

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

### Raynsford Church of England Academy

Park Lane, Henlow, Bedfordshire, SG16 6AT	
<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>St Albans</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	April 2013
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	n/a
Date of inspection	4 May 2017
Date of last inspection	5 July 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	139473
Headteacher	Julie Ashwell
Inspector's name and number	Shirley Whales 830

#### School context

Raynsford Church of England Academy is a one form entry lower school set in the rural area of Henlow. The headteacher has been in post since September 2014 and the number of staff members has increased during this time to meet the growing needs of the community. A large majority of pupils are from a White British background. The percentage of pupils in receipt of free school meals is well below the national average. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Raynsford Church of England Academy as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The inspirational Christian leadership of the headteacher, effectively supported by governors and staff, shapes and drives the Christian character and vision of the school.
- Fully embedded Christian values made explicit in collective worship, make a strong contribution to pupils' well-being and academic progress.
- The school's distinctive Christian ethos has a significant impact on all aspects of the school life including pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

#### Areas to improve

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to think more deeply and ask questions about faith and belief.
- Continue to involve pupils in planning and leading worship, giving them greater opportunities to explore Christian practice and deeper theological concepts to improve spiritual and moral development.
- Develop the critique in governor visit and subject leader reports so that monitoring has a clearer purpose and leads directly to improvement.

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

Deeply embedded Christian values which clearly influence pupils' daily lives drive an ambition for excellence and a passion for learning within the community. Consequently, the distinctive Christian character of the school has an outstanding impact on the excellent academic achievements, personal development and well-being of pupils. Progress is mostly above or broadly in line with national and has been good over time. Progress for disadvantaged groups has been particularly good as strategies put in place have helped to narrow the gaps. The 'Seesaw' parent messaging system has been used to engage parents who feel that this 'effective communication' enables them to engage in their children's learning more fully.

A strong commitment to Christian values and the development of the whole child underpins the work of the school and shapes its vision. Pupils can talk confidently about the importance of key Christian values, which are linked to Bible stories and reinforced in their religious education (RE) lessons. Parents explain how the values, 'go hand in hand with the day to day values that bring about good relationships'. This results in exemplary behaviour, attendance and a strong sense of community.

The school's Christian values and character directly benefit pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through cohesive links to the wider curriculum, enabling the values to be further explored. An example of this is how pupils demonstrate great support for each other's well-being and validate this by taking on roles of responsibility. Pupil voice is strong and its impact on practice and choice across the school is evident. Pupils enthuse about their new reflective garden and show off their leadership badges, which they wear with pride. One parent enthused about the engagement of pupils, 'Children are proud of feeling included, I love this school, my daughter loves this school.'

Pupils learn about other communities through fundraising. The Owl Parliament, who are school councillors, contribute to the decision-making processes in the school. They speak humbly and proudly of their endeavours and demonstrate real Christian compassion in action. All members of staff are valued by each other as friends and this nurture and respect for each other is quickly mirrored by the pupils. Christian values are made explicit and fresh; they are visible in the hall on a large cross and they are an integral part of school life. Pupils know the values and they do their best to impress by living out the values as part of their daily routines.

The understanding of, and respect for, other cultures and faiths is diligently fostered with visits to Christian places of worship, a synagogue in Radlett and the Bedford Faith Tour. Thus, pupils can express their understanding of diverse aspects of worship from different religious communities and relate this to their own 'unique place in the world'. A recent link with the Watoto Choir from Uganda has enabled pupils to develop their understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural, world-wide faith. They have made personal connections with the choir and have used this link to raise funds, which will help them to sponsor a child in the Watoto community.

The Christian character is well supported by a rich environment, which is full of motivational and aspirational displays based on Christian values, visits, prayers, knowledge and understanding of the different faiths and traditions. Pupils contribute many prayers and thoughts, providing them with rich spiritual experiences. The 'What Would Jesus Do?' display encourages pupils to reflect, 'it helps me make the right choices', though pupils' ability to reason is not yet refined. To address this, the school is developing a mastery approach to learning by providing opportunities for pupils to 'use moral and philosophical questions in the context of RE' more often and not just in RE, but integrated into the 'creative' curriculum through art and music.

