

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Tonwell St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Ware Road, Tonwell, Ware, SG12 0HN	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority / Date of academy conversion	Hertfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	n/a
Date/s of inspection	19 January 2017
Date of last inspection	13 October 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 117388
Headteacher	Sarah Bridgman
Inspector's name and number	Shirley Whales 830

School context

Tonwell St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School is a very small rural school in East Hertfordshire. The 37 pupils who are of mainly White British heritage are from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than the national average. The headteacher began her post in September 2016 and since then there have been staff and governor changes. The headteacher has a part-time role in the school. For part of the week, responsibility for the school is delegated to the deputy headteacher.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Tonwell St Mary's as a Church of England school are good

- The shared and distinctively Christian values form the basis for positive relationships and excellent behaviour throughout the school community.
- The headteacher and school governors are strongly committed to the future development of the school's distinctive Christian ethos and vision.
- Collective worship plays a central role in the school and enables pupils to develop and grow spiritually.
- Religious education makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development and the school's Christian character.

Areas to improve

- Ensure all members of the governing body play a significant role in the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of Tonwell St Mary's as a church school.
- Fully embed the work to improve collective worship by involving pupils in the planning and delivery on a regular basis.
- Provide varied opportunities and experiences for pupils to develop a clearer understanding of diversity within the Anglican tradition across the world and with other faiths so that they are able to understand and respect difference in our multi-faith and multi-ethnic society.

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

The Christian character of this small village school is expressed in strong, caring and nurturing relationships, where pupils and their families feel valued and pupils behave well. Parents like the 'intimacy' and trust the 'open and approachable' contact with school staff. They feel that they can express their opinions of Christian faith and belief openly. Mutual respect is a strong feature of school life and it underpins the commitment of everyone to support and care for one another. This openness extends to the development of pupils' spiritual awareness and was expressed well in a discussion with the pupils, one of whom said, 'We enjoy the times that we can talk to God, to reflect, to have quiet moments.'

Christian values have been given a renewed and explicit focus within the school and as a result pupils are able to make connections with the practical understanding of each value and an appreciation of its impact on their lives. Values are explored through worship, displays, reflection areas and lessons; these help to strengthen each value and provide connections to Bible stories. Pupils are not yet confident about recognising and articulating the links to their explicitly Christian origins but they are able to speak positively about the prayerful 'forgiveness pebbles' that help them to focus on ways of reconciling differences.

Attainment and progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is good but has been variable over time and requiring improvement in Key Stage 2. Recent improvements in the quality of teaching have helped to raise pupil expectations and standards. The new emphasis on values has helped in this. The school's commitment to meeting the needs of all pupils is now achieved through a perceptive, personalised approach resulting in a strongly improving picture of achievement across the school. School leaders have high expectations of good attendance, which now matches the national average. They deal sensitively with any issues.

A variety of visual and reflective stimuli enable pupils to express themselves spiritually. For example, in a Key Stage 1 religious education (RE) lesson pupils were asked to picture their own 'special places'. One pupil explained her creation of a reflection area in her bedroom and how she might think about, 'dog walking on a beautiful day'. Pupils talk about their learning with enthusiasm. When sharing her book, one pupil described her gift to Jesus would be 'a photograph book to know Him more as a baby'. Pupils' opinions are shared regularly with the school council who show compassion for others through their support for charities such as Cancer Research and Comic Relief. They enjoy taking increased responsibility especially in worship, which contributes naturally to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Whilst the RE curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures and religions, their understanding of these and the Christian faith at a national and global level is less well developed. School leaders are aware of how this restricts the Christian character of the school and have already made reference to it in their school improvement planning.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship (CW) is an important and valued feature in the daily lives of pupils at the school. Governors speak highly of the headteacher who has 'transformed the approach to collective worship' and they support the changes and improvements she has made since joining the school. Governors also praise the pupils' respect for worship and especially their efforts to 'connect and reflect'. They are encouraged to reflect, leading them to consider how the themes and values make connections and impact on their own lives. The headteacher explains how the invitation to worship together enables 'pupils to have the ability to talk about fundamental values'. This view is mirrored in the opinions of parents who explain how the values are used inclusively and in context. They welcome the Christian sharing assemblies and the sensitive interactions that pupils of all ages have with each other.

