

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John's Upper Holloway Church of England Primary School

Pemberton Gardens, London N19 5RR

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	London
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Islington
Date of inspection	30 June 2017
Date of last inspection	28 March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 100439
Headteacher	Brian Welsh
Inspector's name and number	Emily Norman 912

School context

St John's is a smaller than average one form entry voluntary aided primary school with a nursery, which serves three parishes in the area. Pupils come from a wide range of ethnic minority backgrounds and around a third speak English as an additional language. An above average number of pupils receive the additional funding allocated to disadvantaged pupils, while the number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities is broadly average. Pupil mobility is above average. The headteacher and deputy have been in post for 7 years, but the long-standing parish priest recently moved on to become a bishop.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's Upper Holloway as a Church of England school are outstanding

- There is a deep understanding by the whole school community that the Christian vision and values of the school are successfully equipping pupils for their lives, both now and in the future.
- Pupils' personal spirituality is very well developed because they are given the freedom and contexts in which to explore this, and have a deep understanding of the purpose of prayer.
- Creative and exciting religious education (RE) teaching develops pupils' respect for diversity and strengthens their own beliefs and values.
- Leaders are passionate and relentless in ensuring the very best for all pupils, driven by their unwavering commitment to the Christian ethos of the school.
- The RE and collective worship leader has effected significant improvements since the last inspection so that both have a striking impact upon the school community.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that pupils have frequent opportunities to lead aspects of worship, both in planned and spontaneous ways, so that the whole school community can benefit from the interesting ideas and deep spirituality of its pupils.
- Explore a wider range of ways to capture pupils' oral responses in RE, to fully exemplify the standards pupils attain.

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

The school's Christian vision, encapsulated in the quote of their patron saint, St John the Evangelist ('shine on through these days'), is highly effective in ensuring that all aspects of the school's work are driven by its Christian character. In addition, a core set of Christian values (truthfulness, friendship, creativity, thankfulness, perseverance and courage) help children to know how to achieve St John's vision for them. Each week, they explore Bible texts which illustrate the values, and they are supported to understand the link between these values and their behaviour through the 'brilliant book'. Because of the strong emphasis on equipping pupils for their lives both now and in the future, pupils know that the school has high expectations of them and consequently achieve above average standards by the end of their schooling. Their well-being needs are also tended to with great care and compassion, both by the school and the church, who work together closely. For example, both church and school staff visit families at home and provide practical support for their needs in order to tackle attendance issues. Because of this deeply Christian approach, relationships, behaviour and attitudes to learning are all excellent, despite the challenging circumstances that some pupils come from. Pupils' individual spirituality is well-addressed in this school, with pupils feeling free to explore their own beliefs and the beliefs of others in a safe, nurturing environment. Their moral, cultural and social development is also tended to through a range of charitable events and projects, involving both local and global communities. They learn about diversity in the church through the input of three different parishes in the life of the school, and about the different faiths of their peers in school, comparing and contrasting their beliefs sensitively. This leads to a high degree of respect between all members of the school community, where faith is celebrated and all individuals are encouraged to be distinctively themselves. One pupil commented: 'it's a Christian school, so we learn about Christianity, but everybody feels included.' Religious education (RE) excites pupils, because of the creative ways in which it is taught and the opportunities they have to debate and discuss. It is a highly popular subject and pupils see the value in what they learn about Jesus and the Christian faith, regardless of their own faith background.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship (CW) at St John's is a significant time of inspiration and reflection within each day, which is valued by all members of the school community. The high priority given to the worship life of the school is particularly evident in the way that both staff and all three of the local parishes have worked hard to sustain its high quality after the departure of the parish priest. The singing in worship is a highlight for staff, pupils and parents, who talk about the effect this has on them personally. Pupils learn about the church's year and the school's Christian values through a carefully crafted plan of Bible texts and stories, worship songs and liturgical responses, and modern day examples of faith in action. As a result, pupils' understanding of the Christian faith is secure, including their grasp of Jesus as central to the Christian faith, and of key Christian beliefs such as that of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pupils are proactive in supporting one another, and in reaching out to their community, as a result of what they learn in worship. One pupil commented: 'everyone respects and loves each other. We know we're forgiven and that makes us a very loving school'. Pupils of all faiths and none understand the importance and purpose of prayer. They write prayers to contribute to worship, and prayer is a very important aspect of their everyday lives at school. This is further facilitated by a weekly prayer group at the church which includes parents, who take the pupils' prayers and commit them to God. Pupils value this and as a result are deeply engaged with the prayer life of the school. Newly implemented prayer books, and themed prayer days have also made a strong contribution to pupils' relationship with prayer. Parents comment on the meaning that the school prayer has for them, saying it gives them a 'warm glow' and a feeling of 'joy'. Acts of worship are distinctively Christian, but pupils of all different faiths and views find them to be valuable experiences in their lives, as they can explore their own spirituality in the context of learning what is special about Christianity. Worship is led by a wide variety of staff as well as clergy from three different churches, providing many different presentation styles and perspectives. This ensures that CW is always interesting, fresh and challenging for the pupils and that they have a well-developed appreciation for the diversity that exists within the Christian church. The school seeks pupils' feedback on worship, and pupils often prepare and lead parts of the regular church services, such as prayers and singing. They feel empowered and included by the votes taken about elements of CW. However, there are not yet many opportunities for them to lead spontaneously or to plan whole acts of worship themselves, although pupils say they would be keen to do more of this. The school is rigorous in its monitoring of CW, with governors, staff, clergy and pupils involved in reviewing acts of worship. As a result, prayer and worship are making a real difference to the lives of the whole school community because everyone understands their purpose and significance.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils enjoy RE immensely because it is fun and interesting. Lessons are regularly creative, often involving drama or 'Godly Play'. It provides them with numerous opportunities to talk about their beliefs and figure out their own

