

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Caldecote Church of England Academy

Manor Place, Biggleswade, SG 18 9DA	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	July 2017
Name of multi-academy trust	Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust
Date of inspection	14 June 2018
Date of last inspection	12 February 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Academy 144010
Headteacher	Leigh Pointon
Inspector's name and number	Mel Adams NS 58

School context

Caldecote CE Academy, a smaller than average village school and nursery with 71 pupils on role, became an academy in July 2017. This followed an Ofsted inspection which judged the school inadequate. There has since been a number of interim headteachers and a large turnover of staff. Pupils are predominantly from White British backgrounds. A small number of pupils have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities [SEND] is below average. The number eligible for the pupil premium grant is below average. The substantive headteacher has been in post since April 2018.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Caldecote CE Academy as a Church of England school are good

- The Diocese of St Albans Multi Academy Trust [MAT] and the diocese have played a vital role in protecting and securing the future of the school as a church school.
- Through the tenacity and determination of the long-serving religious education [RE] leader, the school has sustained its Christian character through a period of considerable upheaval.
- Collective worship is central to the identity of the school as a church school through the clear promotion of Christian values.
- The support for collective worship provided by a range of local Christian churches and organisations has nourished the understanding of Christian faith and worship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural [SMSC] development.
- The vision and mission statement, recently reviewed under the leadership of the vicar, are well known and understood by staff and pupils and are supporting the ethos in which pupils know they can flourish.

Areas to improve

- Deepen understanding of Christian faith and worship throughout the school by school leaders and clergy working together to develop a clear theological understanding of the purpose of worship.
- Increase understanding of the newly devised vision by ensuring that it is underpinned by a clear and shared recognition of spirituality appropriate to a church school.
- Secure recent improvements by ensuring that school leaders establish systematic monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school's Christian character.

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

The values which are readily spoken about by staff and pupils are the same values which have sustained the Christian character of the school during a period of rapid change. Pupils at this school are quite clear that without their values, 'people would be mean, grumpy and sad'. They say that their school is a good place to learn because they have values. The extent to which they are embedded is unmistakable in the relationships within the school as staff and pupils naturally use them in their interactions. This is particularly powerful in giving pupils the vocabulary and concepts to speak of forgiveness when sorting out problems and disagreements. Pupils speak of how, because of this, they are able to learn well in school and concentrate in lessons. Evident in displays around the school, central to collective worship and RE, and apparent in other curriculum areas, Christian values permeate the school.

The school cares for and knows its pupils well and is working to secure improvements in progress throughout the school. A range of support is in place for a small number of pupils with low attendance. With significant mobility for a small proportion of pupils, the school ensures that when they are in school they make good progress. One parent expressed her gratitude for the welcome and care shown to her and her child.

Spiritual development is enhanced through prayer, including the school prayer. In collective worship and RE, times of reflection can lead to pupils expressing admiration, for example, of the awesomeness of the Christian creation story. Beyond the school, parents describe how their children use values at home, for example, speaking to a sibling to remind them to show respect. Amongst the staff there are a number of ways of describing spirituality; however, there is not a shared understanding of what this means in a church school.

SMSC development is nurtured through collective worship which challenges pupils to use their Christian values in relationships. This leads to good attitudes and behaviour, creating an ethos in which pupils are able to learn. SMSC development is also supported through learning in RE, where pupils develop an understanding that there are other faiths and different ways of worshipping. One of the youngest children is able to explain that to members of the Jewish faith the Torah is a 'special book'. Pupils are not clear about what worship means to those of different faiths. SMSC development is evident in other curriculum areas. For example, in an English lesson where pupils were able to debate ethical issues arising from their reading of 'The butterfly Lion' by Michael Morpurgo, or when speaking of perseverance and compassion in a PE session.

Strong partnerships with local churches who support leading of worship in school give pupils an understanding of the different ways in which Christians can worship. Enjoying hearing music and worship songs from different Christian traditions further extends this. This is further enriched by visits to different churches, sometimes for collective worship. More recently, a link to a school and church in Cambodia is giving pupils an understanding of the church in another country. Pupils describe enjoying finding out about how school life is similar as the children do lessons and say prayers like they do.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship has been strategic in providing an unbroken strand of continuity and in upholding and preserving the Christian ethos. Staff recognise it is as central to the identity of the school. It is the place where staff and pupils take time during the business of the day to be still and reflect on the Christian values which underpin the life of the school. One member of staff describes how this helps to connect her to her faith. Recalling learning about forgiveness from the parable of the Good Samaritan and compassion from the parable of the lost sheep, pupils articulate how they are inspired to show these values in their day to day friendships. They understand that these stories are from the Bible, and that they were told by Jesus 'to help people to understand about God'.

