

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Weston Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School and Nursery

Weston CE (VC) Primary School and Nursery, Maiden Road, Weston, Hertfordshire SG4 7AG

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	n/a
Date of inspection	30 November 2017
Date of last inspection	23 October 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary controlled 117413
Headteacher	Geoff Holmes
Inspector's name and number	Juliet Lyal, 829

School context

Weston CE (VC) Primary and Nursery School is a small oversubscribed village school currently with 135 pupils on roll from Nursery to Year 6. Since the last inspection there have been significant changes in leadership and management as well as in teaching staff. The current headteacher has been in post since 1st January 2016 and the governing body was reconstituted in July 2016. The school serves families in the local community with an increasing number from outside the catchment area. Pupils are mainly White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs support and those for whom the school receives additional 'pupil premium' funding are below the national average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Weston CE VC Primary School as a Church of England school are good

- The tenacity of the head teacher and governing body in raising expectations across all areas of the school as a Church of England school is bringing about significant improvement and change in pupil progress and achievement.
- The Christian values education programme has a strong impact on the Christian distinctiveness and effectiveness of the whole school and in particular pupils' attendance, behaviour, attainment and progress.
- Strong, creative links with the church and village make a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.

Areas to improve

- Fully embed the monitoring and evaluation of the school's distinctive Christian character in order to maintain the effectiveness of its impact on all stakeholders.
- Develop a strategy for pupils to plan, lead and evaluate worship regularly to strengthen the whole school ownership of collective worship.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to engage with a variety of faith communities in order to develop their awareness of how religious education helps them understand the world of diversity in which they live locally, nationally and globally.

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

There is no doubt at all that the Christian character of this school underpins every area of school life and is important to every person who is a part of it. Its impact on the school and local community is very strong. Relationships between everyone in the school community are excellent because of the shared and deeply embedded Christian values. Pupils can describe the Christian values taught and lived out each half term, explaining their school 'values board' and examples written by pupils on post-it notes. The broad and creative curriculum, ethos and links between religious education (RE), Christian values education and worship have a strong impact on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of all learners. Pupils understand what is meant by 'spiritual' and say that they enjoy their class reflection areas as places to 'think about God and our values' or to write prayers. Some classes have developed their reflection areas more than others. The Christian values also have a significant impact on pupils' behaviour, progress and attainment. This is evident in the good and sometimes excellent progress pupils are making. In 2016-2017, the end of Key Stage 1 attainment results were in line with the national average and the end of Key Stage 2 attainment results were above both national and Hertfordshire averages. Attendance has improved and currently stands at 97.4%, thus above the national average. The school has clear, sensitive strategies for following up absentees. Pupils behave very well and are confident and articulate. They know that they belong to a church school, explaining that a lot of what they do is because 'we are a Christian school.' They are aware too that 'you don't have to be a Christian to come to this school.' Parents appreciate the 'warmth' and inclusivity of the school and give examples of how the understanding of Christian values impacts their children's behaviour at home. Pupils can explain the school Christian values, linking them to biblical stories that they know, and how these help them both in and out of school. A number of pupils said 'there are fewer arguments at lunch time because we remind each other of the values of truthfulness and forgiveness'. There is a high degree of respect and understanding from all members of the school community towards those in the wider community from other world faith beliefs and non-religious backgrounds. The eight school council pupils take their elected role of making decisions on 'behalf of others' and being 'part of making the school better' very seriously. They understand their democratic role and how the school's Christian values impact their decision making. They enjoy leading the school with their charity choices and fund raising, for example the local foodbank, Children in Need and the Children's Society as well as the Bishop's 'Full of Beans' appeal. One of the outcomes of this is the development of pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith, which is now an action on the school development plan. Pupils value the way that teachers encourage them to 'take up the challenge' in all subjects. In the mixed Year 2 and 3 RE class, pupils were keen to respond to challenge when learning about the Christian belief of incarnation. Looking at pictures of a baby and of Jesus as a baby one Year 3 pupil was able to explain that Christians believe Jesus was the Son of God so he was different from other babies. Pupils visit the local church as part of their RE learning. Visits to other Christian denominational places of worship or to those representing a different faith are not part of pupils' RE experience.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The school community values, understands and expresses the importance of collective worship. Stakeholders describe how worship is a whole school gathering, attended by every pupil from Year 1 upwards and, on the majority of days, all members of staff. The practice of Reception children starting school with their own collective worship and then, over the year, joining the whole school enables these pupils to experience and become familiar with worship in a small group before worshipping with the whole school. Collective worship, which is now interactive and creative, takes place in the school hall or, once a week, in class rooms. It is planned by the rector and the senior leadership team (SLT) and expressed by pupils as 'a special' and 'important' part of their school day. Each term there is a whole school service in the church to which parents, along with members of the village and church community, attend in large numbers. Whilst this is led by the rector and chair of governors – who is also a diocesan reader – pupils say that they also look forward to, and enjoy, participating in prayer reading, organ playing and hand-bell ringing. Parents like the way in which the staff members read biblical passages and comment on how the service is a good way of connecting parents with the school and church. Data from a recent parent survey reveals the impact of collective worship on the school community showing that 100% of parents who responded, some being non-church goers, had attended an act of collective worship, either in school or in church. Since the previous inspection, evaluation of the impact of collective worship on the school community has been undertaken, recorded and reported by staff and governors and has led to successful restructuring of worship, particularly the use of prayer and reflection time. A Year 6 pupil keeps a worship log but as yet, does not evaluate. At this point pupils are not involved in planning or leading collective worship although older pupils take on the daily responsibility as technicians and stewards. School council pupils say that they would like to 'do some leading'. During weekly worship, with the rector and chair of governors, Year 6 pupils also light candles, read their own prayers and biblical texts. In this collective worship, pupils participate enthusiastically in an Anglican greeting and dismissal, the Lord's Prayer and an adaptation of the Living God's Love prayer. They say that they do this 'because we are a church