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

Distinctively Christian worship has a high profile and is central to the life of the school and the community. Anglican prayers and responses are spoken calmly and pupils respond respectfully and with reverence. In the act of worship at the time of inspection, pupils participated responsibly by identifying animals in an optical illusion. They contributed when reading part of the Bible story about Balaam and his donkey. Pupils joined in readily with prayers, which were read by their friends. These expressed the values and helped them to 'talk to God and each other'.

Pupils' reflection areas in class follow similar themes based on Teaspoon Prayers, which focus them on saying thank you, sorry and please. This time of quiet reflection impacts significantly on pupils' spiritual development by helping them to contemplate Christian messages and relate them to their own actions. Prayer themes are colourful and varied; they offer pupils positive challenges and enable them to develop their own interpretations of God. Pupils have found the analogy of different parts of an apple very helpful in expressing the meaning of God as Father, Son

and Holy Spirit.

There are opportunities for families to share worship time at the end of each term and at different times in the church year. Pupils are taking increasing responsibility for delivering parts of these services and parents particularly enjoy the performances of the choir. This enthusiastic choir, which is almost half the school, makes an excellent contribution to these services, the creative curriculum and the Christian ethos. Reverend Shaun refers to these occasions as a 'palpable sense of the Christian ethos working within this welcoming, inclusive community'.

Almost all staff are actively involved in delivering high quality worship, which is planned in accordance with the value of the month, a variety of biblical texts and the liturgical calendar. Pupils benefit from a rich and varied experience of worship led by a range of people. Worship is delivered by the Methodist minister, an Open the Book team and Reverend Shaun. Clergy make a strong contribution to pupils learning and well-being through regular reading sessions, worship and a contribution to the spiritual life of the school. Pupils have enjoyed using their leadership skills to plan and deliver different aspects of worship in church. They demonstrated their enthusiasm by explaining the roles that each of them play. One pupil said, 'We enjoy contributing to worship and making our own decisions.' Whilst pupils have a limited understanding of the deeper concepts of theology, they speak confidently about their role as Christianity Leaders and are excited about developing this further.

Many different members of the school community have provided personal reflections of the worship they have seen and the foundation governors are responsible for feeding back this information to the full governing body. They make evaluations that identify where improvement is needed to increase the impact of worship but these do not lead to action being taken. Consequently, the full benefit of monitoring is lost.

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

The PEACE vision, Progress through Excellence, Achievement, Challenge and Enjoyment, is articulated and promoted comprehensibly by all members of the school community. The headteacher has ensured that this vision encapsulates the Christian ethos and she inspires everyone to achieve it. It is clearly visible on the school website, in school documents and in weekly newsletters. The evaluation of the school is both accurate and effective in developing the school's Christian culture.

Governors are proactive and supportive and they use their skills and experience to good effect. Governors are beginning to ask more challenging questions and consequently developing more effective roles in monitoring the effectiveness of the school as a church school. Whilst they are aware of the influence of the Christian distinctiveness on pupils in the life of the school, self-evaluation is not having a consistent impact. Engagement with eminent professional development activities, such as the link with the Cambridgeshire Maths Hub on the mastery curriculum, has been a priority and this has impacted on the quality of learning experiences for the pupils. This approach enables pupils to work at greater depth.

School leaders have produced clear policy guidelines and school improvement plans for the improvement in RE and collective worship. Pupils receive positive learning experiences from a rich and vibrant creative curriculum, which enables them to achieve well. Recent changes to the RE curriculum, which now incorporates some of the Understanding Christianity units have been well-received and these are having a positive impact on the quality of RE. Arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.

There are excellent reciprocal relationships between the church and the school, both bodies supporting each other and recognised by parents as a 'sense of community'. Parents comments give examples of 'happy, settled and confident children who are extremely well cared for'. Links with the Diocese are effective as advice and training received have benefitted both staff and governors. Areas from the last inspection have been addressed and the school is aware of its journey for further improvement.

A pre-school has been set up to not only to serve the community but also provide a firm foundation for pupils coming into the school. Links with local schools is good and the change to academy status has been well managed. Leaders have clear capacity to retain a steadfast Christian vision for this school as the education landscape changes.

SIAMS report May 2017 Raynsford Church of England Academy, Henlow, Bedfordshire SG16 6AT