

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Seal Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Zambra Way, Seal, Kent TN15 0DJ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Rochester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Kent
Date of inspection	5 December 2016
Date of last inspection	2 November 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	118605
Headteacher	Liz Mitchell
Inspector's name and number	Anne Southgate 820

School context

Seal has grown in size since the previous SIAS inspection and is now an average sized primary school. The school is awaiting funding for new buildings. Whilst the area in which the school is situated is fairly affluent, the school's intake is socially diverse. Most pupils are of white British heritage and about 10% attend church regularly. Proportions of pupils with special needs and of those who are eligible for the pupil premium are broadly average. The headteacher has been in post for three years, having been promoted from being deputy headteacher in this school. The school has recently been awarded level 1 as a UNICEF Rights Respecting School.

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

- The strengthened Christian character has had a profound effect on behaviour and relationships, which are very strong as a result.
- Religious education (RE) has improved rapidly, so that creative activities engage all pupils.
- The support offered by the vicar and by governors has a clear impact on the continuing development of Seal as a church school.

Areas to improve

- Develop clear links between the school's values and biblical teaching, so that the Christian basis for the values is apparent to all stakeholders.
- Formalise the gathering of stakeholders' views, so that these have a regular impact on self-evaluation.
- Ensure that the explicitly Christian character of the school is clear on the website and in other documentation, so that those outside the school understand that this underpins the life of the school community.
- Separate RE displays from reflection and prayer areas, so that the distinction between the two is clear.

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

Shared Christian values of respect, compassion, community, aspiration, perseverance and independence underpin the daily life of the school community. The values are rooted in the belief that this is how Jesus taught us to live. Whilst some pupils can relate the values to biblical stories, this link is not established. The values are applied by teachers and pupils to learning, and this results in attainment which is above national averages. There is a clear emphasis on respect for others and on achieving life in its fullness. This means that behaviour and sensitivity towards the beliefs of others are exceptional. For example, a Year 5 class listened to a younger Muslim pupil talk about his beliefs about the Qu'ran. The pupils all showed genuine respect and interest, and they were able to ask sensitive and meaningful questions. These attitudes, together with the wide range of cultural experiences, such as One World Week, mean that pupils have a high regard for diversity. The application to become a Rights Respecting School was driven by a desire to deepen the impact of the school's Christian values. The school is now a community where everyone is respected equally, including non-teaching staff.

The support offered to children and to their families is strong. Consequently, attendance for most groups of pupils is high. Restorative justice helps pupils to understand how relationships can be repaired and it means that there have been no exclusions in the last two years. Pupils reflect on their learning in RE, and many choose to write prayers in the class reflection areas. However, in some classes, RE displays and reflection areas are confused, rather than being separate areas. RE helps pupils to ask questions of meaning and to reflect on their lives. Creative activities, such as using art, drama and music engage all pupils. Marking of pupils' work helps them to improve. Therefore, the development point about marking in RE from the previous denominational inspection has been addressed. The Christian character of the school, including RE, helps pupils to develop well spiritually, morally, socially and culturally.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils and adults gather respectfully every day for collective worship. Worship themes prompt pupils to reflect on the school's values and to apply them to their own lives. This often results in action to help others, including support for Christian Aid and for a local food bank. Pupils participate actively in worship, frequently offering thoughtful answers to the questions posed. Pupils are taught about Jesus and about Christian beliefs in collective worship. Older pupils have a good understanding of key Christian beliefs, such as that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Bible stories are sometimes told, but this is not always a feature of collective worship. The vicar supports the planning and leadership of school worship very well. She is well known to the pupils, as a frequent visitor to the school. The pupils enjoy talking to her, and sometimes they offer spontaneous prayers with her.

School services are held in the church to celebrate Christmas and Easter. These are well attended by parents. Anglican responses are used in worship, and Christian symbols provide a focus. This includes the lighting of a candle. Pupils explain that this reminds them that, 'Jesus is the light, which guides us and keeps us safe.' The issue from the previous denominational inspection to involve pupils in the leadership of worship has been addressed. Pupils frequently lead aspects of worship, such as reading and acting stories and leading the school in prayer. The quality of worship is monitored informally by governors and by the pupils who are Rights Respecting ambassadors. However, the views of all stakeholders are not collected regularly. The views that have been gathered have resulted in greater variety within worship and in speakers visiting from organisations such as Christian Aid.

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

The headteacher's Christian vision to enable every child to develop into the person that God created them to be, is shared with staff and with parents. This renewed focus on being a church school has resulted in improvements, such as pupils being exceptionally well behaved and respectful. This, in turn, has created better engagement in learning. The headteacher takes her leadership of a church school very seriously. She has addressed all of the action points from the previous denominational inspection. However, whilst the Christian character of the school is clear to those within the school community, it is not as clear from the website or other documentation. The headteacher receives excellent support from the governing body and from the diocese. She regularly attends diocesan meetings. These strong partnerships have helped school leaders to develop the Christian character of the school and to improve the provision of RE.

The relationship with the church is particularly strong and is mutually beneficial. Hymns learned at school each week are used in Sunday services, and a good number of parents attend monthly family services with their children. An ethos group of governors and senior leaders evaluate the progress of the school as a church school. The views of pupils and parents are collected on an informal basis, but there is no regular system to collect these. Statutory

requirements for RE and collective worship are met. The development of RE is given a high priority and the new subject leader has already had a positive impact. She is supported in her role by attending diocesan training which she then implements in school. Leaders are also supported and helped to develop as leaders of church schools by using the expertise of some of the governors and parents who are ordained. The focus on deepening the Christian character of the school has resulted in a school where pupils' attitudes are very positive towards exploring the nature of God. It also means that pupils have a mature understanding of differences between communities across the world.

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