

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Henlow Church of England Academy

Church Road, Henlow, Bedfordshire, SG16 6AN

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

St Albans

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Date of Academy Conversion

April 2012

Date of inspection

29 June 2017

Date of last inspection

May 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Middle - Voluntary Controlled equivalent -
138027

Headteacher

Caren Earp

Inspector's name and number

Pamela Draycott 161

School context

Henlow Church of England Academy is a growing and increasingly popular middle school. Most pupils are White British. The percentage with some sort of special educational need or disability (SEND) is just below the national average. The percentage for whom extra funding is received due to social need is broadly around the national average. Due to its proximity to military bases almost 10 percent of pupils come from service families. Since the previous denominational inspection there has been a change of headteacher and both deputy headteachers. St Mary's parish church has a new vicar following a period of vacancy.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Henlow Church of England Middle School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- A caring, inclusive and nurturing learning environment, based on its Christian values, leads to good progress and attainment, to strong relationships and to the excellent behaviour of pupils.
- In keeping with its Church of England status the wellbeing of pupils and staff is taken seriously with effective procedures in place to support and challenge all members of the school community to strive to do their best.
- As a clear expression of the school's Christian values in action, pupils are well known as individuals with a range of gifts and talents. Their opinions are clearly listened to and contribute well to their positive engagement in school life.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that national and diocesan developments in Church of England education are closely drawn upon in order to ensure that the school's Christian vision and values evolve as it moves into its next phase of development.

- To improve standards of attainment and engagement further, embed the changes begun to the religious education (RE) curriculum, based on the locally agreed syllabus, and linked to providing an approach to learning focused on key religious concepts.

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

The Henlow values are based on letters from its name - honesty, enthusiasm, nurture, love, originality and wisdom. They were introduced during the academic year 2013 to 2014. These values are now well embedded into school life and practice and are closely related to the school's Christian foundation and to biblical teaching. Pupils are given appropriate space to reflect on these values in lessons across the curriculum, through worship and in relation to their behaviour and attitudes to learning. This impacts positively on the school as a Christian and nurturing community where relationships are strong. In keeping with its Christian underpinning the school knows and treats pupils as individuals, recognising and celebrating their various gifts and talents very well. This Christian underpinning focuses on the needs of the individual. This leads to the gap in attainment between different groups of pupils, including SEND pupils and disadvantaged pupils, being much smaller than that found nationally. At the end of Key Stage 2 pupils' attainment is slightly above the national average. Therefore, overall pupils make good or very good progress from their various starting points. The larger than average percentage of pupils who enter the school at times other than the usual starting time are welcomed in keeping with Christian hospitality. However, this can impact on a particular cohort's overall attainment and progress. Pupils are very well prepared for moving into the next phase of education. Local high school data confirms that the school prepares pupils well for their secondary school experiences. This is reflected in the fact that many Henlow pupils attain highly at the end of Key Stage 4. In keeping with its Christian care there are very supportive monitoring systems in place to help pupils achieve their best and develop strongly both personally and academically. Consequently, pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are developing as confident and caring individuals, increasingly able to share their ideas and beliefs whilst listening attentively and respectfully to others, who may disagree with them. Instances where pupils fall short of the high standards of behaviour expected are low and dealt with consistently and fairly, in keeping with the school's Christian insights on forgiveness, justice and restoration. Pupils feel happy and safe in school and as a consequence attendance has improved and is now slightly above the national average.

Display celebrates the school's Christian distinctiveness as well as pupils' attainment and progress. This contributes well to its very good provision of opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development which are very well responded to by pupils. Charitable giving is clearly seen as an expression of thankfulness, care and concern and is linked appropriately with Christian teaching and practice. Pupils are sensitive to the needs of others locally, nationally and internationally through participating in fundraising activities with enthusiasm and understanding. Pupils take responsibility for themselves and others in a range of ways including through the school action group. This group replaced the school council system at the beginning of this academic year. It is proactive in organising activities for the school and in sharing ideas for further development. Extra-curricular clubs and activities are extensive and include, for example, sports clubs, a Christian club and a chance for service family children to meet together. The worship programme and the RE curriculum are key drivers in supporting SMSC development and the school's Christian ethos. Appropriate opportunities in other areas of the curriculum are also taken through, for example, poetry and creative writing, art and personal, health, social, and citizenship education (PHSCE). Pupils enjoy RE and see that it helps them develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other faiths so that, 'we learn about what different people believe and show respect and understanding for difference'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Acts of worship take place daily often in tutor or year groups. Adults and pupils take part in worship with enthusiasm and recognise its importance in school life. Staff have had some training in how to deliver worship to their forms. The programme for worship is clearly planned and effectively involves exploring the school's Christian values, the Christian year and key Christian beliefs such as that of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As one pupil commented, 'Worshipping God is important to do and in school we get chance to

