

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

### Rusthall St Paul's Church of England (VA) Primary School

High Street, Rusthall, Kent TN4 8RZ	
<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Rochester</b>
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Kent
Date of inspection	17 October 2017
Date of last inspection	11 September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 135164
Headteacher	Caroline Powell
Inspector's name and number	Anne Southgate 820

#### School context

Rusthall is an average sized primary school in the centre of Rusthall village. Pupils come mainly and increasingly from the local area, which is socially mixed. Pupils come from a range of different backgrounds, but they are predominantly of white British origin. A smaller proportion of pupils have special needs or have English as an additional language than is the case nationally. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average. A new senior leadership team has been in place since January 2014.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Rusthall as a Church of England school are good

- Rusthall is an inclusive school, in which everyone is respected, valued and cared for.
- Christian values have had a very positive impact on improving behaviour.
- Religious education (RE) is exciting and challenging for pupils.
- Attendance is improving as a result of the care shown for pupils and their families.
- Pupils develop very well spiritually, morally, socially and culturally.

#### Areas to improve

- Raise achievement further by ensuring that the new additional Christian values consistently underpin learning and policies.
- Increase and widen pupils' leadership of collective worship so that they are all more actively engaged in worship.
- Ensure that all stakeholders understand that the values are rooted in Christian teaching so that the Christian character of the school is explicit.
- Ensure that classroom prayer areas are distinct and separate from RE displays, so that everyone is clear how these are different activities.

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

Christian values of forgiveness, friendship and respect are well established. As a result, behaviour has improved considerably and is now good. Pupils are polite and they show genuine concern and care for each other, including those who have special needs. Adults help pupils to use the Christian values to reflect on their behaviour and to restore relationships where necessary. Consequently, Rusthall is a very inclusive school where all pupils feel valued and are able to flourish. Three new Christian values (responsibility, perseverance, creativity) have been introduced this term. These new values are related explicitly to learning and they are beginning to have a positive impact. However, this is not consistent or established and outcomes are currently at or below national averages. Leaders understand the Christian basis to the values. They teach pupils that, for example, Jesus taught us to forgive if we want to be forgiven. Others in the school, however, do not have such a clear understanding that the values are rooted in Christian teaching. Staff members work hard to improve attendance because they believe that every child deserves to fulfil their God given potential. Consequently, attendance is improving.

The broad and engaging curriculum, together with a range of clubs, enables strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Pupils show respect for each other's opinions and beliefs and display genuine care for one another. This means that pupils interact socially very well. Pupils are helped to reflect deeply on their attitudes and on their behaviour. This is aided by interactive prayer stations in each building and by a 'trouble tree'. Many pupils choose to use these and find them helpful. As a result, pupils develop well spiritually and morally. The prayer areas in some classrooms are less successful as they are not easily accessible and are confused with RE displays. This means that the distinction between RE and worship is not always clear. Deep learning days help to raise pupils' awareness of other cultures and of Christianity across the world. For example, pupils learned about the different ways that Christians in other countries celebrate festivals. A pupil commented, 'even though we're in different parts of the world we can all have similar beliefs'.

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

Pupils gather respectfully and quietly for collective worship each day. Routines are well established and most pupils participate well. The Christian background to the school's values is a regular focus in worship. Leaders frequently relate themes and Bible stories to pupils' own lives so that they understand the relevance of these. Collective worship helps pupils to reflect on their attitudes and behaviour and gives them a thought to carry through the day. Worship, therefore, has a clear impact on the pupils' daily lives and it contributes to good behaviour and to caring attitudes. Pupils are sometimes motivated to raise money for charities, such as Christian Aid, as a result of collective worship. Pupils enjoy contributing to acts of worship. For example, pupils volunteer to compose and say prayers, which they do with confidence. Older pupils lead aspects of worship, such as saying the gathering sentence and lighting a candle. More pupils would like to be actively involved in planning and leading parts of the school's act of worship. This would increase the active engagement of more pupils. Older pupils' views about worship are sometimes gathered by the headteacher and governors regularly monitor acts of worship. This helps leaders to know whether they have got their message across and to make improvements.

The school community celebrates a range of Christian festivals, often in the local church. This contributes to most pupils' good understanding of key Christian beliefs, for example, learning about the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Aspects of Anglican practice are used regularly. These include using Anglican sentences and prayers, and using colours to represent different times of the church's year. There is a clear rota for leadership of worship and this includes all teachers, the vicar and representatives of Christian groups. This ensures that pupils experience a variety of styles of worship.

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

The new syllabus based on the 'Understanding Christianity' materials is having a very positive impact on pupils' attitudes to RE and on their learning. Pupils have been enthused by the subject recently. Older pupils, who are learning about different approaches to science and religion, are particularly excited about RE. Pupils are helped to think deeply and they find the topics challenging and relevant. Teaching is mostly at least good and many teachers are skilful in the way that they question pupils. The best teachers adapt their plans as they gauge the ways that pupils respond. This ensures that learning is effective and appropriate. Pupils make good progress, attaining broadly average standards, which are comparable to those that they achieve in literacy. There is a focus on challenging pupils to achieve higher levels of attainment and many are responding well to this. Everyone's opinion is respected

and pupils show genuine interest in the beliefs of others. This means that there is a climate in classrooms in which everyone feels safe to express their views.

Teachers are supported well by the subject leader. There are dedicated staff meetings for the development and planning of RE, so that teachers can support each other. The RE leader attends training from the diocese. She uses this to ensure that all teachers are enabled to deliver quality RE. RE books are monitored regularly to ensure consistency across the school. Assessment is recorded and this enables the leader to monitor pupils' progress and to identify where further support is needed.

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

Leaders have a shared vision of a school which serves the local community and which helps pupils to experience the fullness of life. When the headteacher was appointed, she quickly introduced Christian values into the school. These were used to drive improvement, particularly in behaviour and in wellbeing. Standards of achievement have been lower than average, but are now improving and this is supported by the introduction of further Christian values. Leaders have, therefore, used the Christian character of the school to bring about improvement. A group of foundation governors works with the headteacher to monitor and evaluate the school's progress as a church school. This means that they have a good understanding of what it means for the school to have a Christian character. Governors offer helpful support to school leaders. Leaders have produced clear and relevant improvement plans, based on a thorough understanding of the school. Statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are fully met. Development points from the previous denominational inspection have been addressed. Some policies, such as the teaching and learning policy, are explicitly based on Christian values and belief. However, this is not the case with most policies.

Relevant diocesan training and support is accessed. This helps to develop teachers' understanding of what it means to be a church school. This, together with the priority given to Christian values by the headteacher, helps teachers to grow as future leaders. A growing number of parents attend the church services which are led by the school. In addition to the vicar regularly leading school worship, parishioners sometimes listen to pupils read in school. Therefore, there are strong relationships with the local church. Parents feel that communication with the school has improved since the appointment of the current headteacher. They feel supported and listened to. The school runs community events on its site, for example an exhibition on the history of the school. This means that there are strengthening relationships with the local community and the school is becoming the school of choice for local families.

SIAMS report October 2017 Rusthall St Paul's (VA) CE School TN6 8RZ