

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

### **Edwinstree Church of England Middle School**

Norfolk Road, Buntingford, Hertfordshire, SG9 9AW

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|--|-------------------------------|
| <b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>      | <b>Good</b>                   |
| <b>Diocese</b>                             | <b>St Albans</b>              |
| Previous SIAMS inspection grade            | Outstanding                   |
| Name of Local Authority                    | Hertfordshire                 |
| Date/s of inspection                       | 28 June 2017                  |
| Date of last inspection                    | June 2012                     |
| Type of school and unique reference number | Voluntary Controlled - 117554 |
| Headteacher                                | Jo Gant                       |
| Inspector's name and number                | Pamela Draycott 161           |

#### **School context**

This middle school serves students from Years 5 to 8. Most are White British. The percentage with some sort of special educational need or disability is below the national average. Likewise, the percentage for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage is below the national average. The school has been through a period of instability since the previous denominational inspection. It received a 'requires improvement' judgement from OfSTED in 2016. Monitoring by OfSTED, the Local Authority and the Diocese show improvement. There is a new headteacher in post since September 2016.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Edwinstree Church of England Middle School as a Church of England school are good**

- Drawing on the school's Christian underpinning, the perceptive and effective leadership of the new headteacher, ably supported by her deputy and other staff, is enabling the school community to emerge from a difficult period in its recent history.
- There is a renewed focus on ensuring that the school's Christian ethos and values support students' personal development and wellbeing. This is effectively also linked with encouraging their academic attainment and progress.
- The school's worship programme and religious education (RE) are both supporting well the whole school Christian vision, ethos and values.
- The behaviour of students has improved significantly across the course of this academic year as they have, as an expression of the school's Christian care and concern for the individual, been well supported and challenged to achieve their best.
- The school is a happy and purposeful place where staff and students enjoy being as they together explore and live out the school's renewed focus on its Christian vision, ethos and values.

### **Areas to improve**

- Embed the school's Christian vision and values so that they consistently drive forward developments as a church school.
- Enrich the RE curriculum, delivered in line with the locally agreed syllabus, particularly through implementing an approach to teaching Christianity with a focus on key concepts, in order to bring about deeper knowledge, understanding and thinking through the subject area.
- In order to refine practice improve the collective worship programme by:
  - extending the leadership of worship to include students and visitors;
  - providing regular opportunities for students to evaluate their experience of worship.

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

The school is a safe and happy environment which, based on its underpinning Christian ethos, takes the wellbeing of all its students and staff seriously. This is now based on working effectively and co-operatively together to ensure all flourish and achieve their best. It is a clear expression of the teaching of Jesus as seen in John chapter 10 verse 10 and is reflected by the school's focus on both the personal development and academic needs of the individual. Expressing this vision, the school has recently introduced a set of Christian values to underpin its life and work. These include forgiveness, reverence, service and justice. They can already be seen to be influencing decision making and development planning as well as impacting positively on students' attitudes to learning and behaviour. Students enter with attainment around the national average and over their time in school they make at least expected and increasingly better than expected progress. In the school's recent history this has not resulted in consistent expected progress. However this year, under the new leadership, there is strong evidence that students have made accelerated progress and their data is now returning to national average. Internal data for this academic year shows some significant improvement in pupil attainment across the school, including in Year 6. However, this data has not been externally verified as yet. The gap in attainment and progress between different groups of students is clearly closing. Most students know the values and can talk about how they help them to learn and 'to grow as a person'. However, many students can only relate the values in a vague way to Christian teaching. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are positive and respectful. It is clear that the school's Christian underpinning has been, and continues to be, a stabilising factor in the difficult period the school has undergone since the previous denominational inspection. Since the arrival of the new headteacher firm boundaries for behaviour have been reset. This means that initially internal exclusions increased but these have now declined as students are aware of and respond positively to the high expectations in place. These are clearly based on forgiveness and justice which are two of the school's core Christian values. As an expression of the school's Christian foundation, on those few occasions now where behaviour, attendance or SEND gets in the way of learning, the school works realistically and in a caring fashion to support the pupil and their family. Strong pastoral support is in place which expresses the school's caring and compassionate nature well. Pupils feel safe and happy in school and consequently attendance has improved and is now around the national average and on a rising trend.