think about who Jesus was and how the Holy Spirit can help us in daily life'. This means that through worship pupils are developing their knowledge and understanding of these elements of the programme in age-appropriate ways. Worship opportunities encourage pupils and adults, whatever their faith position, to address issues of spiritual and moral concern and reflect on the significance to their own lives. Worship also celebrates the attainment and achievement of individuals and groups within the school and so enhances its community feel. Thus worship impacts positively on many of those who attend. Pupils have appropriate opportunities to lead worship. For example, in Year 5 tutor worship volunteers address the opening sentence with responses from their classmates as well as offering prayers.

Personal reflection diaries were introduced in September 2016 and have made a strong contribution to developing pupils' thinking and reflection skills. Although their use has yet to be fully embedded. Similarly this academic year the prayer table has been moved from the entrance hall into the school library. This move has made it more central and has increased its use by pupils significantly. A different focus is given each half term which also keeps its use fresh within the school community. The focus during this denominational inspection was on hope. Cloud shaped paper provides the opportunity for pupils to reflect on their hopes and prayers for the future. Many pupils took the opportunity to contribute to the prayer table. A new prayer garden has been designed by the pupils with the help of a parent and has just been completed. However recent, it does signify the way in which the school is not standing still with regards to encouraging prayer and reflection. Rather it is finding new ways to support its impact on school life and on individuals. The Lord's Prayer is said regularly and pupils understand something of its significance for Christians. Worship in school is well extended through occasional acts of worship held in the parish church. These are enjoyed and contribute effectively to the school's links with the local Christian community as well as contributing to pupils' understanding of Anglican practices well. Views about worship are gathered from staff, pupils and occasionally from parents. These are taken into account as part of the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of worship. Some suggestions made have been acted upon to improve worship further.

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

This church school is capably led by a headteacher whose vision is firmly grounded on the needs of the individual and on the school's responsibility to encourage all to flourish. This vision is fittingly shared by senior colleagues, staff and governors. The school's Christian underpinning is central and its values are carefully expressed in many policy documents and in practice across its daily life. The leadership team, ably supported by engaged governors, is forward and outward looking. This means, for example, that strong links are made with the lower schools from which many of the pupils join in Year 5. Likewise links with the upper schools pupils go to at the beginning of Year 9 are good. Appropriate transition activities from one phase to the other are expressions of how the school's Christian care and nurture for pupils extends widely. Parents are kept very well informed of their children's academic progress and are well engaged in school life through various events. The vast majority of parents are supportive of its Christian foundation, irrespective of their personal faith or non-faith position. They see how it provides, 'moral grounding,' and that it, 'encourages children to think for themselves'.

Governors know their school well and are regular and valued visitors. They are clearly involved in setting direction and in monitoring and evaluating the school's distinctiveness and effectiveness as a church school. They are looking to further secure the future of the school 'for the next forty years' having just celebrated forty years since its foundation. Senior leaders and governors are aware of recent and ongoing key developments in the vision for Church of England education nationally as well as within the Diocese. This has not translated into supporting action planning currently. Areas for improvement from the previous denominational inspection have been very well addressed: most effectively in the time since the new headteacher came into post. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and leads to next steps for improvement which provide a clear focus for action, including on how finances are used. Arrangements for RE and worship meet statutory requirements. Governors have ensured good leadership for worship and RE. The new head of RE came to the school at the beginning of this academic year. He is reviewing the RE curriculum which is based on the locally agreed syllabus and also providing Year 7 and 8 philosophy option

lessons. He has undergone recent training within the Diocese on a new national resource for improving the teaching of Christianity. It does this through providing challenging materials that focus on key Christian concepts. Although in the very early stages of implementation there is already limited evidence that it is impacting positively on pupils' enjoyment and attainment in RE. Staff are provided with appropriate opportunities to develop professionally during their time at school.

Links with the parish church have remained good over time and were effectively maintained during the recent clergy vacancy. This was achieved through the commitment of a retired priest who is also on the governing body and by lay leadership in the church. Relationships with the church are being refreshed and deepened further with the arrival of the new vicar. He is also now on the governing body and beginning to be involved in school worship and pastoral care. The school's links with the Diocese are principally through taking up periodic training activities and support provided by the education team,

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