

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Bishop Wood Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

Frogmore Street, Tring, Hertfordshire, HP23 3AU

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Date of inspection	30 November 2017
Date of last inspection	25 September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided Junior 117458
Interim Headteacher	Jon Hall
Inspector's name and number	Judith Ruff 528

School context

Bishop Wood is an average sized junior school serving the town of Tring. Currently the school has full capacity of 240 pupils. 13% of pupils in the school are identified as having special educational needs. A small number of pupils are in receipt of free school meals. Both of the above are below national averages. The majority of pupils are from a White British heritage, with 4.6% from other ethnic groups. A long serving headteacher and religious education (RE) leader have left the school within the past year. The deputy headteacher has stepped up to interim headship for the term. A new headteacher has been appointed for January 2018. The church of St Peter and St Paul is within a short walking distance from the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Bishop Wood Junior as a Church of England school are good

- The school's Christian ethos permeates throughout the building and all who form part of the school community. It arises from the Christian values which are deeply embedded in the daily life of the school. All feel welcomed and valued and the significant impact that these values have in shaping the lives of pupils is clear to see.
- The links with the local church of St Peter and St Paul are strong and well-developed over time. The team rector is a regular visitor to the school and positively supports the school community's understanding in both RE and collective worship, enabling pupils' spiritual development particularly to develop and flourish.
- Pupils have a deep sense of spirituality, developed through good opportunities for prayer and reflection. This has enabled them to confidently express their feelings, thoughts and beliefs, secure in the knowledge that these will be sensitively responded to and built upon through adult – child discussions.

Areas to improve

- Revisit the school's vision ensuring that it is theologically underpinned and takes account of both the Church of England and diocesan visions for education.
- Increase the capacity for all governors to contribute to the strategic development of the school as a church school by ensuring that discussions on Christian distinctiveness at full governing body meetings are regular and comprehensive and that sub-committee minutes are properly received and discussed.
- Develop a systematic, formalised process for monitoring and evaluating collective worship, so that all stakeholders are part of the process. Ensure that the outcomes from this in terms of raising the quality of provision are fully understood and communicated.
- Ensure that governors understand standards and progress in RE on an annual basis, so that they can ask relevant questions and challenge outcomes where necessary.