Christian teaching with an emphasis on Bible teaching, big questions, Christian values and the celebration of major festivals in the Christian calendar follow a systematic plan of worship, which is currently devised by the headteacher. The vicar pays weekly visits and other members of the church plan and deliver worship. However, the school is mindful of increasing the responsibilities of other members of the school community such as pupils' ideas for planning and leading worship as this practice is still in its early stages of development. Governors do not formally monitor worship so they do not have the information to inform development planning in order to maintain the improvement in worship. Some acts of worship are celebrated in the parish church of Holy Trinity, which is in Bengeo and is a few miles away. There is a growing affinity with the church and the attendance of parents and carers in church services reinforces the importance of the local church within the school community. Four candles, donated by the church, are lit at the start of school worship and pupils gather calmly responding appropriately to the atmosphere that has been created. This reminds the pupils of the special time that they share together and they respond respectfully and with reverence.

Pupils participate willingly, often helping to act out stories or read prayers. Simple rituals include familiar responses, songs and prayers and these enable pupils of all ages and abilities to take an active role. When pupils were asked to

say spontaneous prayers of forgiveness one very young pupil asked God, 'why He allowed all the hurt to happen in the world'. This was met with a stillness and quiet that enabled both pupils and adults to contemplate the question. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to write their own prayers and they offer some thoughtful and spiritual ideas on symbolism and the creation. 'Isn't the moon always there?' one pupil asked about a particular picture depicting aspects of the creation. This sense of awe and wonder contributes to pupils' spiritual development but the deeper theological and philosophical enquiry is underdeveloped and as a result pupils have a limited understanding of the Trinity, Christian theological concepts and Anglican traditions and practice. Teachers are not always taking advantage of pupils' natural ability to question and debate. Pupils understand the purpose of prayer and reflection and the school has regular opportunities for prayer at other times in the school day including lunchtime. The reflection space focusing on the value of forgiveness is situated in the communal area of the school and is used well.

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

The recently appointed and dedicated headteacher has invigorated the school's values system and the way that the distinctive Christian values are lived in the daily life of the school. They now make a greater difference to pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning and particularly their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The headteacher demonstrates a commitment to the ongoing development of the impact of these values on the wellbeing, learning and achievement of all pupils in the school by ensuring the Christian ethos is central to all aspects of school life. The review of the school's vision to promote the Christian ethos of the school is now a priority and is being undertaken with views from the whole school community. The Christian ethos is endorsed throughout the school and beyond the school to the community. Aspects of learning feature regularly on displays in church, in the parish magazine and the school promotes its foundation through community events like the Christmas Tree Festival. Links with the local church are becoming stronger. Local clergy and church members make a valuable contribution to the life of the school through their commitment on the governing body and supporting the school through worship and literacy lessons. The school has recruited new governors who add capacity to the team and who provide support to the school. However, current systems of governor monitoring and evaluation are not supporting the school improvement planning process effectively. Governors do not have a rigorous and formal arrangement of evaluation, which identifies areas for development and is a more systematic way of monitoring church school distinctiveness. Leaders ensure that the school's Christian values are now at the forefront of policy-making procedures and new initiatives.

Parents and carers appreciate the distinctive nature of the school and speak highly of the way in which the headteacher carefully introduces the important Christian characteristics of the school. They understand how the Christian values have impact on their children's lives and particularly value the open and honest avenues of communication. Pupils' views are also taken seriously, either as individuals or through the school council. They play a leading role in the decision-making processes of the school.

Professional development is a high priority for the staff team and collaboration with local networks is effective. This is having a positive impact on teaching and learning. The school values its support from the diocese in providing training for staff and governor development. Effective RE and CW leadership by the headteacher ensures that they have a high profile within the school and that staff receive quality training to ensure that their good practice is both maintained and improved. The school fulfils the statutory requirements for both RE and collective worship.

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