

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

### Clophill St Mary's Church of England Lower School

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| High Street, Clophill, Bedford MK45 4BE                                    |                        |
| <b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>                                      | <b>Outstanding</b>     |
| <b>Diocese</b>   | <b>St. Albans</b>      |
| Previous SIAMS inspection grade  | Outstanding            |
| Local authority  | Central Bedfordshire   |
| Name of multi-academy trust / federation                                   | N/A                    |
| Date of inspection   | 1 March 2018           |
| Date of last inspection  | 5 March 2013           |
| Type of school and unique reference number                                 | Voluntary Aided 109617 |
| Headteacher / Executive Principal / Head of School [delete as appropriate] | Karen Bingley          |
| Inspector's name and number  | Mel Adams NS 58        |

#### School context

This is a smaller than average village lower school and nursery with 130 pupils on role. Pupils are predominantly from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities is below average. The number eligible for the pupil premium grant is below average. Since the previous SIAMS inspection, a new headteacher was appointed following the retirement of the previous long-serving headteacher. The majority of the staff remain the same. The chair of governors has been in post since September 2017. The school chaplain is a regular visitor to the school and the vicar leads school church services.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Clophill St. Mary's Lower as a Church of England school are outstanding**

- The headteacher has great clarity of purpose in her resolve to ensure that the Christian character of the school is fully understood, continues to develop and has a daily effect on the very positive experiences of pupils and staff.
- The powerful effect of the 'living out' of the Christian values is recognised by pupils, staff, governors and parents, resulting in a school community where pupils flourish.
- The behaviour of pupils is excellent, linked to their understanding and active application of Christian values.
- Daily worship, in its variety of formats, is greatly enjoyed and appreciated by all pupils. Its dynamic effect inspires worship to extend into the school day.
- Pupil leadership roles through the spirituality group and the value ambassadors, uniquely equips pupils to take responsibility for supporting understanding of Christian values and faith with other pupils.
- The exceptional way in which pupils are able to apply learning in Religious Education [RE] to their own lives enriches and deepens spiritual, moral, social and cultural [SMSC] development.

#### **Areas to improve**

- Increase the impact of the recently reviewed school vision by drawing together the range of perspectives of spirituality as a church school, to establish a cohesive understanding.
- Deepen understanding of religion by developing understanding of what faith and belief mean for believers.

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

Inspired by Bible stories and the lives of people of faith, Christian values dynamically permeate the school, shaping the lives of all those who learn and work there. Deeply rooted, these values are spontaneously and naturally used, positively supporting relationships, excellent behaviour, learning and progress for all pupils. Pupils use the values, both in school and in their lives outside school, with parents describing how their children speak to them, or their siblings, about 'living out the values'. One parent explains this as, since coming to the school, the care and support has enabled her child to feel safe, become happier and more confident, making friends and progressing well with learning. Pupils enjoy coming to school resulting in good attendance. Driven by a strong belief in the value of every individual, staff have provided high levels of support to improve the attendance of a tiny proportion of unauthorised absence.

So confident are pupils in 'living out the values' that they take on leadership roles to support the developing understanding of fellow pupils. Set up in response to an area for development from the previous inspection, the pupils' spirituality group work with adults to create activities for fellow pupils to develop the current value. This results in stunning displays, most recently of the value love. This features pupils' art, including peace doves and heart paper chains along with springing candles representing Jesus light of the world. Pupils also act as values ambassadors, supporting fellow pupils around the school and nominating them for demonstrating the values. This is celebrated in weekly worship. As a result, SMSC development is very strong. Taking the messages they hear from daily worship into the school day, pupils experience a natural synthesis with learning in RE and other subjects. For example, learning about creation challenges thinking about conservation and care for the planet, resulting in an older pupil relating it to what can be done, writing, 'Don't over buy, it wastes food and money.'

Across the school community, it is evident that the Christian character of the school contributes significantly to spiritual development as pupils and staff speak of how their day-to-day experiences help them to reflect on what Christian values mean for them. Amongst governors and staff, there is a range of perspectives on the nature of spirituality, so there is not a shared understanding. A beautiful display of Christians worshipping around the world illustrates how pupils' understanding of Christianity extends beyond the parish church and their locality.

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

At the heart of this outstanding church school is worship, described by one pupil as 'sticking the whole school together'. Another explains, 'It's a time to think about God, to stop and pray, think about what we've done and ask God to forgive us.' Pupils carry this sense of God being with them into their lives in school, as observed by a member of staff who asked a pupil if they were on their own, to which the pupil responded, 'I'm never on my own'. Pupils explain how they use the class reflective areas and the spiritual garden to write or say their own prayers, with one saying, 'you can just pray anywhere, in school, in church, in your head'. Through such experiences, worship, based on the school's values, which are linked to Bible stories, quietly permeates the day. The normally busy hall is transformed into a unique setting where soft lights and music create an air of expectation for all who attend. In the quietness, a trio of candles are lit in the name of the Holy Trinity. Pupils and staff read Bible passages, ask questions, pray and enjoy times of reflection and stillness. Pupils of all ages focus, respond, and later describe how, during this time, they learn that their values are from Jesus, and that He will help them to keep them. Following worship, pupils return to classrooms where they spend a short time talking with teachers about what they have heard. They enjoy this and say that it gives them time to think further about 'how to live our values'. Staff attribute the resulting excellent behaviour during playtime to this. Staff describe how worship creates time and space for them, in the business of the day, to be still and pray, with one member of staff explaining how it has helped personal faith to grow. Where pupils take their experiences of worship home, parents are aware of what it can mean to them, such as writing prayers at home and younger siblings wanting to join in. Parents also speak with appreciation of the times when they attend worship and experience for themselves the celebration of pupils' successes in the context of the strong Christian ethos. This ethos is inclusive of all pupils of different faiths or none.

