

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Withington Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

High Street Withington Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL54 4BQ

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

Gloucester

Previous SIAS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Gloucestershire

Date/s of inspection

22 June 2017

Date of last inspection

13 June 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary 115703

Headteacher

Sonia Beames

Inspector's name and number

Karen Surrall 842

School context

Withington is a small rural primary school with 34 pupils on roll. There is a governor-led preschool with 20 places, which is part of the Foundation Stage class. The number of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and vulnerable children is slightly higher than the national average. Small cohorts mean that data from end of key stage tests are treated cautiously. The headteacher is new in post, having served as co-head in the previous year, and there have been other recent changes to the senior management team. There are currently no pupils in Y6.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Withington as a Church of England school are good

- The headteacher has a clear Christian vision for the school, based on a strong understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, so that the school is ready to build on its current performance.
- The strong family ethos of the school, lived out through its highly effective and supportive staff team, ensures that all stakeholders are supported within the framework of the school's distinctively Christian character and core Christian values.
- The excellent behaviour of pupils which is universally attributed to the school's distinctively Christian character.

Areas to improve

- Develop a whole school understanding of spirituality so that staff are able to support pupils own spiritual journey through planned experiences across the curriculum.
- Ensure that children appreciate the diversity and difference in national and global communities so that they can more fully understand their future place in the world.
- Governors to create monitoring systems of the school's distinctively Christian character, collective worship and religious education (RE) that informs the school development plan so that their actions are readily identified and impact is based on clear evidence.

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

Distinctively Christian values are clearly expressed by the staff, pupils and governors. This is articulated through the

statement 'Working together, showing God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (the fruit of the Spirit). These distinctively Christian values underpin the life of the school and contribute to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of all learners. All stakeholders recognise how the school's distinctively Christian character makes a difference to the lives of the children. Parents are not able to identify the school's Christian values specifically because they do not have a high enough profile on newsletters and the school's website.

Strong and supportive relationships between all members of the school community and beyond are readily attributed to the school's Christian foundation and result in pupils' excellent behaviour. 'This is a special school. Children who have failed at previous schools blossom at Withington because of the school's Christian ethos' reported one parent. Children know that they are cared for and that they need to support each other. Older children help clean up the dinner tables at lunchtime. This is seen by pupils as a way to follow the example of Jesus and to live out the school's Christian values. As a result, children are happy to come to school and attendance across all year groups is above the national average. This enables pupils to achieve well and to make good progress from their starting points.

Staff have begun to explore what spirituality means to them and how they can enable children to develop their own spiritual journey. At present, there is no explicit planning for SMSC development in either RE or in other subjects across the curriculum. This means that occasions for enabling the children to explore their thoughts are too few to develop their spirituality in a structured and coherent way.

RE lessons are enjoyed by all pupils and make a positive contribution to the school's Christian values which make a positive contribution their lives. Learners have some understanding of Christianity as a world-wide faith and respect for diversity and difference of other faiths. However, this is not deep enough for learners to understand the relevance of their learning in a wider national and global context.

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

Collective worship has a very central place in the life of the school. The worship table, with its cloth reflecting the liturgical calendar, cross and an open Bible, encourages children to approach this time in a thoughtful and respectful way. Worship themes are carefully planned to ensure that they support the school's Christian values and the pupil's spiritual and moral development. For example, the parable of the talents was used to explore the theme of responsibility. Participants were encouraged to think how they might use their talents in service to others and what link might be made to the fruit of the Spirit.

Children place great importance on collective worship and the things that they learn. They are able to apply this to their everyday lives giving examples of 'being kind to my little sister when she was upset' and 'practising self-control when my brother was annoying'. They like having plenty of time for reflection during worship time 'because it could change your life'.

Worship times are planned and led by a variety of leaders, including the vicar, pupils and the Open the Book team. Pupils are taking increasing responsibility for leading acts of worship. Themes are biblically based to ensure the centrality of the life and example of Jesus in the Christian faith is understood by all. This ensures that learners have a good understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Learners participate with enthusiasm throughout the worship time, which concludes with a time of extemporaneous prayer. It was impressive to hear how closely these prayers mirrored the teaching during the act of worship. There are close links with the local church with parents and members of the community regularly joining the school to celebrate key Christian festivals.