The lighting of three candles, greeting and inviting in the name of the Holy Trinity, creates a setting in which pupils participate with respect and dignity. Pupils of different faiths or no expressed faith listen attentively and respond to the stories, knowing that they can each follow the values for themselves. Pupils help to lead worship by lighting the candles, writing and reading prayers and singing heartily. Pupils enjoy singing a range of songs, with one pupil describing how sometimes they explain 'what Jesus came to do', for example, why he died on the cross. There is calm during times of reflection where they respectfully take time to think their own thoughts, 'sometimes about the story and sometime about the values'.

As pupils move through the school, understanding of the Christian belief in God as the Holy Trinity develops. One of the pupils is able to explain, 'God in heaven, who created the world, is the Father; Jesus his son came to earth and then left the Holy Spirit to help us.' Many key elements of worship are used, however, the theological understanding of the objective of worship is not clearly shared or understood. Staff work together to plan and lead worship through which pupils develop understanding of aspects of the church year. They use greetings such as 'peace be with you' and prayers such as the Lord's prayer. Festivals such as Easter and Christmas are celebrated in the parish church. Worship in school led by the vicar further supports their understanding.

A wide range of leaders from other Christian denominations and organisations including Methodist, Baptist, Churches Together, Open the Book and Scripture Union, further enhance the experience of daily worship. Pupils enjoy taking part in drama activities and events such as the Easter trail which they say really helps them to understand what the characters in the stories are going through. Work written from the perspective of Jesus revealed a deep understanding of the events of Holy Week.

Pupils speak of how worship helps them to understand more about Jesus. The pattern of worship across the week also includes a celebration assembly where children can receive a 'values leaf' for showing their values during the week. Pupils appreciate this and say that they are proud to be recognised. They also explain how they can give a leaf to an adult for demonstrating a value.

Spiritual and moral development is well supported, for example, remembering the Grenfell Tower tragedy anniversary and reflecting on how people are willing to help. From this, pupils thought about the compassion of Jesus, how he always helped people and how helping our neighbour can bring us closer to God. A pupil later describes how she was able to help a friend who was finding it difficult to keep running during the 'daily mile' run, 'by caring and showing compassion'.

Identified as an area for development in the previous SIAMS inspection, pupils' participation in leading acts of worship is developing. An example of this is where, during Advent, pupils explained the meaning of the Advent ring. On another occasion, Key Stage 2 pupils prepared and led worship on Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Pupils regularly write prayers which show their response to the values along with issues relevant to themselves, such as, 'I am going to be respectful to the world and not drop litter and waste water.'

Monitoring and evaluation of collective worship are not established, however, some discussions with pupils indicate that they enjoy worship and that it helps them to understand more about beliefs about God and what he does in peoples' lives. The importance of prayer is evident in the way it extends into the school day beyond the time of collective worship, with prayers at lunch time and at the end of the day. Prayers are also said at the start of staff meetings. Class reflection areas are used by pupils to write prayers. One pupil describes getting stuck with her work and how writing a prayer helped her.

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

'Learning to flourish through love and faith', the vision statement recently devised by the vicar and staff working together, is beginning to have an effect in the life of the school. One of the youngest children is able to describe how flourish means 'you learn and grow'. This vision also reflects the spirit with which the long serving RE leader has cherished and nurtured the Christian character of the school through the period of fracture and change. By tenaciously ensuring that daily collective worship has been maintained by working with local church leaders, she has ensured that the heart of the school's Christian character, defined through its Christian values, has remained strong. MAT and diocesan leaders have been unequivocal in their support of the school, providing continuity and challenge to support improvements, thereby protecting the school's future as a church school. The recently appointed headteacher describes how he has already seen the impact on pupils as they routinely use their values such as perseverance when they are supporting each other. Staff describe pupils speaking of 'doing the values because this is what Jesus wants'.

The diocese and MAT leaders have worked with the school to support regular monitoring and evaluation. The evaluation of Christian ethos and worship was an area of development from the previous inspection, but this is not systematically established amongst school leaders. The new headteacher has conducted an initial evaluation across the school, including of the Christian ethos and character, creating a development plan to support improvements in collective worship, the profile of Christian values and to support staff well-being. This has already improved the setting for worship and some staff resources.

Standards in the school are comparable with national expectations, but vary across cohorts which have small numbers of pupils. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs are below those of other pupils. The school has identified areas for development to support these pupils and improve progress.

Parents and grandparents enjoy going to church services with the school. They also support the school through fund raising 'so that we can improve things for the children', and though volunteering to listen to them read.

RE leaders and the vicar have been supported by the diocese, and have attended training which has led to improvements in the RE curriculum as well as the development of the vision. One of the RE leaders supports RE leaders in other schools. Statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are met. Leaders are tenacious, ensuring that these areas have a high profile in the school, securing their strategic impact in developing the Christian character of the school.