

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

High Wych Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

High Wych, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, CM21 0JB

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

St Albans

Previous SIAS inspection grade

Good

Local authority

Hertfordshire

Date of inspection

25 January 2017

Date of last inspection

07 February 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary VC 117398

Headteacher

Mandy West

Inspector's name and number

Judith Ruff 528

School context

High Wych is an average sized village primary school, with 234 pupils on roll at the time of the inspection. Approximately 63% of pupils reside in local Hertfordshire villages, including High Wych. The remainder come from the nearby town of Harlow in Essex. Pupils are predominantly from a White British heritage. Currently, 62% of families identify themselves as Christian, 33% with no religion and 5% from other faiths. Percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals and those receiving special educational needs support are below national averages. The church of St James is adjacent to the school.

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

- The strong, effective partnership with the local church community, led ably by the rector, enriches significantly the community's theological understanding of the school's Christian foundation and the development of pupils' personal spirituality.
- Christian values are deeply embedded within a framework of a loving, self-giving and compassionate response to every child's needs, based on the unwavering belief that each one is a unique child of God, made in his image and precious in his sight.
- Religious education (RE) makes a significant contribution to the Christian character of the school through the high profile that it is given, but also the excellent teaching and learning opportunities which are offered. The exciting, first hand visits to a range of religious buildings teach pupils to appreciate the importance of faith to believers and the impact this has on people's lifestyles and actions.

Areas to improve

- Clarify the school's vision and ensure that the values that are selected and encompassed within the taught curriculum and through collective worship are communicated effectively and regularly to parents. In this way, both existing and prospective parents can be well-informed about how the school develops and celebrates its Christian foundation and distinctiveness.
- Provide support and training for foundation governors to observe acts of collective worship and to be able to identify strengths and areas for further development from these. This will add to the pupil evaluations of worship which are already being utilised to develop the quality of worship further across the school.
- To increase the ability of the whole governing body to understand and discuss developments emerging from the SIAMS working group by enabling a regular, discrete time on governor meeting agendas to plan strategically training and to monitor and evaluate development plans linked to Christian distinctiveness.

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

'In this school children are secure in the understanding that everyone is different, but equally valued', said a parent. The school has worked hard and successfully to embed a programme of distinctly Christian values. However, the school's vision and values, founded on promoting and developing a Christian ethos, are not sufficiently high profile or communicated with adequate clarity through parental newsletters or on the school website. This restricts the opportunities that parents have to discuss and share these values within the home environment. Pupils are very clear about how each selected value is impacting, both on their academic and personal development. The current value of 'endurance' has enabled them to understand that challenges in life build resilience and character to keep going despite set-backs. They talk about the perseverance needed when work is new or requires a concerted effort to master. Learners' achievements are good, well above national averages, a testament to the commitment and dedication of staff, but also to the strong and effective parental partnership, built on trust and confidence in the school and its values. Attendance rates are high and exclusion is a very rare occurrence. This is because pupils feel a strong sense of identity with the school's teaching on taking personal responsibility for your actions and the impact that these have on the rest of the school community. Pupils adhere to the school rules and know that they are in place to support their learning and personal development. There are many opportunities for pupils to serve others, through eco and school councillor roles, house captains and in a variety of monitoring and organisational capacities. These enable them to understand the importance of 'doing things for others, but not expecting anything in return' as one pupil said. Pupils understand that these values are found within Bible stories, particularly in the life of Jesus. The modern day exemplification of living out Christian values is successfully developed through pupils choosing to interview local people such as cub scout leaders and nurses living and working within the community as part of a home research project. Levels of charitable giving are good, inspired by pupils' compassion and concern for those across the world less fortunate. They engage enthusiastically with giving to 'Water Aid' and the 'Shoebox appeal'. The school allotment provides produce for the harvest service, building on pupils' understanding of the goodness of God's creation and the responsibility to share its bounty with others. Spirituality is developed very well through many opportunities to reflect across the curriculum, supported through a good audit of opportunities to raise staff awareness. The regular visits to the church enable pupils to feel 'safe, calm, relaxed and protected' and as one said, 'When I am in church I feel God's presence. He feels close, so I think that nothing can hurt us'. Behaviour is excellent, pupils care for others through buddy systems, and supporting those pupils with special educational needs and disabilities in class, shaped by Christ's teaching on compassion and care for all. Relationships are built on the nurture and celebration of God given individual skills and talents. Opportunities to play an instrument and join the school orchestra strengthens teamwork and brings together different generations within the school community to share their efforts with others. Sporting provision is extensive and varied with something for each individual to participate in regardless of their skill and fitness levels. The school has worked hard on developing pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith and this has been linked to very high quality art work, such as that inspired by a Nigerian nativity scene. RE contributes significantly to the Christian character of the school through the high profile that it is given, but also the excellent teaching and learning opportunities which are offered. The exciting, first hand visits to a range of religious buildings teaches pupils to understand cultural differences, appreciate the importance of faith to believers and the impact this has on people's lifestyles and actions.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship has a significant impact on members of the school community. School staff speak about, 'Worship enabling us to live out our values, providing a clear link to the development of the whole child and an opportunity to be still and find a space for reflection in very busy days'. Pupils understand that worship involves looking more closely at 'values that show us how to live our lives'. Pupils really enjoy the opportunities they are given to plan worship. The Year 5 class on the inspection day, led an act of worship on the theme of 'endurance'. Their sense of ownership, willing participation and efforts to get their message across were very commendable. Prayers are written by the pupils to address each focused value, asking for God's help and support to assist them in living out their lives and responsibilities within the school. They know that prayers can be both public and private, 'You can share your worries and concerns with God in a private time and place and he will listen'. Acts of worship have a clear structure. Pupils benefit from the strong theological understanding the rector provides of how the teachings of Jesus influence the life and work of the local church community. He has encouraged and developed excellent links with St James' church and the congregation, giving generously of his time to support and unpick the harder concepts, such as the Trinity. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of this and recall the events from Jesus' baptism as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciples at Pentecost. Anglican traditions and liturgy have become part of pupils' everyday experiences. As a consequence, they have a depth of understanding through the use of bidding prayers and responses, attending church festival services and looking at the range of vestments worn throughout the year. Pupils feel comfortable in and have a strong sense of identity with St James' church, deepened by their weekly experience of church based worship. Pupils remember using their value of 'courage' to

