

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Nicholas Church of England Primary School

Manor Farm Avenue, TW17 9AD	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	London
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Surrey
Date of inspection	12 October 2017
Date of last inspection	November 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VA Primary 125230
Headteacher	Liz Felsing
Inspector's name and number	John Viner NS144

School context

St Nicholas is a larger than average primary school located in Shepperton and serving the parish of St Nicholas. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and only a small proportion speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is lower than average, as is the proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the school receives additional funding. A small percentage of pupils attend church. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are higher than national averages. The school was recently inspected by Ofsted and confirmed to be good.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Nicholas as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Leaders, governors and clergy share an ambitious Christian vision for a school where pupils of all faiths and none share a sense of spirituality that helps them thrive academically and personally.
- Core Christian values underpin the school and are lived out in every aspect of its work.
- Collective worship and prayer are essential components of every day, reinforcing the values that the school promotes and affirming all who attend, regardless of faith or belief.
- Religious education (RE) has high priority in the school and provides pupils with opportunities to explore deep questions of meaning and purpose.
- Leaders and governors are highly effective in their review and renewal of the school's Christian distinctiveness and are united in its mission.
- The school and parish church sustain an indivisible partnership that unites them in the Christian service of the community.

Areas to improve

- Review the order and content of the RE curriculum so that, when pupils encounter world faiths, it is progressive as they move through the school.
- Deepen teachers' knowledge of key world faiths so that their confidence is raised and they teach with greater precision.

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

Christian values not only lie at the heart of the school; they define its character, underpin its work and are evident in every aspect of its operation. The core values of friendship, thankfulness and trust are set in the context of a broader range of specific Christian characteristics that are summarised in the school motto: 'together we learn; together we grow, with faith, love and God beside us'. All stakeholders, whether they are governors, staff, or parents articulate these values and know what they mean in practice. Even non-believing parents say that the Christian values emphasised by the school make it a place of excellence. Staff remark on the 'special feel' that results from the school's ethos. The impact of the school's Christian character is seen in the academic progress and personal development of all pupils, regardless of faith or belief. It also inspires the warm, trusting relationships between and among adults and pupils. As a result, this is a school where pupils know that they are safe, valued and special. They make good progress and attain high standards. Most pupils attend regularly and the school's careful work with families whose children often miss school is having a positive impact on their attendance. Parents recognise that the school's Christian ethos makes this a safe space where respect grows and faith is nurtured. They acknowledge how successfully the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development so that they behave impeccably and develop positive attitudes to others.

An unusually deep sense of spirituality is recognised by all members of the school community. It is evident in the school's caring provision for its pupils, for example the 'koinonia room', a quiet space which pupils can use when they need to. It is evident in the thoughtful displays around the school and it is evident in the well-used classroom prayer and reflection areas. Pupils say that this makes a difference to the way people behave and look out for each other. Because they develop a growing appreciation of the nature of faith and belief, pupils also learn to be compassionate and look for opportunities to serve others: for example, through their own suggestions of good causes that the school should support. The school's excellent promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development means that they acquire a high degree of understanding of diversity and develop positive attitudes of tolerance and respect. RE has a high profile in the school and pupils come to a secure understanding that Christianity is a world faith in the context of a wide variety of faith communities. They are excited by RE and regard it as part of the Christian distinctiveness that makes this school special.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship lies at the heart of the school. Rather than being an add-on, it is a natural consequence of the spirituality that defines the school. Pupils place great value on worship and some say that it is the highlight of their day. As a result, they behave reverently and join in enthusiastically. Because it so clearly links with the school's Christian character, it becomes an expression of school life, affirming all who attend, regardless of personal faith and belief. Pupils say that this is a peaceful, calm time when they can think and talk to God. Pupils of other faiths say that they too are affirmed by worship and their parents suggest that it helps to deepen their own faith.

Worship is distinctly Christian, rooted in the person and life of Jesus and based on a clear understanding that Christians regard God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The use of a candle to signal the beginning of worship, and the prayers that are said as it is lit or extinguished, give pupils an experience of Anglican practice. There are many excellent opportunities, through the shared services with the parish church, to understand the traditions of the Church of England. The school is gradually introducing a form of Christian meditation that will engage them with silence and contemplation. Pupils say that they like the varying pattern of worship with its many different styles, from meeting in large groups to the more intimate and prayerful times in classrooms. Parents especially comment on the special atmosphere of Bread Sharing in Key Stage 1 and the Eucharist in Key Stage 2. Staff describe them as calm, intimate sessions that draw parents and members of the local community into school. These are meeting points of school and parish.

