

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Roger de Clare Church of England First School and Nursery	
Station Road, Puckeridge, Herts, SG11 1TF	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	n/a
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	n/a
Date of inspection	9 November 2017
Date of last inspection	October 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 117406
Headteacher	Laura Woods
Inspector's name and number	Shirley Whales 830

School context

Roger de Clare C of E First School is a two-form entry first school and nursery set in the rural area of Puckeridge. The school serves a varied catchment area due to recent housing developments in nearby Buntingford, which has contributed to the increase in the number of pupils travelling from outside the village. The headteacher has been in post since January 2014 and staffing at the school remains stable. 92.3% pupils are from a White British background. The percentage of pupils receiving support for special educational needs and the number for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage is below the national average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Roger de Clare Church of England First School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Roger de Clare school is a caring, happy and inclusive environment where every child is nurtured to fulfil their potential as a 'special and unique' child of God.
- Explicitly expressed and displayed Christian values impact strongly on pupils' excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to life and learning.
- The school enjoys exceptionally strong partnerships with St Mary's parish church, with a high level of collaboration and support that clearly benefits the whole community.
- The quality of pupils' spiritual awareness promoted by the school's distinctive Christian character has a strong impact on their personal development.

Areas to improve

- Continue to involve the worship club in the planning and leading of worship so that they gain a fuller understanding of Christian faith and tradition.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to explore multicultural aspects of learning so that they improve their understanding of differences across national and global communities.
- Develop the skills and abilities of governors and subject leaders to gather high quality evidence of the impact of the Christian ethos and use that to identify further challenging areas for improvement.

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

Every pupil is valued as a 'special and unique' member of the school's Christian family. At the heart of the school is the recently reviewed vision statement, 'Maximum achievement for all in a happy, caring and Christian environment.' which is intrinsic to school life. The vision statement encapsulates all that is virtuous about this school. Its Christian character is underpinned by Christian values and this results in a learning environment which enhances the academic achievement and personal development of all pupils. As a result, attendance is close to the national average and there have been no recent exclusions. Standards of attainment are above the national average levels and data shows that pupils make significantly strong progress across the school. The holistic progress of pupils is of utmost importance to leaders and parents who say, "When it comes down to the welfare of the child, it cannot get any better". Pupils who join the school at times other than the usual transfer times are supported well. The majority settle quickly and their learning is closely monitored to ensure progress.

The secure Christian ethos has a strong focus on Christian values, Bible teaching and the life of Jesus and is actively and effectively promoted. As a result, pupils' behaviour is excellent and this facilitates productive and successful learning. Pupils enjoy talking about the values of respect and honesty and how they link with their golden rules. These impact meaningfully on their relationships and experiences in school. Governors' assertion that 'children show appreciation and consideration naturally' is accurate. Pupils enthuse, without prompting, about the impact that the values have on their lives, 'We learned about Walter Herman who made a peace wall. We made our own peace wall this week; the messages are important because by leaving them on the wall, our worries are taken away'. The school's Christian care and commitment and the promotion of the Christian values contribute significantly to pupils' social and moral development. For example, pupils describe how their value of respect helps them to, 'know how to look after each other and to live well together'. Pupils have many roles of responsibility such as eco-action members whose responsibility it is to look after the energy within the school, the sports crew who organise the 'active area', the school council who 'devise ideas to make the school better' and the worship club who 'focus on different types of worship'. Pupils live out these distinctively Christian values of kindness and service. They are proud of their decision-making activities and commitments and they are pleased with their progress.

Classroom prayer and 'mindfulness' areas are prominent and freely available for pupils to use as places of stillness and reflection. They are meaningful and relevant to pupils' daily lives because the pupils make regular use of them. Pupils talk with confidence and sensitivity about how these areas are used and valued. This means that pupils develop very well spiritually.

Warm and caring relationships exist at all levels not only in school but also beyond the school community, such as in the off-site extended school provision, where evidence confirms leaders' assertion that, influenced by a Christian ethos, 'all children interact kindly.' They welcome the 'familiar environment where the children thrive'. Governors are encouraged by the positive relationships that exist because of 'the percolation of morals and values through the whole school community'. Consequently, relationships are positive and affirming.