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

In this good church school Christian values are made explicit throughout the learning environment and are deeply embedded in the daily life and work of the school. As one parent said, 'Spiritual values are infused through everything. There is an emphasis on children as whole people, with the sense of the spiritual being valued as much as academic development'. The inspector agrees with this comment. Pupils' spiritual development is valued and nurtured through opportunities to reflect on the sacrifice and service of others. For example, at the recent Remembrance day commemoration of the Battle of Paschendaele, pupils from streets where local soldiers had been killed in this battle, laid ceramic poppies in their memory. Achievement rates are high within the school, well above national and local authority outcomes. Disadvantaged pupils' progress has been slower. The school has faced this challenge with faith and belief that every child is precious to God and deserves to be able to celebrate success in line with the school's vision statement. A family liaison worker has been employed, teaching assistants have specific roles in monitoring attendance and the school is engaging in a local authority project around 'diminishing differences'. These are beginning to show signs of positive impact on progress rates. The school works in a determined and compassionate way to support vulnerable families. This is especially true of families experiencing challenging times – 'I felt held and my children felt held'. Spiritual development is a strength of the school. Pupils are confident to express their feelings, thoughts and beliefs, secure in the knowledge that these will be sensitively responded to and built upon through adult-child discussions. Pupils' behaviour is good, supported through the Christian values of love, care, compassion and an empathy for the feelings of others. This is demonstrated well through 'The Three Point Rule', which ensures that any perpetrator of unacceptable behaviour is confronted with the feelings and wishes of the victim. This means that there has only had to be two fixed term exclusions in the past two years. This low number is a testament to the school's determination to meet the needs of every child within a loving Christian context. A recent initiative, 'Show racism the red card', had a particularly strong impact on pupils' awareness, as did the spotlight on the plight of refugees through a focused day of work. Cultural development is strengthened through RE where pupils have studied the differences and similarities of the world faiths, including Christianity. Pupils have a growing awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural faith through an RE unit of work on Christian communities in India and Rwanda. There is a developing link with a Christian school in Madagascar. Pupils' understanding of diversity within the Christian faith is promoted through links with a local Baptist church, visited by Year 5 pupils recently. Pupils are both enthusiastic and curious about RE. It is deepening their understanding of other world faiths, enabling them to compare beliefs and ideas and relate these to their own experiences of a Christian community in action.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The centrality of collective worship is regarded as essential by stakeholders to the daily reaffirmation of the school as a faithful and committed church school. This is summed up in a simple phrase 'Worship is what we do'. The governing body, in partnership with the local clergy team, produced a joint definition of worship which is promoted within the collective worship policy. Staff members, both recent and longer serving, really appreciate the opportunity to come together, cementing the sharing of beliefs and the sense of belonging. Pupils know that worship is a special time. Opportunities to write prayers and reflect through periods of focused silence were strengthened as a direct result of pupils' feedback. Pupils have a developing knowledge of Bible stories linked with the chosen values. The worship is well planned, linked to the diocesan materials and the liturgical year. This gives pupils a clear sense of the pattern of the church liturgical calendar. Pupils supported the rector very well in the collective worship seen during the inspection. They confidently reflected their thoughts on the commercial countdown to Christmas, contrasted to the Bible message of preparation through space and time to reflect on the Advent values of hope and expectation. They shared opportunities about experiences of joy often being connected with stillness, such as listening to bird song. Pupils said their own prayers and the whole school sang 'Light of the World' very beautifully. Prayers contribute significantly to pupils' understanding of talking to God, whether it be through the 'Five Finger' prayer hands on the classroom reflection tables or from the lunchtime and end of day prayer collections. Pupils enjoy writing their own prayers and use these as part of special commemorations, for example at Remembrance Day and church festivals. Pupils' understanding of the Trinity is age appropriate, supported through the rector's collective worship on this theme and the use of Trinitarian prayers. The school's Year 6 worship leaders are new in this role. They are keen and enthusiastic to plan and lead worship with the rector's support and guidance. They particularly like the opportunities to explore Bible stories through the use of role play. They are beginning to have a clearer understanding of the importance of a worship structure and how to communicate messages in interactive ways, which engage others and develop a growing understanding of God. Monitoring and evaluation is undertaken by pupils and teachers leading worship, but outcomes from these are not yet sufficiently analysed to support improved provision. Governors monitor informally and are actively involved in supporting worship. This monitoring lacks rigour and there is currently insufficient evidence that governors have a secure understanding of the current strengths and areas for development in collective worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards in RE for the large majority of pupils are in line with the expectations of the local RE syllabus. For more able pupils they are higher. Pupils make good rates of progress from their starting points. This is very obvious looking across the year group outcomes from Year 3 through to Year 6. Teachers use assessment guidance from the local syllabus to make judgements on attainment at the end of each unit. As yet information on attainment and progress is not analysed and collated into a form that can be communicated to governors, thus enabling them to ask relevant questions and challenge outcomes where necessary. Teachers' marking is inconsistent across the year groups. The best examples of teacher marking are clearly matched to the lesson learning objectives and provide next steps guidance on how the work could be further improved. Written learning tasks are not frequently adapted to meet the ability ranges within classes. Opportunities for extended writing in RE work are underdeveloped. Pupils' have very positive attitudes towards RE. They enjoy the creative and innovative learning activities provided by their teachers, which offer good opportunities for them to demonstrate their skills of enquiry and analysis. Year 6 pupils really enjoyed their lesson on inspirational people. This reinforced very successfully the Christian values espoused by the school, as demonstrated through the life and works of both famous people and family members. The quality of teaching in RE is at least good, with some teaching having outstanding aspects. Teachers know their pupils well and use this understanding to both support and challenge in equal measure. RE has a high profile within the school curriculum. Pupils not only are developing a sound understanding of Christianity, but also enjoy contrasting and comparing religions in terms of similarities and differences. Their RE work outcomes are celebrated very well within classroom areas. Pupils thoroughly enjoy opportunities for first hand visits to faith buildings. At present these have been limited to Christian places of worship. Good connections are made to the Christian values of the school and pupils can link these to a number of Bible stories taught in their RE lessons and in collective worship. The interim headteacher has taken on the responsibility for RE this term. He has already completed teaching observations which reinforced the belief that RE teaching is good and often outstanding. New teachers to the school feel very well supported and have had opportunities to observe outstanding class teaching of RE. A book scrutiny completed a year ago raised issues around ensuring that quality marking processes, such as peer to peer marking and the identification of next steps, as found in literacy, were introduced into RE. This is only just beginning to emerge in some year groups. The RE subject leader is clearly committed to the subject and has written an action plan for this academic year. However, his workload as interim headteacher has restricted the amount of time available for advancing the priorities in this plan and progress to date has been limited.

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

School leaders communicate their vision for the school through a mission statement, set of aims and a strapline available on the website and in the school. It is based soundly on the promotion of distinctively Christian values. However, how the school's strapline and mission statement is theologically underpinned is not clear. Neither does the present vision statement currently take account of either the Church of England's or diocesan vision for education. School leaders, including governors, particularly those who are parents, see first-hand the impact that values have on individuals and school life as a whole. They speak of pupils developing a strong sense of respect for others. As one parent said, 'Some will struggle, but all are welcome and celebrated as individuals'. The uniqueness and specialness of each child to God is the key driver in the work and vision of the school. Self-evaluation is largely accurate and has involved senior leaders and the rector, but has not been sufficiently collaborative, involving all of the governing body. Actions from the previous inspection have been addressed satisfactorily. Governors are kept well informed about pupil achievement and understand that the progress of disadvantaged pupils needs to accelerate. The school development plan does have a SIAMS strand, although this is not discussed at full governor meetings. Governors are active within the school, generously offering their time and talents for the benefit of both pupils and staff. The rector is a great friend and supporter, offering both pastoral and theological support. Links with the local church of St Peter and St Paul are well established and deeply embedded within the life of the school. The departure of a long serving headteacher has opened up good possibilities for developing staff as leaders in church schools. Governors have created three assistant headteacher positions to support the interim headteacher and this structure is working well. The recruitment of the new headteacher was a rigorous process with a good emphasis in terms of interview activities and questioning around headship within a church school context. Leadership of collective worship and RE is temporarily with the interim headteacher. He has made good efforts to progress each of these areas, but his time has been limited by headship responsibilities. Parents interviewed are overwhelmingly supportive of the school's Christian ethos. However, the school has not surveyed the whole parent body around their views on church school distinctiveness. Links with the diocese are strong. Training was taken up by all members of the teaching team, plus some additional teaching assistants, for the 'Understanding Christianity' resource. The chair of governors has attended diocesan training on vision building. The cathedral at St Albans is visited regularly and the school was delighted to host a visit from the Bishop of St Albans, just over a year ago.