Worship is carefully and thoughtfully planned by headteacher and clergy, often drawing on the suggestions and ideas of pupils. Themes are drawn from the Church's Year, world events and the school's Christian values. A range of leaders, including senior leaders, parish clergy and other visitors ensure that worship is kept fresh and interesting. Both pupils and parents say how much they enjoy the regular acts of worship led by parish clergy. The themes of collective worship often lead pupils to think deeply. For example, the recent visit from a Mozambican priest inspired pupils to suggest ways in which the school could make a difference to his work with the people of his parish. The evaluation of worship is regular, thorough and analytical. It involves pupils, leaders and governors, and ensures that there is ongoing planned improvement and development.

Prayer is not limited to worship but is threaded through the school. Pupils quickly learn the nature and purpose of prayer and there are many excellent opportunities for them to pray, both publicly – in worship and in class - but also privately. Reflection areas in each classroom give opportunities for quiet thought and to commit concerns or delights to God in prayer. In this way prayer and worship become a part of the fabric of school life.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Religious education is outstanding because pupils are taught well, learn to think deeply and make excellent progress. Most pupils, including those with lower starting points, attain standards that are often higher than those expected nationally. Pupils are excited and engaged by RE and many say it is their favourite subject because they love learning about religions and their teachers make it fun. Since the last inspection, the school has developed creative ways to engage pupils in all subjects as well as RE and, as a result, they develop confidence in discussion and acquire the skills of reflection and empathy. As a consequence, they express themselves thoughtfully, ask profound questions and sometimes produce work that demonstrates a maturity beyond their years.

These excellent outcomes are the result of consistently good and outstanding teaching. Because teachers are confident and knowledgeable, they inspire pupils to learn well. From the time they join the school, children begin to appreciate that they are part of a complex creation and, as they move through the school, pupils develop an understanding of the nature of faith and belief that makes a powerful contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This helps to make RE exciting and stimulating. The school has recently introduced a new, and more demanding, curriculum. Its implementation is in the early stages and, while there is a good balance of faiths taught, currently pupils do not always encounter them at points that enable them to deepen their knowledge as they move through the school. Consequently, by the time they leave the school, pupils have an excellent knowledge of Christianity and the Bible, but their knowledge of some other faiths is not yet as deep as it could be. However, because they are developing key skills of reflection and enquiry, pupils' good understanding of Christianity gives them a secure platform from which to make their own connections between faiths and value systems.

RE is strongly led by a knowledgeable but relatively new subject leader who has built on the good work of her predecessor to ensure that RE continues to develop well. Supported by diocesan officers, she has good systems for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. She is working with colleagues in other schools and the diocese to refine assessment processes so that teachers have an ever more accurate idea of the progress their pupils are making. She is supporting colleagues in working with the new curriculum and helping to develop their confident understanding of the full range of faiths taught. These well-focused and ambitious plans contribute to ongoing subject development so that the already outstanding provision of RE can become exceptional.

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

Inspired by the faithful and determined leadership of the headteacher, leaders, governors and clergy share an ambitious Christian vision for the school that is based on the sense that God is always at our side, uniting our actions and plans. The commitment of leaders, the dedication of the parish priest and the active engagement of governors create a powerful leadership team that is driving the school forward as a place of excellence in the context of Christian witness and spiritual awareness. Members of the team share a humble sense of pride in the impact that the school has on the personal and academic development of its pupils, identifying and meeting their needs at an individual level. Parents of all faiths and backgrounds recognise this and say that this is what makes the school special. They recognise that it results in their children's excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, giving them values for their lives that are evident in their conversations and conduct, both at school and in the home. Since the last inspection, the leadership has brought about very significant improvement in RE and its assessment and raised the focus on Christian values to the point where they are integral to the school's work and define pupils' behaviour and attitudes.

The cohesion of the leadership team results in a thorough understanding of the school's distinctiveness and effectiveness. This leads to highly effective strategies for further improvement, including plans to meet any future leadership needs. This has included opening opportunities for senior leaders to work with other schools while supporting middle leaders to develop confidence and skill. Leaders and governors have secured excellent leadership of RE and worship and continue to refine a curriculum that is informed by the school's Christian character. The excellent support of diocesan officers is so significant that governors regard the link adviser as part of their team.

There is an impressive partnership with the parish church. Regular use is made of the school for church services, parishioners attend school worship and both governors and parents say that it is not possible to separate church from school. This is both mutually beneficial and of service to the whole community. Through the church's links with Mozambique, pupils benefit from a relationship with a developing nation and are involved in supporting the church's work there. The regular and dedicated involvement of the parish priest adds significant capacity to the school, supporting worship, contributing to RE and providing chaplaincy to the whole school community. Together, church and school are a powerful Christian presence in the community they serve.