

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Great Gaddesden Church of England (VA) Primary School

Church Meadow, Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead HPI 3BT

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	n/a
Date/s of inspection	22 February 2017
Date of last inspection	30 January 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 117433
Headteacher	Nikki Comer
Inspector's name and number	Juliet Lyal 829

School context

Great Gaddesden CE (VA) Primary is a small, rural school with a nursery. On the inspection date, there were 89 pupils on roll - an increase of 44% since the last inspection. A permanent headteacher was appointed in September 2012 and following that a senior teacher in 2014. The school draws from surrounding villages and from Hemel Hempstead. Pupils are mainly White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs support is above the national average and the proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding by the pupil premium is below the national average. The Ofsted report (March 2016) judged the school to be good.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Great Gaddesden CE (VA) Primary School as a Church of England school are good

- The commitment, drive and vision of the headteacher, staff and governors have energised the distinctive Christian character of the school. The impact on behaviour, attitudes to learning and pupils' enjoyment of school is very strong
- The strong relationships between all members of the school community are based on their commitment to develop the strong Christian ethos of the school
- The investment in a high staff to pupils ratio enables all learners to be very well supported and flourish in their potential as children of God
- Strong links with the church and church community have increased pupils' understanding of the Anglican faith and practice.

Areas to improve

- Develop pupil evaluation of collective worship, including when it is planned and led by the collective worship team, so that they learn to identify what makes it engaging, inspiring and transformational
- Plan, monitor and evaluate the teaching and learning in RE in order to enable all pupils to develop their higher thinking skills
- Ensure the spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness of pupils is enhanced and developed by articulating in the school development plan existing strategies to address this.

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

This school's practice and policy ensures that its explicit Christian values, on which the school vision and character are based are deeply embedded in the daily lives of the school community. Pupils say 'we are a Christian school' and describe how 'together we live our school values', giving examples of Jesus' life and parables that support their learning and action. They explain how they join in with prayers and follow the school's Christian values because 'these are important for everyone'. Pupil behaviour remains 'impeccable' (Ofsted 2016). Some pupils can explain how this is encouraged by the permanent Christian values 'hands' display in the school hall, for they can nominate one another for living the values. Parents describe the positive impact of the school's Christian character on their children at home and believe that this is due 'to the staff going the extra mile'. They say that their children notice how all adults talk about and live out the Christian values that they teach. In a pupil survey (November 2016) about the Christian ethos of the school, a pupil described how their family now says a prayer before they eat because 'we do one at school.' Pupils notice the school's Christian values being followed when they play football against other schools because 'we all look out for each other and work together.' All stakeholders commented on the Christian 'feel' of the school. Parents and pupils say that all staff knows every child by name, even if they don't teach them. Pupils are clear that being a small school is 'a strength'. Confident Year 6 pupils describe how they feel the school Christian ethos helps to prepare them for secondary transfer because they all have a turn at taking responsibility and leadership. These children understand the Christian values they are taught to live out because they give as well as receive. Old and young children play happily, respectfully and safely together in the playground and pupils who joined mid-term say that because this is a Church school they don't feel judged if they have friends in other year groups. The school believes that the rise in pupil self-esteem, promoted by the school's Christian values, contributes to the significant rise in attainment. Ofsted (March 2016) noted the school to be an 'environment where pupils can thrive.' With a high staff to pupil ratio, and established intervention programmes for vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs, pupils do well. Parents and governors believe that this strong Christian inclusivity impacts pupils' achievement, behaviour and good attendance because pupils want to be in school. Pupils are confident in exploring and expressing their spirituality and spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is clearly a natural part of school daily living. Religious education (RE) is treated as a core subject and described as exciting. Pupils can discuss aspects of the global nature of Christianity and to ensure deeper understanding, there is an action related to this on the school development plan. RE contributes to pupils' respect and understanding for those in their school and the wider community with faith and belief practices different to their own.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The whole school community values and expresses the importance of collective worship and its impact on their daily lives. Pupils and staff enjoy worshipping together at the beginning of each day, which they say prepares them for the day ahead and includes 'lighting the candle and thinking about God.' They like the pattern and atmosphere of daily worship which they say helps them to focus on the prayers, Bible story and song chosen each morning. Year 6 pupils take the responsibility of lighting the candle under the wooden cross and leading the school in the school prayer, written by school council last Autumn and based on the school's Christian values. The Lord's Prayer is either sung or spoken. Friday services are held in 'our' church, to which all parents and members of the church community are invited and some attend. Planned by the incumbent and the collective worship coordinator, pupils write and lead their own prayers to reflect the Anglican season, world event or school value. There is a set order of service following Anglican liturgy, including the school prayer and Lord's Prayer. All stakeholders value the special services for major Christian festivals and at the end of the school year, involving pupil leadership and participation. Visitors are invited to lead worship, including local Christian groups, such as 'Open the Book', representatives from Christian charities and visitors from other Christian denominations including the local Baptist church. Discussions with stakeholders show that pupils benefit from these opportunities to develop their understanding of Christian diversity. Pupils appreciate how, before lunch and at home-time, the class candle is lit and a prayer from the 'pocket of prayers' written by pupils, is said. Following a 'prayer day' led by the incumbent for Year 1 to Year 6, pupils say that they have a better understanding of prayer and reflection, 'even if I am not a Christian'. Parents say that their children enjoy sharing prayers, songs and Bible stories. The collective worship team comprises pupils from Years 1-6 who meet voluntarily with the collective worship coordinator, twice a half term. They plan the worship, based on the school value of the month, and link this to Bible stories or festivals. The 'friendship' worship on the day of the inspection, at which all pupils were present, explored the story of the Good Samaritan. After the enactment pupils asked and answered questions, led by Year 4, which reflected good listening, engagement and thinking, referring to Jesus and God. Pupils are not yet evaluating collective worship, although staff and governors do, which informs planning. Pupils refer to the hall display about the Holy Trinity and some show age appropriate understanding. Through the joint church/school travelling crib activity pupils show a good understanding of Advent and Christmas.