The school provides a good range of opportunities to support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Opportunities within the curriculum through, for example, art, literacy, RE and the worship programme are well responded to by students. As one student reflected, 'art makes me look at things closely and differently' and another said, 'worship is a time to reflect and be together'. Students are developing well their ability to express their ideas and beliefs whilst respecting those of others who may differ. There is a good extra-curricular programme which extends SMSC opportunities well. Students take responsibility for themselves and others through, for example, in sports teams, buddying with younger pupils and looking after the prayer room. Charitable giving is rightly seen as a way of expressing the school's values and thankfulness for, 'what we have that others' don't'. Students enjoy RE and worship and recognise the improvements in these areas over this academic year. RE, delivered in line with the locally agreed syllabus, supports students' understanding of different beliefs and practices. One student

commented, 'It's important to respect others and know what they believe. RE helps you think about that'. Students have a basic understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith. They recognise, for example, that, 'no matter where a Christian lives in the world the Bible will be important to them because Christians believe it's the word of God'.

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

A high priority is given to the daily worship programme across the school. Adults and students take part actively and with enthusiasm. They can express something of its impact on them as individuals. For example, 'Worshipping God as part of my life is important to me', as a Key Stage 2 student reflected. It is well focused on supporting and extending the school's Christian vision and values. It also supports the school's feeling of being a community sharing together. Worship is explicitly Christian and inclusive of those who have other religious or non-religious beliefs. Its impact on students' personal and spiritual wellbeing and development is good. The well planned programme has been refocused this academic year to address the newly introduced school values, Christian festivals and beliefs, as well as responding to issues in the news. Students are beginning through worship to appreciate the significance of Jesus for Christians and something of the rhythm of the church's year. Through worship they have some limited opportunity to explore more complex Christian ideas, such as that of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is also a renewed focus on using stories and teachings from the Bible and relating them to contemporary life in school and beyond. Students engage well in worship and especially enjoy it when other students are involved in leading it. Each week a class leads worship based on one of the school's values. The quality and depth of these acts of worship is impressive and leads to a deeper understanding of the value under consideration. Students are respectful during acts of worship, entering quietly, listening well and joining in with prayers, including the Lord's Prayer, reflectively. They enjoy singing and over the course of this academic year the range of Christian songs and hymns has been extended. Worship in tutor groups provides another experience of worship where students reflect and discuss together the material provided. The worship programme is well extended through periodic worship in local churches. However, students' understanding and appreciation of a range of Anglican practices, such as lighting candles, different colours being used across the year and opening and closing sentences with responses, is under-developed. These Anglican aspects of worship are most evident through the involvement of the vicar who is a regular visitor to school to lead worship. The school has rightly identified the need to invite a wider range of visitors into school to lead worship. There are firm plans in place to do this during the coming academic year. A prayer room has been recently opened and is beginning to have a significant place in school life. It provides opportunity for students to request prayer, write prayers or simply be quiet. There is some monitoring and evaluation of worship in place but this is not impacting positively on improving practice.

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

The dedicated and effective leadership of the headteacher is transforming the school. She is enabling it to emerge from the difficult period it has been through since the time of the previous denominational inspection. She works in close collaboration with her deputy headteacher and with other staff and is building a collegiate culture of support. This is based on the school's longstanding Christian foundation being refreshed and revitalised for the next stage of the school's development. It puts at the heart of the improvement process the needs of the individual both personal and academic so that they can flourish. There is a thorough understanding of the school's performance. This is based on thoughtful and accurate self-evaluation leading to convincing and effective strategies for rapid and sustained progress. Governors have secured good leadership and management of worship and RE, both of which meet statutory requirements. Together worship and RE have been given a high priority in contributing to the school improvement and to its distinctiveness and effectiveness as a church school. Improvements in both areas indicate that they are already impacting positively. Good leadership of RE is in place and the curriculum is being adapted to ensure that it challenges and supports pupils learning well. This is drawing on an approach to teaching Christianity based on key concepts. The school has invested in the training and

resource called, 'Understanding Christianity'. Although in the very early days of implementation, alongside the locally agreed syllabus for RE, impact is already being seen. This includes deeper questioning by teachers and improved engagement by students.

Areas for improvement identified in the previous denominational inspection have been partially addressed. The need for rigorous monitoring and evaluation by a wider group of stakeholders across the school has taken place. However, under new leadership, the school has rightly identified that monitoring and evaluation of the school's Christian character, including of worship and RE are not rigorous enough. Neither does it involve pupils and parents sufficiently. Parents are enthusiastic in their praise for the new leadership of the school and acknowledge the impact that it is already having on their children's attitudes and learning. Parents are supportive of the way in which the school expresses its Christian foundation in terms of concern for the children as 'rounded, whole people'. They recognise that it provides a, 'framework and 'moral compass' for life and decision making whether you are Christian or not'. School links with the parish church are good, principally through the vicar. The school draws appropriately on training, support and review from the local authority and from the diocese, listening carefully to advice offered and ensuring that these insights are incorporated appropriately into school practice.

SIAMS report [June 2017] Edwinstree CE (VC) Middle School, Buntingford, Hertfordshire, SG9 9AW