

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Primary School			
Address	London Road, Welwyn, Hertfordshire, AL6 9DJ		
Date of inspection	21 March 2019	Status of school	Voluntary Aided Primary
Diocese	St Albans	URN	117490

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Excellent
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Excellent
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Excellent

School context

Welwyn St Mary's is a primary school with 430 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly below national averages. Since the previous inspection, both the headteacher and deputy headteacher remain in post. There has been a restructuring of the senior leadership team to include additional assistant headteachers.

The school's Christian vision

Our vision, 'Believe and achieve' Matthew: 19 v.16-18, roots all our actions in the teaching of Jesus. By doing so we aspire to enable all pupils and adults to achieve and flourish in every dimension of their lives.

Key findings

- The refreshed, succinct and memorable school vision, builds successfully on the long established commitment by leaders to the school as a beacon of excellence for church school education within the locality. The associated values are deeply embedded and integral to all aspects of the school's work. They profoundly influence the lives of all within the school community.
- The Christian value of service shines through all areas of the school's work. Adults and pupils work unstintingly for the wellbeing and flourishing of others. Exceptional levels of team work result in skills and talents being harnessed so that all can experience success in personal and academic achievements.
- Pupils are enabled to become articulate advocates for change, confident and ready to challenge injustice and inequality. Rich and challenging curriculum opportunities develop global as well as local awareness of disadvantage and deprivation and inspire pupils to think of ways in which they can take positive action.
- Collective worship is inspirational and exemplary. It contributes richly to the strong sense of spiritual and moral development of pupils.
- Pupils are inspired and stimulated by religious education (RE). They recognise it as a challenging but safe space to explore their own and others' religious, spiritual and philosophical beliefs critically and openly.

Areas for development

- To continue to embed the chosen vision statement within key school policies, in order that all members of the school community gain an increased understanding of how practice is informed by the vision.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

In this school, one of Jesus' principal commandments, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', forms the foundation and cornerstone of the distinctively Christian vision. It is not only deeply embedded, infusing all decisions that leaders make, but it transforms lives within the school community. Deep wells of compassion and hope for all to succeed, through a belief in themselves and others, drives leaders. They model humility, self-sacrifice and the importance of putting others before self to enrich the lives of all. Policies reflect the vision and associated values but are implicit rather than explicit about the expected impact on practice. Values emanating from Jesus' teaching form the bedrock of interactions between adults and pupils. The question, 'What would Jesus do?' supports the basis for thinking through solutions and challenging complex dilemmas. Peer mediators use this approach to strengthen their skills in restorative justice. A sustained, highly effective diocesan partnership has resulted in the school being used as a centre of excellence. It has regularly hosted aspirant church school leaders and shared the innovative and inspirational practice with generosity. Highly effective and rigorous induction processes for new staff are in place. Newly appointed leaders are inspired, nurtured and guided into the outstanding church school ethos by the headteacher. Her daily modelling of the Christian vision and values is clear for all to see. This, coupled with excellent professional development for staff and governors, ensure that the exceptional church school distinctiveness is maintained and developed.

'Believe and Achieve' encapsulates leaders' vision and aspirations for all to succeed. Pupils' outcomes are high, well above national averages. Pupils flourish in an environment where belief in oneself and others' ability to succeed is encouraged and expected. Disadvantaged pupils and the vast majority of those with special educational needs make rapid progress. At times this is above that achieved by peers nationally. Pupils are exceptionally keen to learn. This leads to outstanding behaviour and above average attendance. A creative and challenging curriculum provides countless opportunities to learn through an enquiry based approach. Pupils exude confidence in their learning. They are undaunted by asking questions around big issues. Debates and discussions around spiritual and ethical issues are a strong element of teaching and learning time. This has included the rights of women, climate change and pollution of the natural world. RE makes an excellent contribution to spiritual development, when pupils wrestle with questions such as, 'Creation and science: conflicting or complementary?'

