

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St James Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Woodside Avenue, Muswell Hill, London, N10 3JA

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	London
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local Authority	Haringey
Dates of inspection	14 November 2017
Date of last inspection	October 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 102136
Headteacher	Carol O'Brien
Inspector's name and number	Pamela Draycott (161)

School context

This average-sized school serves families from around North London. Most pupils are White British with a range of other ethnicities represented. The percentage who speak English as an additional language is close to the national average. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is well below average but increasing. The percentage with some sort of special educational need or disability is below average. The majority are from Christian backgrounds, a significant number of whom attend St James' Church, where there are longstanding and deep links. There are small numbers of pupils from Jewish, Muslim and Sikh family backgrounds who are part of the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St James Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The long-term, committed leadership of the headteacher, supported by her senior leaders and by governors, effectively promotes a clear Christian vision of service, based on biblical principles. This successfully sustains its work as a church school.
- Appropriately high academic expectations, exemplary behaviour and mutually respectful relationships are clear expressions of the school's Christian underpinning as expressed by its mission statement and values.
- A strong partnership with St James' church makes a substantial contribution to the school's distinctive Christian character.
- Both religious education (RE) and the worship programme express very well the school's Christian vision and impact positively on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas to improve

- As part of the planned cycle of development and to ensure recent diocesan and national developments are taken effectively into account, review the school's Christian vision and values and the RE curriculum. Ensure that full use is made of the educational expertise available through the diocese in doing this.

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

The school's mission statement of, 'Learning to live. Living to learn. Learning from Christ' successfully sustains and guides decisions made in the school. It leads to a clear focus on the importance of developing pupils both academically and personally. Consequently, pupils thrive, for example, displaying very positive attitudes to learning and being considerate towards others. The school has a strong 'family feel', which pupils respond to positively, knowing that they are well cared for. This means that attendance is above the national average and behaviour is commendable. There is a clear behaviour policy which is well based on Christian principles such as justice and forgiveness. It is very well understood by pupils and consistently applied. On those very few occasions where behaviour or attendance issues get in the way of learning, compassionate and effective support for pupils and their families brings about positive resolutions. The school has a rather long set of Christian values which include, for example, thankfulness, compassion, peace and hope. The values are well known. Their biblical underpinning is understood by many but not by all across the school. Each class focuses on two of the values annually and shares their thoughts and insights with the rest of the school through the collective worship programme. This contributes to these Christian values permeating the school's life and work. The school's vision and values has not been thoroughly reviewed in the light of recent and ongoing developments in Church of England education. Attainment is consistently high when compared with local and national averages. This demonstrates the good or accelerated progress that pupils of differing abilities and backgrounds generally make. Likewise the school's Christian identity is being lived out through the consistently high expectations and mutually supportive relationships in evidence. As an expression of its Christian foundation, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is given a high priority. For example, opportunities are very well taken within a broad and balanced curriculum, including in RE and though topic work, to help pupils be mindful and reflect on issues of spiritual, moral and ethical concern. This is very well supported through a range of extra-curricular activities and by the Year 6 voluntary Bible study held weekly after school in the church. Charitable giving is clearly seen as an important expression of the individual's and the school's responsibility towards God and the wider world. Opportunities for giving and for fund-raising for charity are very well supported by the pupils and their families as well as by staff. As one pupil reflected, 'Giving to charity can be fun as well as something we should do because Jesus helped others, so should we'. Through the RE curriculum pupils develop an appreciation of difference and diversity as they address Christianity and other world faiths, appropriately addressing similarities and differences. 'It's important to know about what other people do and believe. Otherwise you'd be ignorant and you might not be respectful which wouldn't be good,' as one pupil reflected. The teaching of Christianity is firmly grounded. However, there are some missed opportunities to consider in greater depth the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic dimension of Christianity and indeed Anglicanism as a world faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The worship programme is key to sustaining and promoting the school's Christian foundation. Elements of the worship programme include exploring the school's Christian values as well as key Christian festivals and teachings. These are well planned for and contribute very well to pupils' appreciation of Christian beliefs and teachings. Whole school acts of worship are the daily norm. These are led principally by the headteacher, other staff, clergy and members of St James' church, as well as by class groups. This provides a variety of approaches and helps to maintain interest. Pupils participate and respond positively to worship and engage very well with it. They are regularly and appropriately involved in leading worship and are respectful and focused during worship opportunities. The programme is well extended through visits for worship to the parish church. Parents are invited to join when worship is held in church or in school when their children are involved in leading worship. This contributes effectively to a strong sense of belonging and community alongside providing relevant opportunities for worship. Biblical teachings and stories are drawn on and related well to events in the world today. This contributes to a deep level of understanding of the importance and relevance of the Bible for Christians and particularly of the significance of Jesus and his teaching. As a consequence they are able to relate biblical teaching to events in the world and their lives today. Pupils have a developing understanding of key Christian beliefs such as that of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship in school complements worship styles in church. Thus pupils are exploring particular Anglican aspects of worship. Pupils understand that prayer is 'important and is talking to God'. They know that there are different types of prayer such as, 'praising God, saying thank you and asking for things'. They know the Lord's Prayer, which is said or sung regularly, and have an appreciation of its significance for Christians. The school prayer is said in daily worship and there are opportunities at lunchtime and at the end of the school day for prayer in the classroom. These prayers are often written by the pupils themselves. This means that prayer is part of the daily rhythm of school life. The church ran a prayer room in the school during the previous summer term and pupils asked for it to be continued. In response, a prayer, reflection and quiet room is being set up, although is not yet functioning. The impact of worship is closely monitored and pupils' views and suggestions are taken into account. This leads to its relevance being reinforced and developed further.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The importance of RE in supporting the school's Christian ethos is rightly recognised. Pupils enjoy and respond very well to the range of content and approaches they are given. This is based on a scheme called, 'Discovery RE', which has been adopted by governors. Discussion, asking questions and reflection play key roles across the age groups. In this way, pupils are given opportunity to develop enquiry, information gathering and evaluative skills in age-appropriate ways. Pupils share their personal ideas and beliefs articulately within a respectful learning environment. This contributes deeply to their learning. Improving the quality of written work in RE so that it reflects that in literacy has been a focus during this academic year. This focus follows advice given by the diocesan link adviser. There is already evidence that this is impacting positively on how pupils demonstrate their learning. The breadth of written activities such as prose, re-telling stories and report writing is extending. There are gaps in exercise books when activities other than written activities have been addressed. In some classes these times are well recognised through providing, for example a picture, or the lesson's learning intentions. This helps pupils to 'join up' the different types of learning they engage in through RE. However, this is not consistent practice across the school. RE's current focus is to embed new assessment practices in the light of national developments and is a whole school priority. Teachers mark pupils work regularly with some helpful comments and in some instances pupils respond to this marking to improve their work. Self- and peer- assessment in RE is under-utilised. Standards are broadly in line with literacy levels across the school. Oral responses demonstrate a high level of engagement and thoughtful response to curriculum content. Pupils are making at least good with some making accelerated progress in RE, from their various starting points. Regular support, monitoring and evaluation is provided by the headteacher, who is currently the RE subject leader, and by governors. This feeds into the subject action plan and ensures that RE continues to contribute positively to school life.