help them to lead collective worship, both in school and in the church. They speak proudly of how they have grown in confidence and understanding of the importance of worship in a church school. Bible stories are well-known and pupils recall these easily, following through to share how these support their behaviours and responses to others. Planning for collective worship has improved and developed since the last inspection. It is now regularly involving pupils, through participation, leading and evaluating worship. Foundation governors have monitored collective worship through pupil voice activities and being present for worship. As yet they have not formally recorded their observations, to provide opportunities for evaluative discussions leading to further improvements.

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

Leaders, including foundation governors, have worked hard to develop a vision and a set of values to promote and enrich the Christian ethos. These arise from a belief that every child is a unique and precious child of God who should be enabled to explore their skills and talents within a Christian values-based ethos of care, love and nurture. However, both the vision and values are not communicated with sufficient clarity to either existing or prospective parents through the school website and newsletters. A strength of the school is how well all stakeholders, including parents, can articulate the impact of the Christian values on the pupils and on the whole life of the school. 'It is the way in which everyone responds to others' needs. It teaches children to be kind to each other, so they work together as a team and care deeply.' Leaders' commitment results in high expectations for all pupils. This leads to excellent levels of support for the disadvantaged pupils, whose progress levels are good. Pupils enter at broadly average levels, but leave with outcomes well above national averages. Self-evaluation is accurate and significantly enhanced and informed by the SIAMS working group, which has met regularly over the past two years. Outcomes from these discussions have not always been subject to feedback at full governing body meetings. Foundation governors know the school well and actively support the ongoing improvements through leading on new initiatives. An example of this is the recently introduced St. Jamestide service, which has raised pupils' understanding of the church's patron saint. Despite several changes of RE subject leaders, it is clear that the school leaders have invested hugely in the importance of this area to educate and inform, not only about Christianity, but about the other major world faiths. This results in pupils who are keenly interested in faith and belief as drivers for people's views and actions. Strategic development and planning has led to significant improvements in collective worship, including good opportunities for pupil-led worship. Partnership with the local church is a strength of the school. Through the highly effective partnership between the rector, church congregation and school staff, the church foundation is secured and developed through faithful working out of what it means to live a Christian life and follow the teachings of Christ. Links with the diocese are good and recent training on the 'Understanding Christianity' project has further enhanced staff knowledge and understanding of key Christian concepts. Governors have participated in diocesan training and aspirant church school leaders are interested to explore more about diocesan leadership opportunities.

SIAMS report January 2017 High Wych VC Primary School, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, CM21 0JB