The outstanding pioneering work that the school has trialled in developing character education has been recognised. School leaders were invited to speak at both regional and national conferences on this theme. The pupils' 'Believe and Achieve' video on the website emphasises pupils' understanding of the importance of building perseverance and resilience levels to keep going through challenging times. Compassion and a strong sense of challenging injustice and unfairness are developed through the link with a Tanzanian sponsored child. Pupils are determined through fundraising to improve and transform lives. Support for vulnerable people inspires letters to the local council about improving provision for the homeless. Speakers are invited in to inform about the local food bank provision and homeless shelters, leading to generosity of pupils' time, talents and money to improve and support provision.

The strong link, through the vision statement to 'love your neighbour as yourself', centres all the school's response to behaviour on the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. Year 6 pupils wrestled in their RE lesson with a range of scenarios of 'What can you forgive?' They challenged their immediate responses with the teachings of Jesus and learnt a great deal through this of what Christians believe about the nature of God. 'He is perfect love and able to forgive. His understanding is above all humans.' Pupils and adults flourish through exceptionally wise choices that leaders make. These enable prioritisation of nurturing, growing, and learning through mistakes. The sustained high levels of teamwork and embracing of both vision and values promote positivity and encouragement within all relationships.

Absolute commitment and belief by leaders that all can succeed and achieve enables pupils, including those with vulnerabilities and disadvantages, to flourish. They do this within a truly hospitable and inclusive community, where each child is known and loved as uniquely special and loved by God. Bold curriculum decisions are made so that issues around diversity and difference are addressed and pupils given opportunities to express their views safely within a supportive and non-prejudicial environment.

Collective worship is an impressive expression of all that the school community stands for – inclusivity, excellence of experiences and inspiration to be the best that you can be. It reinforces the community’s belief that service to others can make profound and meaningful differences to people’s lives. Pupils and adults value the opportunities it presents to grow in faith, quietly reflect and offer prayers to God. Sustained, high quality partnerships with the rector and members of the church congregation enrich and deepen the worship experience. Through opportunities such as the popular ‘Questions to God’ and the challenging of their biblical knowledge, pupils grow in confidence and understanding. Pupils’ understanding of the importance of worship to Christians is deepened through being part of the worship group. They appreciate that using Anglican liturgical phrases gives worship shape and structure. Excellent music provision through the choir and a range of modern and traditional hymns transforms worship. There is a strong sense of offering to God your very best endeavours. This could be through using drama to aid understanding or prayers to express deepest thoughts and hopes. Rich and varied opportunities to write and share prayers contribute hugely to pupils’ spiritual development.

Curriculum planning for RE is exemplary. Pupils’ enthusiastic and positive attitudes towards the different world faiths are the outcome of leaders who are passionate about RE as an academic subject. Substantial and high quality links are made to embedding the school’s vision through respect and listening carefully to other points of view. Pupils demonstrate confidence and the ability to delve deeper into religious texts. This knowledge and understanding is sharpened by excellent opportunities to critically reflect on their own beliefs and philosophies. The outstanding practice in RE is willingly and generously shared with other diocesan schools. Sustained high quality RE staff training has produced confident, engaged practitioners who maximise opportunities for developing respectful and informed viewpoints.



The effectiveness of RE is Excellent

RE teaching and learning are of an exceptionally high standard. This is due to excellent subject knowledge and a passion and belief in the contribution that RE makes to the shaping of young lives. Regular training, followed by systematic monitoring, enables teachers to plan thoroughly, teach inspirationally, developing in pupils a deep love of the subject. Based on data available at the inspection, pupils’ attainment and progress are at least good and frequently better. Significant percentages of pupils are exceeding age related expectations based on expectations from national schemes of work such as Understanding Christianity and local diocesan units. Standards are at least in line with those achieved in English. This includes pupils with special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils. The school is committed to ensuring that vulnerable pupils thrive through the provision of additional support and work adapted to specific learning styles.

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