They talk about how and why their school celebrates Easter but are not as confident when discussing Pentecost.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Since the last inspection, the planning, teaching and learning of RE has improved significantly. The tracking of standards and progress, which is shared with the governors and teachers, shows that most pupils are in line with the school's RE expectations and sometimes higher. This is indicated in the progress of some vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs. RE is taught by all teachers and benefits from the leadership of a dedicated and creative subject leader, who, whilst not an RE specialist, demonstrates sound subject knowledge. The majority of teaching is at least good and includes opportunities for pupils to reflect on what they have learnt. The incumbent also supports the teaching of Christianity. RE evaluation is carried out by staff, the RE subject leader and the foundation governors; results are shared and used to develop planning. The school is exploring the Understanding Christianity project as a possible resource to support teaching. Pupils also like learning about other world religions and beliefs, which includes visiting local places of worship, exploring religious artefacts and listening and talking with faith and belief visitors. Monks from the local Buddhist Monastery support the teaching of Buddhism in Year 6. When appropriate, pupils visit their local church for RE lessons with their teacher and the incumbent. Some describe the church as an 'outdoor classroom', talking enthusiastically about baptism and the Eucharist. In line with the school's creative curriculum, RE lessons are lively and inspirational enabling pupils to be open and reflective. Pupils say that they 'really enjoy RE' because the lessons are fun and 'taught in different ways' and that they make links to what they are learning about with the school Christian values. Pupil voice data shows a very positive attitude to the place of RE in the school curriculum. Some older pupils say that they would like to 'do more hard work' and have 'more debates'. Whilst the RE books and teaching indicates pupil reflection and enquiry, there are insufficient opportunities for the use of analysis, interpretation and evaluation in order for pupils to use their higher thinking skills. The teaching and learning in RE offers all pupils opportunities for SMSC development and contributes to the embedding of the school's Christian values. During an observation, pupils' RE learning was enhanced when they expressed what it felt like when someone said or didn't say 'thank you' to them and then explored why only one of the ten lepers acknowledged their healing by Jesus. Later pupils thought about and recorded what they are thankful for.

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

In this school, there is a strong sense of belonging, Christian identity and involvement. The rigorous, committed headteacher, described by many as 'amazing' and the challenging, yet supportive, governing body work very closely together. Leaders have a clear understanding of the school as a church school. The Christian vision, created by staff and governors during the first year of the head's appointment is shared with all stakeholders as well as on the SIAMS self-evaluation document and website. Priority One on the school development plan is 'promoting the Christian ethos' which is now discussed at each full governor meeting as well as at staff meetings. Leaders and all staff members have created a strong sense of trust and respect amongst all stakeholders which was referred to in all discussions. The governing body is committed to both school and church and say that 'everything is values driven'. Their meetings start with a prayer and SIAMS is now a fixed item on the agenda. All stakeholders are regularly surveyed about the school as a church school, and the findings are acted upon to increase the pace of change. Leaders articulate what working in a school that is distinctively Christian means to them and can readily describe the positive impact Christian values make on their pupils. Governors' visits are in place and monitored accordingly. All governors meet termly with their staff subject leaders and have a clear understanding of pupil progress and achievement, profiles and targets. They are familiar with the school development plan and say that they are kept well informed of the school's performance and attainment by senior leaders and most of the day to day running of the school. Diocesan and local and international clergy are regular visitors to the school thus enabling pupils to develop their understanding of the wider Christian community. This is also achieved through the school's involvement in local and diocesan services and events such as Harvest Festival at St Albans Abbey. Governors go over and above their role. For example the incumbent and chair, regularly support vulnerable pupils through chapel 'chillout' when they gather in the library for shared activities and discussion. Foundation governors often join the staff on training days, which strengthens their involvement with the school. Pupils mix with other church schools for trips and charity events, gaining a good understanding, in a Christian context, of local, national and global communities. Planning for collective worship and RE is informed by the school's Christian values and contributes significantly to pupils' SMSC development. Support for the leader of RE and collective worship is a high priority and this results in pupils continuing to achieve well in RE. All staff are given opportunities for continuing professional development, attending diocesan and local authority courses, valuing the networking and training. The senior leadership team is now structured so as to enable further development of the staff as leaders in church schools.