

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ardeley St Lawrence Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

School Lane, Ardeley, Stevenage, SG2 7AJ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Date of inspection	17 November 2017
Date of last inspection	13 September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 117420
Headteacher	Karen Connolly
Inspector's name and number	Lindsay Fraser 107

School context

Ardeley St Lawrence is a small rural primary school in the village of Ardeley. It serves the local village and attracts many pupils from the nearby town of Stevenage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities is above the national average. The percentage for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage is near the national average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. Previously, many pupils left at the end of Year 4 to attend middle schools, but increasingly pupils are remaining until the end of Year 6. Pupils receiving extra support for learning, health or emotional needs currently totals 38% of all pupils. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2017.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ardeley St Lawrence Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school's distinctive Christian character has a significant impact on all aspects of school life including pupils' achievements and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC).
- The effective partnerships with the local church, the local community and other schools, strongly support the school's Christian Character.
- Fully embedded Christian values influence pupils' enthusiasm and desire to support those in need, both locally and in the wider world.
- The dedication, drive and vision of the school governors ensures that the distinctive Christian character is sustained through all change so that all staff are well supported in their mission to address the needs of each pupil.

Areas to improve

- Continue to develop and embed the new assessment practices in religious education (RE) so that teachers have accurate information from which to plan for the needs of all pupils.
- Embed the planning now in place for the new RE syllabus and the Understanding Christianity project to further raise standards in RE, especially for pupils who are more able.
- Develop pupils' understanding of other forms of Christian worship through religious education and the involvement of leaders from other denominations in collective worship.

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

Deeply embedded values and a strong Christian vision underpin all aspects of pupils' daily experiences which are further enhanced by times of prayer, reflection and collective worship. The school's Christian vision, based on the statement, 'Loving and Learning in Fellowship and Faith', is displayed clearly in the entrance foyer and evident throughout the school. The joy of learning, excellent behaviour and pupils' attitudes and belief in themselves and in those who teach and support them, further reflect this vision. Pupils achieve well and those pupils who are disadvantaged make very good progress due to the excellent level of support for each individual child. Parents whose children have additional needs state that they choose this school because they know that the staff will do whatever they can to meet the specific needs of their child. One member of staff compared their support of pupil who are needy to the parable of the 'The Lost Sheep'. She described their role as the shepherd actively seeking out and tending the lost sheep. This is because staff view each child as unique in the eyes of God and it is therefore their responsibility to know, understand and support every child. Staff are therefore well trained to support a variety of needs, including training in protective behaviours, a framework for personal safety, self-esteem, resilience and confidence building. Where necessary, external support is sought. Besides supporting those with additional needs the new headteacher is rigorous in her drive to ensure high standards whilst ensuring that pupils' well-being is paramount. More pupils are now staying in the school until Year 6 because parents and pupils believe that the school is preparing them well for secondary education. The school's chosen values of love, compassion, respect, reverence, wisdom and hope are also well understood and articulated by all pupils, staff, parents and governors. They are referred to constantly by pupils as they describe how love and compassion influence their response to the needs of others. For example, on the day of the inspection one pupil referred to the compassion shown by Jesus for those whom he did not know, those of different cultures and those in need. Pupils also explain that to love Jesus means to have love for all. The headteacher also focuses on the Biblical text Matthew 10:8, 'freely you have received, freely give'. Consequently, pupils in the school feel a great sense of responsibility for those less fortunate than themselves. As one pupil states, 'Everyone deserves to have what we have'. Because of this, the school council commit themselves to raising £25 each month for the Christian charity 'Compassion'. This enables a child in Uganda to attend school. Not only has this increased pupils' understanding of Christianity in action in other parts of the world, but enables them to understand the difference they can make to the lives of others by their love and compassion. In a recent parent questionnaire parents also remark on the impact of the school's Christian values on themselves as well as their children. For example, one parent states that the values make him want to be more involved in the local community. The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is excellent because the school is committed to teaching its Christian values through first hand experiences. These have included Indian dance workshops, working with disabled athletes, a visit to Norwich cathedral and links with a Kenyan school. The importance attached the development of spirituality is clear through pupils' desire to reflect, to record and share their reflections and to write thoughtful prayers. This has been further enhanced this term due to the headteacher's development of greater reverence and reflection within collective worship. Pupils have a very good understanding of diversity, both in people's differing needs and in different faiths. The quality of teaching in RE enables pupils to develop a good knowledge and understanding of a range of faiths and the impact of beliefs and personal faith on people's lives. However, pupils' understanding of diversity within Christian denominations is less well developed.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is central to the school and has a significant impact on pupils, staff and many parents. Over half of parents have attended collective worship during the term, mainly because they want to feel involved and to be able to talk to their children about collective worship. Staff also speak highly of the special time spent in collective worship which has relevance to their own reflective practice. Pupils are inspired by collective worship and are extremely keen to participate, write prayers and to express their enjoyment and their sense of calm and peace. To emphasise the importance of collective worship and its central position in the daily life of the school the headteacher has refreshed the school hall as 'a place to be close to God'. Using RE displays from each class, the display of the Lord's prayer and pupils' prayers, together with a prominence given to the school altar, the lectern, chalice and the candles this has been achieved. Pupils speak proudly of this space and are keen to talk about the meanings of the different displays. For example, they can explain how one collage depicts the purpose of the dove at Jesus' baptism as the Holy Spirit. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their understanding of the candles, carefully explaining how they also relate to the Trinity. Consequently, they explain with confidence the Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, many explaining their own analogies to the Trinity through pictures they have drawn. Pupils enjoy having a variety of worship leaders, including all teaching staff. However, there are no leaders from other denominations and the school has identified this as a focus for development. Planning is thorough, paying attention to continuity, cohesion, variety and focus. The staff are now beginning to plan collaboratively to further enhance the quality of worship. All pupils are keen to volunteer for role play or to assist the leader during worship time. The worship crew, made up of a group of pupils, are involved in planning, preparing and delivering collective worship. Through the recommendation of the governors, following visits to collective worship, this is now a monthly activity rather than a weekly activity. This ensures that pupils have sufficient time for thorough preparation. Pupils also take on a range of

