

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### St John's Church of England Primary School

Swan Lane, Whetstone, London N20 0PL

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| <b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>      | <b>Outstanding</b>      |
| <b>Diocese</b>                             | <b>London</b>           |
| Previous SIAMS inspection grade            | Outstanding             |
| Local authority                            | Barnet                  |
| Date of inspection                         | 5 July 2017             |
| Date of last inspection                    | January 2012            |
| Type of school and unique reference number | Voluntary Aided 101321  |
| Headteacher                                | Curtis Sweetingham      |
| Inspector's name and number                | John Pearson-Hicks, 760 |

#### School context

St John's Whetstone is a popular one form entry school with a nursery. The school is situated close to the church of St John's. Since the last inspection the school has undergone a complete change in leadership and staff restructuring and there is a new vicar. Children from minority ethnic groups now make up 60% of the school population and nearly 30% have English as an additional language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals has decreased recently to around 13%, which is below the national average. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or learning disabilities is slightly higher than average. Since the last inspection a new Christian vision and Christian values have been implemented.

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

- Outstanding communication and commitment from all leaders ensure Christian values are embedded in the work of the school.
- Worship, in its various forms, is central to the life of the school and makes strong connections between the school's Christian values and personal impact.
- The prayer life of the school has a significant impact on the daily lives of children, their families and the staff.
- Pupils are excited and enthused about religious education (RE) and achieve high standards, supported by a newly implemented assessment system which has ensured children learn from and about religion in highly creative and effective ways.
- The absolute clarity and commitment of the headteacher in leading a Christian school is shared by all leaders and governors. As a result the whole school community is highly motivated and fully supports the ethos of the school, sharing a 'can do' mind-set.

#### Areas to improve

- All staff to be systematically involved in the moderation of RE assessments across the school.

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

The distinctive Christian character of this school, lived out through its mission statement, 'Nurture, Encourage, Challenge, Through Christ,' has clearly driven this school from strength to strength. The significant structural change in the life of the school has been effectively managed to ensure children are at the centre of all planning. The passion and drive of senior leaders, staff and governors in supporting the school through significant change has had a positive impact on the children's personal, social, moral and spiritual development. The impact of explicit Christian

values is tangible around the school. The school ambassadors, and others, can effectively explain their role in 'promoting Christian values' and can articulate why these values are important. The school has quickly and effectively developed RE to deepen the children's understanding of Christianity, other world faiths, and how key aspects of different faiths interrelate. Recent changes in RE, including the implementation of a new syllabus, has made a significant contribution to the Christian character of the school. Children enter the school with skill levels broadly appropriate for their expected age. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school, regardless of their ability or background. By the end of Key Stage 2 levels of attainment are above the national average. Great care and detail is taken in supporting the vulnerable and pupils speak about the different reasons why they feel safe and are well supported by staff. The impact of the school's values, 'respect, thankful, truthful, forgive and hope' in a Christian context is that children are well supported and achieve their very best. Pupils are excited about their learning and enjoy coming to school. Children take great pride in their work and talk animatedly about their learning and achievements. The calm and purposeful atmosphere in the school, alongside a relentless focus on meeting the needs of all learners, means that children are well behaved, happy and have high aspirations for themselves and their peers. The children have a very clear understanding of the school's Christian values, and at the upper end of the school they clearly articulate the positive changes the new head and deputy have made. The children's attendance is good and they are proud of their school because staff 'nurture and encourage us'. The school and its parish church ensure that children and families of all faiths, and none, are affirmed through inclusive Christian practice. Parents are unanimously positive about the school and how 'strengthened relationships between church and school' have impacted on their children over the last couple of years. Parents and governors explain how the school's distinctive Christian character and RE teaching impacts on the children who are 'exceedingly happy' in this school because of the care and attention given to them. Parents are clear that staff model the school's Christian values which means their children are modelling them too. There is a real sense that staff, parents and governors are working together in highly motivating and systematic ways to ensure children make the most of their time at St John's.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship is central to the life of the school and makes a significant contribution to the children's understanding of their place in the world. The headteacher, deputy and vicar work closely together to devise the programme for worship which is based on biblical themes and current events which are meaningful and memorable. Children give many examples of school worship and how they apply it to their lives. One group of pupils spoke of how worship has 'helped them resolve arguments' by using the school's values. Clear procedures for evaluation and effective working partnerships has enabled worship to be a focal point in developing a new culture. Children regularly plan, lead and evaluate worship which result in the children feeling involved in sharing their faith in very personal ways, which reflects the school vision. Children say collective worship helps them 'think deeper about things I never thought about before'. They are actively involved in many different ways in worship which children recognise as a great strength and source of encouragement. One child [who said they were of another faith] explained that, 'Jesus is special to us. He is important like God and the Holy Spirit'. This is one of many reasons children give as to why they love worship and think it is important. Since the last inspection there has been a significant focus on developing prayer throughout the school day. There are many opportunities for the children to write and share prayers, as well as using the 'prayer corners' daily in each class. Children spoke about 'building' their own prayer corners at home and why prayer was important. They enjoy writing prayers as well as saying formal prayers like The Lord's Prayer, and they can explain what they mean and why they use them. Parents say that 'relationships between the church and school have strengthened' since the last inspection and that the vicar has had a significant impact on deepening children's thinking. Children readily talk about prayer and worship and the impact it has on them as individuals and in respecting and understanding the views of others. A daily act of worship is a key focal point of the school day where stories from the Bible, Christian values and themes are explored in depth. Regular class worship, led by staff or children is seen as a very important part of school life. Children, staff and governors are actively involved in evaluating worship through a systematic process, which feeds into how the leadership changes and adapts what takes place. Consequently, pupils have a sense of ownership of worship because all staff treat it as important. Children were keen to explain the meaning of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and spoke in an articulate manner about the impact of their experiences in worship at school and in church.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