Other acts of worship during the week include class worship, where children enjoy hearing stories and answering questions. They also appreciate hearing Bible stories with clergy, or led by visitors from 'Open the Book' where they enjoy seeing Bible stories acted out. 'Our favourite worship is when we are together in the hall, it's quiet, we can be still and reflect', says a pupil. The chaplain and Methodist minister regularly lead worship in school and the vicar leads school worship and Eucharist in church. Planned to follow the seasons of the church year, worship leads to pupils having an awareness of traditions such as the colours of the church seasons, along with the key festivals of the church year. These are celebrated in services such as Christingle or nativity performances. School evaluation has identified the need to broaden pupils' understanding of worship by involving leaders from other denominations. Each term pupils have the opportunity to plan and lead an act of worship with their class, which they say helps them to identify with the character and the meaning of the values. These experiences all serve to broaden and deepen pupils' experience and understanding of worship. The theological basis for worship, centred on the person and work of

Jesus, supports pupils' growing understanding of the Holy Trinity. Explaining their understanding, one pupil said, 'God the Father, everyone is made like Him, God the Son is Jesus who shows us our values and how to live them and the Holy Spirit is in our hearts'. The effect of what they hear in worship also leads to acts of service, often through fund raising for local charities such as Noah, an organisation working with the homeless. Discussion amongst staff, pupils, clergy and governors supports evaluation and planning for future cycles. Worship strongly supports pupils' SMSC development.

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

'It's amazing how Christians, Muslims and Sikhs believe it is important to care for our wonderful world!' The sense of awe captured by a pupil in Year 4 is indicative of how pupils' knowledge and understanding supports a developing appreciation of religion and how it can affect the lives of believers. Where learning tasks are carefully constructed, they enable pupils to apply their understanding to their own lives. For example, one of the younger pupils analysed the qualities of Jesus as an inspirational person as caring, loving and respecting. He then wrote, 'I live the value of love, I show caring.' This is typically how the 'golden thread' of the school's values, heard in daily worship, is consistently used in RE and permeates other curriculum areas.

Pupils speak of their enjoyment of learning RE, acting out stories, writing poetry, high quality art, whole school collages and construction activities and how these help them to develop religious understanding. This is seen in a stunning display of learning about the Lord's prayer, where pupils explain what it means for them. Carefully graduated learning steps support pupils' learning, challenging and extending their knowledge and understanding. An example of this is designing Christian Aid posters linked to Jesus' words to 'love your neighbour as yourself' and then thinking about the importance of acting on this. Consequently, pupils gain a strong understanding of Christian faith, belief and action. RE clearly supports good SMSC development.

Because of these rich learning experiences, standards in RE are at least in line with core subjects, and often exceed them. Based on aspects of the Bedford syllabus for RE and a new resource, 'Understanding Christianity', learning is organised so that classes spend up to half a day each week, along with whole school focus afternoons and days. Eighty percent of the syllabus is Christianity, with Sikhism and Islam studied by the older children. Through their evaluations, the school has rightly identified the need to provide a wider understanding of the faiths and beliefs represented in the local area and beyond. The RE leader teaches alongside colleagues, especially with those new to the profession. This ensures that all teachers have a clear knowledge and understanding, resulting in the high quality learning experiences enjoyed by the pupils in RE. Assessments each term, in line with the syllabus, create an overview of attainment and progress throughout the school, which the highly effective RE leader uses to evaluate teaching and learning and the curriculum. The high standards support the school's accurate evaluation that teaching is consistently good, and often outstanding.

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

Since the headteacher's appointment following the previous SIAMS inspection, she has been tenacious in sustaining and further developing the commitment to the distinctive Christian character and Christian values. The chair of governors, appointed at the beginning of the academic year, is rapidly taking up his strategic role. There has been a revision of the school vision, summarised in its final statement, 'We learn with God by our sides, we grow with God in our hearts, we accept one another in God's image, for in God we trust'. One governor explains, 'It takes in everything we do,' and places pupils at the heart of strategic developments.

Governors' exceptional commitment to regularly meeting in school with senior leaders, gives them a clear understanding of how their strategic decisions are followed through in the life of the school community. For example, they observe staff as clear role models and pupils using their values in solving problems, supporting each other in relationships. School leaders understand fully how the strength of these relationships supports effective learning and high standards for all pupils in RE and the wider curriculum, including pupils who have special educational needs and the disadvantaged. SMSC development as a result is very strong.

RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements and leadership of these are highly effective. Leaders are well supported through the close working together of the headteacher, deputy head, RE leader and school chaplain. Thorough evaluation and development planning by the headteacher and senior staff effectively identifies areas for development. This includes increasing the effectiveness of the governing body in holding the school to account as a church school. The RE leader has worked with the diocese writing aspects of the syllabus, leading training and has modelled teaching of RE for other teachers. As a result, the school contributes significantly to the development of leadership of church schools in the diocese. The school in turn has benefitted from the support of the diocese for training for staff and governors. Very effective partnership with parents and families significantly supports pupils. They also support the school as volunteers and in fund-raising.