RE often challenges pupils to think deeply. They display a mature understanding of abstract and quite complex concepts in their discussions in lessons, such as the value that they place on giving 'love' as a gift. Pupils enjoy learning about people who hold different beliefs from themselves and they recount many aspects of their learning about Hinduism. Pupils ask pertinent and sensitive questions, which makes a significant contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, the depth of pupils' learning is not always recorded in their books, nor displayed around the school. Pupils learn about different Christian traditions, such as how Christmas is celebrated around the world, although this and their understanding of other global faith communities is not fully developed.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Great value is placed on collective worship and pupils appreciate the opportunities offered for deep reflection. This was observed at the time of inspection when the pupils were asked to think about what Jesus should do after Peter defended him from the officials in the garden of Gethsemane. Following a time of silence, pupils responded sensitively to questions, referring to their own understanding of the values. After learning about the way in which Jesus showed forgiveness, one boy later talked about why it was important for him to forgive his friends. The pupils are very familiar with the Lord's Prayer and the Grace and they have some understanding of the seasons within the Christian calendar. Personal prayers are used by pupils to express their spiritual thoughts and feelings.

Worship is distinctly Christian and Anglican in nature. It expresses the richness of the school's spirituality and deepens it. Worship is led by a range of people, including a lay preacher who has focused on reading stories from the Old

Testament. The worship programme draws well on other biblical stories, through which the pupils develop an appropriate understanding of the significance of Jesus for Christians. School leaders teach pupils about Christian beliefs in worship, including that God is father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pupils of all ages have an impressive knowledge and understanding of this. Visual symbols, such as a large plait of different coloured ribbons, clearly displayed in the school hall, are used to help pupils understand that God is three in one. One pupil explained, 'He's not just the creator, He came as Jesus.'

Pupils apply the messages of worship to their daily lives and they share these messages at home, 'Our children use the Christian values in a subtle way, they are deep rooted, second nature and transforming.' This expression of the values often results in pupils' desire to help others, both inside and outside of the school. As a result, the school community supports a range of charities such as Keech and Children in Need. A visit from Ian Rose, paralympic judo champion, inspired the pupils to think deeply about the importance of determination, resilience and empathy. Pupils linked this to their Christian values and talked openly about the messages that leave a lasting impression such as, 'practice makes progress' and 'when we pray God tells us how we can improve'.

Pupils often participate in worship and the worship club holds regular meetings to discuss the values and organise readings and prayers. However, their involvement in planning and leading worship is limited.

The very strong links with the church enhance worship and contribute significantly to the spiritual development of the pupils and their families. Sunday afternoon, messy church, now rebranded as St Mary's at the school, is a weekly opportunity for families to engage with worship 'in a familiar surrounding'.

Acts of worship are monitored by governors and feedback is gathered both formally and informally. This is beginning to have an impact on school development and thus enables worship leaders to replicate best practice.

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

The headteacher and school governors clearly express a shared vision of the school's Christian distinctiveness which is made explicit through Christian teaching. The Christian ethos is reflected through an inclusive approach in the belief that each child is a unique child of God and that as a result the individual needs of pupils lie at the heart of the school's provision. Pupils are happy, enjoy their learning and recognise that their gifts and skills are valued. The values, with biblical references, are displayed prominently and are fully embedded into the daily life of the school. They are an intrinsic part of the identity of whole school community as a church school. Pupils see them as, 'ones we need to survive and make us better people,' and governors view them as 'the tools to experience spiritual connections.' These values help guide the actions and decisions of governors and school leaders and as a result accurate evaluations of school successes and areas for development, including those identified from the previous inspection and in the school's 'equality scheme', are acknowledged and addressed.

Governors are well-informed about the life of the school. They are rightly proud of their school and they feel that the Christian ethos permeates all aspects of school life. They visit regularly and support the school in evaluating itself as a church school. Governor visit forms refer to the vision and values of the school and governors' feedback informs school development planning. However, scrutiny of the school's work is not sufficiently robust to challenge and support school effectiveness.

A strong relationship with the parish church is clearly evidenced through the active role of the vicar who regularly leads collective worship. The breadth and depth of partnership working is a very remarkable feature of this inclusive school. There are several joint enterprises such as community lunches, lunchtime Brownies and messy church. These enable the church and the school to work together to serve the community.

Good communication with parents is an important feature of the school. The headteacher is present in the playground in the mornings and her regular communication through the school's Facebook page, is appreciated. Parents and pupils know that where support is needed, academically or socially, it is quickly and effectively given. Parents say that 'the open door is always open.'

Governors ensure that arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. The headteacher and RE leader have developed significantly in their capacity and effectiveness through embedding the values as drivers for school development. Their roles are well supported by productive professional development at diocesan level. As a result, the new 'Understanding Christianity' and the recently updated Hertfordshire RE Syllabus are being interwoven into the RE curriculum alongside the school's Christian values. This is already having an impact on the quality of 'deeper questions' by honing pupils' skills of enquiry.