personal faith. For example in a Year 6 lesson, pupils compared two creeds – one Christian, one Muslim – and then developed their own creeds, based on their personal beliefs. Consequently, pupils’ religious literacy is strong and equips them for engagement with the world around them. They are able to speak thoughtfully about how recent tragedies in the area had affected them, and their concerns about how their religion might be perceived. Achievement in the subject is high. However, the full extent of this is not always evident in pupils’ written work and it is only by talking with pupils that the impressive magnitude of their understanding – often well beyond their years – can be seen. The school now needs to consider how best to capture these responses so that assessments fully reflect what pupils are capable of, and can be utilised as exemplars of outstanding practice in RE. The curriculum, which is currently in a transitional phase, has been carefully adapted to the needs of the school so it provides pupils with a broad and varied range of topics. This includes learning about all major world faiths at appropriate times, as well as learning about other world views in response to the needs of pupils who hold these views. This has had a significant impact upon pupils, who all feel valued because their own beliefs have been highlighted and discussed in class. The programme of visits and visitors, introduced since the last inspection, richly enhances the pupils’ learning and brings the subject to life. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs, are well-catered for in RE and achieve as highly as possible. This is because support staff work closely with teachers and school leaders to tailor learning carefully to meet the needs of individual pupils. The school does not shy away from difficult topics, and pupils as early as nursery age are engaging with questions of meaning and purpose. For example, a very sensitively arranged memorial service for two pet guinea pigs was observed, in which pupils shared their emotions, asked if they could pray and explored their ideas about ‘heaven’. Pupils recognise that RE helps them to develop the six school Christian values. They can also make the link between what they learn in RE and their actions, citing respect for others as a key outcome of what they learn in lessons: ‘everyone feels included’.

The subject leader’s impact on the subject is substantial, and pupils, parents and staff all praise her for this. Her extensive subject knowledge is valued by teachers, who have benefitted from one to one coaching to develop their confidence. As a result she has effectively embedded a number of improvements so that the quality of learning in the subject is high.

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

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have uncompromising aspirations for all of their pupils, which emanate from a clear Christian vision. As a result, pupils rise to their high expectations and achieve extremely well. Their pursuit of excellence is relentless, yet the well-being and care for each individual child is always the priority. Leaders, including governors, model the school’s vision and values in how they conduct themselves, and provide an exemplar to the pupils of what it means to ‘shine on through these days’. Staff and governors, who worked together to review the vision statement, are justifiably proud of it. Whilst the statement is lengthy and detailed, its essence is well-understood by pupils, staff and parents alike. Nevertheless, the school is already working on a more ‘child-friendly’ version to support the school community in articulating the vision, because it is so attuned to the needs of its pupils. Equally, all other school improvement priorities are constantly reviewed and feedback is taken on board quickly so that development points are swiftly implemented in order to ensure that the needs of every pupil are met. There is no hint of complacency, and therefore pupils are thriving in this school.

The Christian character of the school is threaded through the curriculum carefully, so that pupils understand what faith looks like in action. For example, a project where all members of the school community considered the question ‘who am I?’ provided opportunities for pupils and staff to reflect upon the role of faith in their lives. A playground mural project to display the school’s vision and values, devised by the pupils, also highlights the centrality of the school’s Christian character in the life of the school, and now lives on for future generations.

Parents speak very highly of the school and contribute through prayer, through sharing their own faiths and cultures with pupils in class and by supporting church services and events. The impact of the parish priest over many years has left a significant legacy, and it is evident in the way this has been sustained, that the local parish churches highly value their relationship with the school. Staff, too, have worked hard to ensure this remains a central aspect of the life of the school, showing their commitment to the school as a church school. This commitment comes from staff both with a Christian faith, but also those of other faiths and none, who value the Christian ethos and what this brings to the school community. They are assisted to advance in their careers, and develop as RE and CW practitioners, with individually tailored support from the dynamic subject leader, which has led to substantial improvements in both areas. The school makes strategic use of diocesan support, and of a deanery network of local church schools in Islington, to ensure future leaders are developed effectively. As a result, the deputy headteacher has secured a role as a headteacher in another church school, and the headteacher advises church schools in another borough. This is enabling the most effective elements of St John’s distinctively Christian practice to be shared more widely with schools throughout the diocese.