Governors have observed and participated in acts of worship but do not evaluate effectively enough to bring about real improvement to learners' experience. Pupils are beginning to evaluate the worship times that they lead and make some improvements. This is not frequent enough for children to understand how self-reflection can be a positive vehicle for change.

Prayer has a strong focus throughout the school so that many spoke of prayer being something that was important at home as well as in school. They understand the variety and importance of prayer. One child in year 2 spoke of how 'saying sorry is important so that God will forgive you'. Children use the outdoor willow den and the indoor spiritual area as places of quiet reflection and peace, enjoying them because 'they give you a chance to be quiet and think about God and Jesus'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards of attainment in RE are high because teaching is good and children make good progress in RE during their time at Withington. Learners are given a variety of experiences which help them to understand some difficult

concepts. These are taught imaginatively, enabling children to use a range of skills and pupils readily acknowledge how they help them to think differently about other areas of their lives. Assessment systems are robust and inform planning, teaching and learning. They comprehensively record coverage of the curriculum and identify where learners have been able to apply their knowledge in a variety of contexts.

The school has recently begun teaching RE using the Understanding Christianity resource. This has enabled teachers to set the children challenging questions and to think more deeply about issues of faith and belief. Key Stage 1 children were encouraged to think about what Christians believe God is like. Through discussing a variety of Bible stories, which the children know well, the thoughts of the children were drawn towards different aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. This results in teaching that is explicitly linked with the school's Christian values and a curriculum which effectively helps pupils to apply their learning in RE to their daily lives.

The headteacher leads RE well and has the highest expectations of both staff and pupils so that children enjoy their lessons and RE contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral and social education. Teaching of other faiths is not as strong as teaching about Christianity so that pupils are insecure about many of the principal tenets of other world faiths. They do not understand the relevance of other faiths and communities to their future lives.

Monitoring of RE by the headteacher is good and this has brought about significant improvements in how the subject is taught. Governor monitoring is limited to reports from the headteacher as to how well pupils are achieving in RE. Governors do not presently monitor the impact of RE on the school's distinctively Christian character or core values. Consequently, this aspect does not have a high enough profile on the school development plan.

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

The headteacher and governors readily express a distinctively Christian vision, based on the life of Jesus, enabling all stakeholders to 'live life in all its fullness' (John 10:10). They clearly articulate the link between the children's motto of 'Always try your best' and the fruit of the Spirit which has an impact in every area of the school's life. Leaders are clear in seeing their vision as 'one enabling every child to fulfil their God given potential'. This creates an environment where everyone is challenged to do their very best. As a result, standards of achievement are good and this is a school where children thrive, whatever their background or starting points.

Parents readily acknowledge that the Christian vision shared by the staff and headteacher contributes very well to the exceptional behaviour of the children. 'They remember the important things in life because it's a church school', commented one parent. The school's Christian vision is seen as resulting in a school where the staff work hard to create a family ethos, where older children look after younger ones and all feel safe and happy.

Governor interest and care for the school is very high and they know the staff and pupils well. They deploy resources carefully, ensuring that vulnerable pupils get the help and support they require so that they flourish academically and emotionally. However, monitoring of key aspects of the school's work, including the impact of its distinctively Christian character, are not robust enough to bring about real improvement.

The new headteacher has been well supported in her first year and governors have been pleased to see a distributive leadership style emerging. This is ensuring that all members of staff are being prepared for leadership roles within this church school. The school meets its statutory duties for collective worship and RE. These areas of the school contribute well to the school's distinctively Christian values, the excellent behaviour of all learners and to pupils' SMSC development.

There are excellent links between parents, the local church and the diocese. All stakeholders talk enthusiastically about events where school and community have supported each other for the benefit of learners. Messy Church is enjoyed by many children from the school and there is an increasing number of parents who attend as well. The supportive relationship between all members of the school community are clearly rooted in its Christian values, providing a good example of a school that is distinctive and effective.

SIAMS report June 2017 Withington CEVA Primary School Cheltenham GL54 4BQ