas to improve

- Review and redefine the school's Christian vision considering the wisdom and insights of the school community and the Church of England so that leaders, and other key stakeholder groups, have a clear understanding of the distinctiveness of St James' as a church school.
- Ensure that the refreshed vision forms the basis for strategic development and underpins all school policies and practice to enable provision to be consistently informed by the school's Christian character.

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

The Christian character of St James' infant school is one of a caring and nurturing community where children are enabled to thrive. The holistic development of children is of great importance to leaders and staff. As a result, all pupils make expected progress in reading, writing and maths, and increasing numbers are working at greater depth. The strong Christian ethos also ensures that pupils with special educational needs or those from disadvantaged backgrounds are given the extra support they need to develop in line with their peers. Parents appreciate the care given to their children from the school. As one parent stated, 'my daughter skips into school each day, where I know she feels safe, cherished and loved.' The school has four Christian values of faithfulness, thankfulness, forgiveness and trust. These are understood by stakeholders as Christian values and used in the daily life of the school. One parent said that, 'my boys have learnt the values of friendship, to be thankful, to forgive and to be kind.' Christian values, such as these, are seen by many stakeholders as an essential component in defining St James' as a church school. However, stakeholders do not articulate a clear, shared Christian vision for the school. Pupils are able to explain the biblical basis for the school's values and relate them to their own lives. As a Year 1 pupil explained, 'God made up these values so we could be nice to each other'. Parents, pupils of other religions and of none feel part of the school community and appreciate the Christian ethos of the school. One Muslim parent explained, 'it is similar to my religion's values: honesty, trust and faithfulness to God.' Pupils are respectful of difference and diversity, and pupils of other faiths feel part of the one school community. Sea shells are given to pupils as a reward or in recognition of their service to the school. This strategy is very effective in highlighting the importance of living out the school's values and pupils really appreciate receiving a shell. However, pupils could not explain the Christian symbolism of the shell, or its connection to St James. The Christian character and values of the school enable strong relationships between stakeholders and ensures that pupil behaviour is excellent. Pupils' spirituality is not only developed through collective worship but also through a rich variety of experiences, such as prayers to mark key points in the day. Prayer stations are available in all classrooms for pupils to use. They have become a natural part of the classroom and are well used by pupils, for example to sit and reflect by looking through pictures in the Bible as was observed in the EYFS classroom. This has addressed a development point from the previous denominational inspection. Forest school is spiritually significant to pupils. After each session, they conclude by thanking God for a particular part of creation. One pupil remembered her prayer from this experience 'thank you God for nature and butterflies.' RE makes a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils and gives them a deeper understanding of Christianity.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is engaging and great value is placed on it by the school community. Pupils are encouraged to be creative in worship. Many words are signed with actions that the school community do as they sing and pray. Pupils appreciate being 'worship welcomers'. They see this as being 'special helpers' who introduce daily collective worship. A worship box is opened to begin worship. Pupils light a candle, take out a Bible and say a prayer at the start of each act of worship. To help understanding of the Trinity, the Bible is said to represent God, the cross to represent Jesus and the lighted candle to represent the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian nature of God is also explored through bible stories during worship. Pupils relate these biblical stories to the school's values and to their own lives. In the observed worship, pupils acted out the story of 'the lost son'. One pupil later reflected: 'Jesus teaches about forgiveness...in the story the dad forgave the son'; another pupil said 'you learn lessons not to run away from home and waste things.' Worship is, therefore, important in developing pupils' moral and social development. The worship coordinator uses diocesan schemes and liturgical themes very effectively to prepare for the seasons of the Church's year and provides pupils with a rich experience of worship. Worship is also carefully linked to school topics and RE units where possible, which enables worship be more relevant and meaningful to the pupils. Parents appreciate that the school goes the 'extra mile' to make Christian festivals 'real' for their children. A prime example of this was the Nativity story acted out by staff, using 'a real life donkey' as one pupil put it. Events such as these have a deep impact on the school community and express and develop its Christian spirituality. Monitoring and review of worship is highly effective and uses a range of methods and stakeholders to gain an accurate understanding about its impact on the community. In response to another development point from the previous denominational inspection, governors use diocesan forms to formally review worship, pupils add their reflections to a worship book, and a detailed folder is kept for tracking worship over the year. These show the extent to which worship influences and embodies the life of the school community.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils are stretched and challenged in RE through an engaging curriculum and effective questioning by teachers. Pupils are encouraged to learn through play in the Early Years and Foundation Stages, and this active learning continues through to Year 2. During the inspection, pupils were observed making a frieze of the core Christian concepts using paint and potatoes. One Year 2 pupil explained that, 'the rescue plan, the incarnation, is most important because Jesus came to make the world better.' Pupils develop their skills and confidence in RE and are well-equipped to take on tasks that challenge them. Assessment in RE is rigorous and accurate. Pupils display sound theological knowledge for their age, which verified the school's view that progress is in line with other core subjects and that an increasing number of pupils are working at greater depth. Through high quality teaching, using a bespoke curriculum, pupils' religious literacy is highly developed. Themes are taught through 'treasure hunting journeys' that guide pupils to search for answers to important questions in RE. Key questions such as 'what emotions did people feel during the Easter story?' and 'why did Jesus die?' are skilfully explored in creative ways to enable pupils to think and find answers in Christian teaching. The tailored planning and implementation of the new 'Understanding Christianity' materials and pedagogies is exceptional. The school is successfully developing new assessment strategies in RE. These centre upon pupils' understanding of religious texts, making connections between these texts and concepts and then looking at the impact of beliefs. Additional 'RE days' also enhance the profile of RE in the school and enable deeper learning for pupils. Leadership in RE has the highest level of subject expertise and the vision to realise ambitious expectations.

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

Christian values are at the heart of strategic decision making in the school. School leaders share a clear vision that they want the very best education for the pupils of St James', where they teach the whole child, so that every child can reach their full potential. However, the Christian basis for this vision is not clearly articulated. The school's distinctively Christian vision and its provision is not apparent in school paperwork and policies. This being said, the Christian character of the school, shaped particularly by its strong focus on worship and adherence to Christian values, enables the vision to be realised. Leaders have a clear understanding of how being a church school should impact upon the lives of its pupils. Christian values permeate through the curriculum and the approach of leaders and staff to each pupil enables pupils to feel cared for and to develop holistically. Therefore, the school is achieving its mission statement 'to lay strong academic, spiritual, moral, social and cultural foundations for all pupils.' Leaders have a thorough understanding of the school's performance based on insightful self-evaluation and implement effective strategies for school improvement. Leadership of collective worship and RE is a notable strength that significantly contributes to this. The RE leader trains and shares her resources with other schools and has worked with a number of dioceses in developing provision for RE. The school has an excellent partnership with the local church of St James that is of mutual benefit to both and unites the community. For example, the church runs the breakfast and after school provision at the school and ensures that the school's Christian character is maintained. Also, the school staff run a stall at the church fair. The executive headteacher is developing a deeper relationship between St James' infant and junior schools through his leadership of both schools. Governors are looking to strengthen this bond further in the future, for example in regard to the possibility of sharing the same set of Christian values. Future school leaders are being developed within the school and the school engages in training and conferences with the diocese. The school was a founding member of the Tunbridge Wells primary schools collaborative trust (TWPSCT) and the executive headteacher continues to play a prominent role in this collaboration. The incumbent leads a weekly act of worship in the school, and he is an active presence in the school in a way that is appreciated by both staff and pupils. The statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are met.

SIAMS report March 2018 St James' CE Infant School (VA), Tunbridge Wells TN2 3PR