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

The school's Christian underpinning is key to its life based on its vision as expressed through its mission statement. This vision is effectively sustained by the headteacher, senior staff and governors. Other staff across the school share and understand its significance. Thus its Christian foundation is key to school development and successfully underpins the whole curriculum. The headteacher, provides strong and caring leadership. She knows the pupils very well and ensures that staff are well supported for working in this church school. Governors provide effective support and challenge on all aspects of school life, including its Christian life. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school's Christian ethos, irrespective of their personal faith position. They see it as linking positively with their own family values and see that it impacts positively on their children's wellbeing, behaviour and attitudes. They are kept well informed of their children's progress. They are rightly appreciative of the headteacher's 'open-door' policy and the friendliness and professionalism of staff. This is seen as a reflection of the school's Christian care and concern for children and their families. Key issues for improvement in the previous denominational inspection report were linked to formalising the evaluation of collective worship and sharpening assessment and record keeping procedures in RE. Both areas have been well addressed. Assessment in RE is again currently a focus. This is due to significant changes in assessment practice across the curriculum introduced nationally in the intervening period. Governors are highly committed to and knowledgeable about the school and are appropriately involved in its life. Many governors are linked with the parish church and share a passion for the school as a distinctive and effective church school. They, parish clergy and lay workers, and the wider church family are extremely supportive of the school and make a significant contribution to its life and work. The school's self-evaluation of its nature as a church school is rather descriptive but the focus is accurate. However, it does lead to relevant and effective action planning for maintaining and improving practice. For example, by refocusing assessment practice in RE linked to whole school priorities. Likewise, as part of its development cycle, RE is due for review in the Spring term of 2018. Firm plans are in place to do this through the governors' curriculum and standards committee. Leadership for both RE and worship is in place and both areas meet statutory requirements. There is a recognition that St James school is part of the wider diocesan family of schools and it has some positive links with other church school's locally. Although the expertise of the diocesan link adviser is accessed, full use is not made of the expertise of the diocesan education team through, for example, update and support meetings and staff and governor training. This means that recent and on-going developments with Church of England education, nationally and locally, have not been accessed sufficiently.