

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

### Sutton Voluntary Aided Lower School

<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust	N/A
Date of inspection	8 March 2017
Date of last inspection	24 April 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided Lower - 109626
Headteacher	Lucy Chapman
Inspector's name and number	Lilian Weatherley 42

#### School context

Sutton Voluntary Aided Lower School is a small, rural school in the Parish of All Saints Sutton. The school attracts pupils from the growing populations of the surrounding towns of Biggleswade and Potton. There are currently 64 pupils on roll with mixed aged classes in Key Stages 1 and 2. The socio-economic background of pupils is mixed. Nearly all pupils come from White British backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is lower than average. The school is a Values Education School and has been awarded the gold quality mark for religious education. The headteacher has been in post for two years.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Sutton Voluntary Aided Church of England Lower School are outstanding

- The distinctive Christian character of the school is woven through every aspect of school life and has a significant impact on the pupils' attainment and behaviour.
- The high attainment of pupils is underpinned by a clear set of Christian values.
- The headteacher's vision that the distinctive Christian character permeates every aspect of school life is exemplified by her effective leadership of religious education (RE) and worship.
- The very close links with the incumbent, the parish and the diocese, strongly support the school's distinctive Christian character.

#### Areas to improve

- The school needs to embed fully the 'Understanding Christianity' programme into the scheme of work for RE in order to continue raising standards.
- Ensure that the school's chosen method of assessment for RE rigorously and accurately measures attainment in order to maintain high standards.
- With the support of the diocese, create more appropriate spaces for collective worship and remove the need to move tables and chairs so that pupils have a calm environment in which to prepare for worship.

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

Sutton Voluntary Aided Lower School is an excellent example of a church aided school. Underpinned by a clear set of Christian values and a strong, distinctive Christian character, each day is punctuated by prayer, reflection and worship. The school is a Values Education School and the school year revolves around a core set of values chosen by staff and securely rooted in the Christian gospel. These values have a significant impact on pupil attainment, behaviour and attendance.

Pupils all enjoy school. They feel safe and attain well above the national average. They know and understand that the school is a church school and are able to explain how the school values impact upon their learning and behaviour. 'Teachers and friends at our school live the values and we talk about God. If you don't go to a values church school you wouldn't know what God means and how to worship and pray.' Pupils contribute to their code of conduct and behaviour is exemplary.

Each child is known individually to all staff. Relationships are excellent and pupils enjoy opportunities to work in family groups or across the age range. Parents praise the school's Christian character and family atmosphere. They value their children being at a small church school. 'The size makes everyone closer. They all play together and they have personal attention.'

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is a strength of the school. It is evidenced in all curriculum planning and ensures pupils engage in high quality learning experiences in which creativity and reflection are paramount. 'Still time silence' is used to create an atmosphere of calm between activities.

Pupil voice is strong. Pupil surveys show how much the pupils appreciate the active school parliament and taking part in regular pupil forums. They also understand that service is an important part of Christian living. For example, the popular 'Rotakids' group (a junior branch of the Rotarians) enjoys serving the community. The members organise charitable events throughout the year, such as the recent pancake sale for Shrove Tuesday. They also enjoy helping the community by cleaning the parish church each week during their 'Service Work'.

Collective worship and RE each have a very high profile in the school and a significant impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The headteacher provides strong leadership for both RE and worship. Pupils are fully aware that Christianity is a world faith. They have a high degree of respect for diversity, which is supported by the range of faiths studied in RE and links with other countries through the Global Learning Partnership.

The school truly lives out its mission 'to educate all children for life through inspirational Christian focussed teaching'.

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

Worship is central to the life of the school and has a significant impact on the lives of the pupils. It is inspirational and inclusive. The pupils benefit from a carefully planned weekly programme. This is based on biblical teaching, Christian values, aspects of the Anglican tradition and the Church year. The headteacher and incumbent work closely together to plan the worship and ensure the pupils receive a varied and theological approach to the chosen theme. Each act of worship has a clear liturgical pattern. The pupils know and understand this and use the format when they plan and deliver worship to the rest of the school each month. Pupil, parent and staff surveys show how much the school community appreciates the worship offered. The pupils especially enjoy the worship delivered by the church 'Open the Book' team and the incumbent, who lead worship with a biblical and Anglican focus. 'I like Open the Book because it teaches me about Christianity.' Parents, pupils, staff and governors enjoy the regular visits to the church each half term and say how important these visits are to the community. Pupils say they feel special as all are given a blessing.

Worship at Sutton strongly supports pupils' SMSC development and is inclusive. The school day is punctuated by times of prayer and reflection and the sacred space in each classroom is well used during lessons to support this. The incumbent said 'the school is a place of holiness, peace and supportiveness'.

The whole school worship observed on the theme of 'patience' challenged pupils thinking and was cleverly linked into the current RE concept of salvation. Pupils were fully engaged with the story of the Three Trees and sang enthusiastically. They all know the Lord's Prayer, the Grace and Christian greetings and dismissals. They also have an age-appropriate understanding of the Trinity. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 are invited to attend Holy Communion classes run by the incumbent during lunch times. This is growing year on year. With no adequate space, whole school worship needs to be held in a classroom. This has a significant impact for that class which prepares the space and is unable to start lessons until the tables and chairs are moved.