school.' The impact of a simply sung Kyrie is that pupils spontaneously suggest what they are thankful for, sorry for and wish to pray for. Pupils relate their suggestions to learnt Christian values of thankfulness, truthfulness and forgiveness. The arrival of the current rector, in 2014, has led to increased Anglicanism in worship although these key elements of Anglican worship are not yet embedded in each daily gathering. The impact of Christian values that are taught and lived-out across the school is evident when, towards the end of collective worship, pupils are invited to hold a short paired discussion, which they do calmly and thoughtfully, showing deep respect for one another. The headteacher leads the weekly Christian values assembly which includes teaching about the person of Jesus Christ. As a result, pupils express an age-appropriate understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God and the importance to Christians of Jesus. During the weekly singing worship, with the deputy head, pupils learn new and traditional hymns and Christian songs. Pupils are keen to share their singing with the wider community which receives positive feedback. Class worship often includes moments of stillness, reflection and personal prayer, which pupils enjoy. They can explain how these moments of quiet help them to concentrate and 'talk to God'. Major Christian festivals are celebrated and children show a good understanding of the church year, talking about the church 'seasons', relating them to the colours of the altar cloth and key events in the life of Jesus. On the day of the inspection, the rector led Year 2 pupils, with success, to 'freeze frame' the church year, recognising the life of Jesus Christ and culminating with Christ the King. Occasional visitors are invited to lead collective worship, the most recent being the Bishop of Hertford who clearly delighted in worshipping with the whole school.

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

The overriding impression of any visitor to this school is that it is a good church school in which there is a real sense of Christian belonging, identity and involvement which is promoted by all stakeholders. The link with the church and village community is recognised by all as very strong. Following his visit, the Bishop of Hertford wrote that he was 'hugely encouraged to see the warm links that exist between school and church'. Regular 'parent voice' responses reflect how parental involvement in the school continues to rise. Parents are welcomed in school and a very high percentage attends school events, including church services. The school's Christian ethos and practice has helped to break down a barrier for non-church families and they appreciate the added dimension to the church school family provided by the clergy. Since the reconstitution of the governing body there is now confidence, trust and respect between all stakeholders, underpinned by the Christian values held by the school which are shared by all. Governors attribute much of the recent improvements to the drive and commitment of the headteacher and deputy headteacher which has enabled them to become more active, rigorous and involved. They fully support the priority placed on developing the school's distinctive Christian character, which has increased significantly. Everyone in the school recognises these strengths, which have a positive impact on the pupils' spiritual development and outlook on life as well as progress and attainment. Collective worship and RE meet statutory requirements and, as with much of the curriculum, planning in these areas is informed by the school's Christian values. This contributes well to the good behaviour and attitudes of the pupils alongside their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Governors value their school visits, which have increased and now include curriculum learning walks. Formal feedback is recorded and discussed at full governing body meetings. This enables members to be better informed when making leadership decisions. Strategies for self-evaluation have been developed and the SIAMS document is now reviewed termly which means that leaders have a good understanding of the school's performance and Christian distinctiveness. Leaders ask challenging questions to each other, the headteacher and his team whilst at the same time showing much support and unification. Following a SIAMS 'health check' (June 2017), the school has addressed all areas identified as needing to be developed or strengthened. These are now either in place or stated as clear action plans for 2017-18. For this reason the success of some of these initiatives is not yet evident. All members of staff benefit from opportunities to attend diocesan and district meetings. Training in church school leadership has contributed to the SLT's deeper understanding and action to strengthen the school as a church school. The school is part of the 'small school group' and the headteacher values meeting with other local school leaders. Since joining the school the headteacher has trained for and been awarded his National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). This has made a positive impact on his leadership of the school. The RE coordinator has attended training to develop her subject leadership and knowledge which she has shared with her colleagues. Leaders and managers recognise that they are part of an exciting phase of the school's development in which they are raising expectations and bringing about significant improvement.

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