

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Helen's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Church Road, Cliffe, Rochester, Kent ME3 7PU

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Rochester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of inspection	5 May 2017
Date of last inspection	23 January 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 118641
Headteacher	Stephanie Jarvis
Inspector's name and number	Niki Paterson 883

School context

St Helen's is a one form entry school which serves the village of Cliffe and surrounding Hoo peninsula in Medway, Kent. There are 202 pupils on roll, the majority of whom are White British with 13% from minority ethnic groups. The number of pupils on the special educational needs register is below the national average and around a quarter of the pupils are in receipt of pupil premium funding. There have been changes in headship since the previous denominational inspection and a high changeover in staff prior to the arrival of the current head.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Helen's as a Church of England school are good

- Leaders have a shared and distinctively Christian vision for the school which is impacting positively on attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Collective worship is highly valued and monitoring has led to significant improvements.
- Leaders have created a caring and nurturing environment in which both staff and pupils are able to realise their gifts and potential.

Areas to improve

- Incorporate the existing Christian values into strategic school development planning and curriculum design so that distinctiveness is embedded as the driver for improvement.
- Develop pupils' awareness of the Trinity so that the majority of pupils can engage with this concept with a measure of understanding.
- Develop pupils' knowledge of the Lord's prayer as a way of becoming more familiar with Anglican practice.
- Expand professional development for leaders so that succession planning is bespoke to the needs of a church school.

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

The school has developed explicit Christian values of love, friendship, trust and perseverance which permeate both the curriculum and the physical environment. A new spiritual garden, reflection areas and communal displays are fully integrated into the celebration and expression of the values. This means that many opportunities are offered for the community to reflect upon their spiritual meaning on both a personal level and in lessons on a daily basis. Parents appreciate the school's ethos. They describe how welcoming and caring the school is and how it feels like a 'large family'. This supports an inclusive ethos where the school's Christian hospitality has been particularly effective in engaging vulnerable families. As a result, attendance has improved to be in line with national expectations. Pupils and school leaders can articulate how the school's values, embedded through the daily language of the school, are improving behaviour and attitudes to learning. This link is not evident in strategic improvement planning, however. Pupils receive achievement certificates on a weekly basis for demonstrating the values in their learning, attitudes and behaviour. This is supporting academic achievement which is in line with national expectations and is particularly effective for disadvantaged pupils who make better progress than their peers in some subjects. Creative spaces, such as the classroom reflective areas and the newly developed spiritual garden, allow pupils to be both challenged and prayerful. Pupils value the presence of the reflective spaces in their classrooms which can be freely accessed. One pupil described them as 'a place which turns me from sad to happy'. When combined with opportunities for musical tuition, and insightfully taught religious education (RE), it is clear how social, moral, spiritual, and cultural (SMSC) education is developing within the school's ethos. Behaviour is good and one pupil described how the trusting relationships within the school are helping him to manage his behaviour. Caring relationships exist between staff members who feel valued and nurtured by school leaders to achieve their potential. This has led to improved rates of staff retention. RE has a high profile and is well taught through challenge and intuitive open questioning. Pupils have some awareness of Christianity as a worldwide faith and are able to describe why it is important to respect other faiths. Pupils are able to express the importance of recognising values which are shared by different religions.

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

Distinctively Christian collective worship, which is focused on the teaching and inspiration of Jesus, is clearly valued by the community. Pupils are attentive, behave well and are joyful in their praise. Worship is well led by a wide range of leaders, including all staff, clergy, members of the local church and the Family Trust. This ensures that pupils experience a variety in styles and denominations of Christian worship. Pupils who elect to be part of the 'leading lights' group are being developed as leaders of worship and can lead autonomously. This includes a number of pupil musicians who play as pupils enter. Pupils plan worship with the support of school leaders and are committed to this role. Christian values are integral to the content of worship, which is informed by Diocesan planning and by other resources rooted in biblical teaching. It is adapted by individuals to meet the needs of the school but planning is not available collectively. This means that the involvement in planning of other stakeholders, such as governors, is limited. Pupils have limited understanding of the Trinity with only a few able to articulate this. Pupils are familiar with some Anglican traditions through the celebration and observance of the Christian calendar and the practice of liturgical responses in opening and closing worship. They also experience this by attending festivals at the local church. Parents welcome the opportunity to engage in worship with their children during these visits. Prayer is made meaningful, as both pupils and staff write and deliver prayer which is relevant to the current needs of the community. However, only a few are familiar with the Lord's prayer. Regular monitoring of worship is carried out by a range of stakeholders, including children, and is effective in improving practice. Leaders have ensured that the hall has been developed as a worshipful space with the presence of a liturgical calendar and banners which highlight the Christian values. Clergy describe how the pupil engagement with worship has significantly improved under the current leadership.

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

School leaders and governors have worked together to establish a renewed and shared vision of the school's Christian distinctiveness. This is rooted in the life of the community which they serve. They embody the vision statement that every child is 'treasured and loved as a unique child of God'. This has supported a continuous upward trend in academic standards and has closed the gaps for disadvantaged pupils. A strong relationship with the parish church is clearly evidenced through the integral role of the associate priest who has been an active member of the governing body during an interregnum. She and the new incumbent are regular visitors to the school, alongside other members of church. Good communication with parents about the school's values means that they are highly supportive of the school's distinctive ethos. The school embodies its value of love to disadvantaged

families. For example, the school recorded a bespoke sports day video for a parent who was unable to attend owing to severe illness. Pupils have an understanding of their responsibility to love others in their community by regularly supporting local projects and Christian charities such as Caring Hands which supports those in poverty in Medway. This, in turn, supports pupils' understanding of the links between Christian values and SMSC learning. School leaders have been resolute in highlighting the values on a practical level to support school improvement. Along with a highly focussed governing body, they have ensured that Christian distinctiveness is at the core of school life. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are supported by professional development at diocesan level, including for the leadership of RE. This has resulted in a school community which 'thinks like a church school' and has ensured that standards in RE continue to rise. However, opportunities for distinctive succession planning in whole school leadership are limited. Areas for development from the previous denominational inspection have been fully addressed. A continuous cycle of reflective and insightful self-evaluation incorporates a range of stakeholder views, including those of pupils and parents. Focussed and robust monitoring by leaders and governors, underpinned by the school's value of perseverance, has brought about rapid school improvement and consistent practice which is clearly linked to the school's vision. Statutory requirements for the provision of RE and collective worship are met.

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