other responsibilities such as lighting the candles, reading from the Bible and saying prayers. They take great pride in these responsibilities which enable them to develop a greater feeling of spirituality. Reflection areas in each classroom are well used by pupils as are the reflection books. Pupils' reflections and prayers show a deep understanding of and response to themes used in collective worship. Prayer is a very important aspect of the school and all pupils have the opportunity to contribute intercession prayers for worship. Advice for the writing of these prayers is given to parents through the school website. Parents have been supportive in this, leading to meaningful prayers and a sense of involvement. The rector, or lay reader, leads collective worship weekly, linking further the practice of the local church with the school. As a result, pupils have an excellent understanding of Anglican greetings and responses. A termly Eucharist service is held in the church to which parents and members of the local community are also invited. Pupils receive a blessing, but are also developing an excellent understanding of the meaning of Eucharist. They can explain clearly the purpose of sharing the bread and the wine. Governors attend collective worship frequently, sharing their observations with the governor worship committee. Resulting actions from this committee have included the simplification of the Eucharistic prayers for pupils and the training of pupils to act as servers for Eucharist. The celebration of the full range of Christian festivals throughout the year means pupils have a good understanding of their significance.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards of attainment overall in RE are in line with those expected within the local authority syllabus and pupils make good progress from their starting points. Pupils are highly engaged and work hard because they have been inspired by the content of their lessons. This results from teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for the teaching of RE. Due to the change in leadership, the introduction of the new syllabus for RE and the inclusion of 'Understanding Christianity', assessment procedures have only recently been put in place. Following training from the diocese for the teaching of British values and SMSC within RE these areas have now been incorporated into the curriculum. Governors also have attended similar training providing them with the tools to monitor the impact of the new curriculum. This is still at an early stage. Learning in the classroom is enhanced by visits to places of worship including St Albans Abbey, Norwich Cathedral, the local church and Buddhist and Hindu temples. It is evident from pupil discussion that they enjoy their learning and can confidently identify similarities between the practices of different faiths. The use of higher level thinking, especially in extending the understanding of those pupils who are most able, together with greater theological understanding are areas which the school recognises as being of a continuing focus. The RE curriculum is enhanced by the school's enrichment days, including one about Hindu worship and culture, a Trinity day at Pentecost and 'religion around us'. The RE governor monitors the way in which RE is taught and standards achieved in RE through the observation of lessons. She is also involved in the organisation of RE days, enabling her to keep the governing body well informed. However, discussion with pupils is not yet in place and the addition of this to the evaluation process will enable leaders to further identify the impact of the new curriculum.

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

The school vision is encapsulated in the statement, "Loving and Learning in Fellowship and Faith'. Leaders ensure that the school's distinctive Christian character permeates every area of the curriculum, staff and pupil well-being and relationships with the local and wider communities. All members of the school community understand and articulate the school's vision and the Christian values which guide the day to day practice within the school. This is because they have worked together, following training with the diocese, to share and deepen their understanding of the vision statement. Through regular surveys, governor visits to the school and thorough monitoring of pupil progress leaders have an excellent understanding of the impact of the Christian character on standards, pupil behaviour and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Governing body minutes indicate how they ensure teachers are responding appropriately to areas for development whilst offering support to enable improvement. Governors responded to parents' requests for more teaching about other faiths and cultures and greater inclusivity of church events. They gave their assurance that this would be addressed and evidence of pupil knowledge and understanding reflects the actions that have been taken. Governors have a clear strategic overview for the school, ensuring that they are up to date with national developments in such areas as multi academy trusts and federation. They planned carefully for the smooth transition from the retiring headteacher to the current headteacher. This has enabled the new headteacher to build very successfully on the strong Christian legacy of the previous headteacher. As a result, she is already enabling staff to improve standards and pupils to increase their understanding of how Christian values make a difference to their own lives and to the lives of others. Recent surveys indicate that parents also feel very confident that their children's wide range of needs will be met. The headteacher has responsibility for RE and collective worship. She is maintaining their importance within the school, through her commitment to working with the staff to establish successful strategies for learning and assessment in RE and her further development of the pupil led worship. The school has excellent reciprocal relationships with other local schools, enabling such areas as the sharing of good practice in collective worship. The school also has strong and effective links with the local church. This is because members of the church support school worship through leadership and advice and the

provision of Bibles for school leavers. The school plays an active part in many of the village activities whilst benefiting from regular support of volunteers within the school, itself. To reciprocate this generosity the school invites all ladies in the village to the Mothering Sunday tea party, organised and prepared by all pupils.

SIAMS report November 2017 Ardeley St Lawrence C of E VA Primary School, School Lane, Ardeley SG2 7AJ