Children are inspired by RE in this school because it is given a high profile within the life of the school. This is clearly evident in the children's books, classroom displays and in the positive way children talk about RE. Staff and children take great care of their environment and are proud of its Christian heritage. The development of RE since the last inspection has been significant. The new RE leader has effectively implemented a new RE syllabus and assessment system in the school. This enables children to be absolutely clear about what they are learning about

and learning from in RE lessons, and how they can apply it to their own circumstances. The children make excellent progress as they deepen their understanding in RE because staff plan detailed and creative lessons with challenging questions. Children are highly motivated and say RE is 'fun and creative, and we get to learn interesting things like why Muslims whisper in the ear of a new born baby'. The impact is that children enthusiastically explain the reasons why they enjoy RE because 'we now get the chance to experience different religions and compare them' to our own faith. The work in learning from and about religion is a significant strength in the school. Since the last inspection the academic standards have risen and RE makes a significant contribution to this development. There is great consistency in the approach to teaching RE across the school, which has been led by the highly effective RE leader. Consequently there is a common understanding throughout the school about expectations. Staff bring RE alive by using carefully selected resources, for example one teacher was using a well-constructed presentation on the Five Pillars of Islam which encouraged the children to make direct links to prior learning and their own experiences. In another class the youngest children were actively involved and engaged in the unfolding story of Jonah. The use of religious vocabulary in lessons and in workbooks by staff and children is a strength. The impact of consistently outstanding teaching throughout the school is that children are aspirational in their approach to the subject and can apply their knowledge. Creative approaches to teaching RE enhances the children's enjoyment of the subject. Parents say that the RE leader is 'passionate about RE and that permeates her very core, which brings the subject alive for our children'. The quality of work in the children's books, portfolios and around the school is of a very high standard. Marking is used effectively to move children on in their thinking and the children's responses are often thoughtful. Staff effectively use questioning to ensure a deepening of the children's thought processes. Since the last inspection the new RE leader has worked systematically to ensure consistency through monitoring and in supporting staff in the development of RE. As a result staff are confident in teaching RE. The school has put in place a thorough and detailed assessment system to track progress in RE as children move through the school. This has led to clear differentiation in lessons so that all children can access the learning intentions whilst enabling them to challenge themselves. The governing body receives regular feedback from the RE leader and there is a clear process for evaluation and development of the subject. Consequently governors are knowledgeable about the curriculum and the high standards achieved in RE, which in turn informs their self-evaluation.

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

During a period of substantial staff change, including the vicar, school leaders have ensured that children's progress and attainment has been key within a clear Christian framework and this has facilitated rapid improvement in this school. This has been achieved because of the leadership's clarity, drive and understanding of the needs of the school and its Christian character. The vision of the school to 'Nurture, Encourage, Challenge, Through Christ,' is how governors and parents explain the 'transformational journey' under the current leadership which means 'we are clearer as a school community about where we are going' because we have been extensively consulted. The school's mission statement, 'Through our love of God, we: respect everybody, are thankful for everything we have, believe in being truthful in all our actions, forgive one another and live a life of hope' is the foundation of the school's decision making. This has ensured excellent pastoral support for all children, which in turn has a significant impact on their personal, spiritual and academic development. The children are very clear that the school has a Christian foundation and relate this very clearly to the school's Christian values. Self-evaluation by the governors and leadership team has been central in bringing about change, alongside developing a vision and mission statement that the whole community fully support. The governors have fully addressed the area for development from the last inspection which is seen in the systematic evaluation of collective worship which resulted in the school developing more creative approaches. The entire staff community, effectively led by the headteacher, live and work by the school's Christian values which children and parents are equally committed to. Staff talk confidently about how they are enthused and committed to the school because of the way the senior leadership work. Children relate their experience of God through the school's vision. The impact being all children are challenged to explore their faith, because encouraging and nurturing faith is central to the school's ethos. Great clarity and vision of leaders inform the way the whole curriculum is delivered as well as how the pastoral support systems operate within the school. Leaders ensure there is a rich and diverse curriculum which celebrates the backgrounds of all, and makes learning stimulating. Leaders have ensured staff and children have high aspirations in RE and other subjects. As a result achievement is consistently high across the school. Subject leadership in RE is knowledgeable and astute, which has been key in bringing about rapid change. Governors and leaders are actively involved in the school's regular self-evaluation of its work and have ensured effective professional development for staff. This has resulted in a genuine enthusiasm from staff about their needs and the future needs of the school. Parents, staff and children all speak poignantly about the impact of the vicar's accessible, calm and committed approach. Adults and children alike talk about the impact that her 'talks' have on them both in school and church. This has made a significant contribution to the Christian character of the school community. Governors, staff, parents and children are clear that St John's is 'identifiably Christian, while also supporting the widest faith community possible'.