A new and innovative idea being introduced in whole school worship is showing the pupils video clips of worship in different Christian traditions. These are proving to be very popular and pupils appreciate that Christianity is a world-wide and diverse faith.

The whole school community is involved in monitoring and evaluation through regular surveys which are used effectively to improve continuously the quality of worship for the pupils. Pupils also benefit from regular visits to St Albans Abbey and the use of the sensory garden and gazebo for worship in the summer months.

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

RE has a high priority in the school and is regarded as part of the core curriculum. Standards and progress are well above the national average and improving further with the introduction of the 'Understanding Christianity' programme. Pupils have an excellent knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other faiths studied. From an early age they are able to use and understand an increasingly wide religious vocabulary. Pupils in year R, for example, are able to talk about wedding vows and use words like 'love and cherish'. A pupil in Year 1 studying the unit on Salvation was asked why she thought Good Friday was given that name. She explained that 'Jesus rescued us on Good Friday'. The majority of teaching is outstanding. The headteacher is an RE subject specialist and leads by example. All teachers have high expectations of their classes and the pupils respond accordingly. There is effective questioning and high levels of rigour and challenge. The pupils are inspired by the subject and as a consequence all enjoy it. Those interviewed said they would like even more. Most said RE was their favourite subject. One Sikh pupil explained, 'I like RE because I am a Sikh. I like learning about Jesus, God and all the Bible stories. I'm doing well and that's thanks to my teachers'. Rigorous tracking, monitoring and evaluation take place and there is a detailed RE impact report 2016-2017 which is tracking the implementation of 'Understanding Christianity'. The school is still using levels for assessment but has been trialling other methods to find one that they feel is effective.

Detailed planning exists for RE and is based on a combination of 'Understanding Christianity' and the Bedford Borough Agreed Syllabus. Each lesson plan includes opportunities for pupils' SMSC development and Christian values. These are colour-coded for staff to ensure coverage and include times of reflection. This is proving to be very effective and is having a significant impact on the pupils and their understanding of diverse communities.

Pupils benefit from a range of visits and visitors. Pupils were eager to share their experiences of the recent trip to the Synagogue in Edgware Road and biennial 'Queen's Park multi-faith tour'.

The RE subject leader is a member of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) and is involved with RE at local and national levels. This gives the subject additional gravitas in the school and the community. The school was also awarded the Gold Religious Education Quality Mark in 2013. The incumbent is the RE governor, is a regular visitor and strongly supports the school.

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

All issues from the previous SIAS report have been addressed in full. There is a clear Christian vision and mission statement in place, underpinned by Christian values, prayer and worship. Leaders ensure that the distinctive Christian character of the school permeates every area of the curriculum and is lived out in practice in the daily life of the school. This is supported by regular surveys carried out with all stakeholders. All stakeholders interviewed know the school well and are fully able to articulate this vision. In the words of the chair of governors, 'pupils here perform to the best of their abilities in a loving, nurturing and well-rounded Christian environment'.

It is immediately evident from the school's website that Sutton is a church school with a strongly distinctive Christian character. All the relevant documents are available on line, including a detailed RE and worship policy and SIAMS self-evaluation. Governors are regular visitors to the school and, in common with the parents, are proud of their school. They have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the school's performance and issues related to the school's distinctive Christian character. School leaders have a clear strategic overview and ensure that the school is constantly moving forward.

There are regular governor presentations on SIAMS and the new Church of England's new vision for education statement has already been shared and discussed with the governing body. RE and collective worship are a key part of the school improvement plan and there is rigorous tracking, monitoring and evaluation of all areas of the SIAMS framework. The school had a diocesan health check in April 2016 which was also followed up with a detailed action plan. RE is regarded as a core subject. The headteacher is an active member of local and national bodies for RE and this has a significant impact on the profile of RE and quality of teaching and learning in the subject.

The school has strong and effective links with the parish church, the local community and the diocese. The headteacher is a member of the parochial church council and the incumbent strongly supports the school pastorally, for worship and RE. Staff and governors meet regularly with Biggleswade Community Union and governors attend high-level training from the diocese. The school is also a beacon International Values school.

The school is hampered by lack of space, resulting in additional challenges for staff. The Year 1/2 class is a thoroughfare to reach other classes and the toilets, and the lack of a hall means a classroom has to be converted for worship. With the outstanding quality of RE, prayer and worship provided by the school and a growing school population, pupils and staff deserve a calm learning environment in which this outstanding church school can progress.

Succession planning is high on the school's agenda. The headteacher was the senior teacher in the school and having attended the Aspirant Church School Leaders course in 2013-2014 she was appointed to headteacher when the previous headteacher moved to a larger church school. She has continued to share her positive experiences with other staff in the diocese and host new participants on the course at Sutton.