

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

The Thomas Coram Church of England School				
Address	Swing Gate Lane, Berkhamsted HP4 2RP			
Date of inspection	22 November 2019	Status of school	Voluntary Aided Junior	
Diocese	St. Albans	URN	117559	

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

### School context

The Thomas Coram school is a Junior school with 379 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 below national averages. Since the previous SIAMS inspection, the school has federated with an infant and nursery school, forming the Castle Federation. With the exception of the executive headteacher and head of school, the majority of staff have been appointed during the same period.

### The school's Christian vision

Our vision is for everyone to be flourishing in learning and love within a happy, Christian family. 'Do everything in love' (1 Corinthians 16:14) underpins this. Christian values are at the heart of our vision, with our core values being Respect, Responsibility and Friendship.

### Key findings

- The deeply spiritual and inspirational leadership of the executive headteacher ensures that the school vision and values unequivocally set the direction and steer the work of school leaders and governors. This results in an ethos which day to day embraces and values every individual.
- The daily act of worship is without doubt the heartbeat of the school, as the messages reach into the whole school community where they are lived out day by day.
- Inclusivity is powerfully embraced through an exceptional ethos in which the importance of each one is being valued as a child of God. This enables pupils to not only recognise, but also to welcome and speak up for diversity.
- Working together with clergy from St Peter's and other local churches adds variety and richness to the experiences of collective worship and understanding of Christianity.
- Religious education is beginning to provide a more coherent understanding of Christianity and different faiths.

### Areas for development

- Establish a clear, shared understanding of spirituality as a Church of England school in order to deepen spiritual development.
- Increase pupils' understanding of social justice and deprivation by building on the recent examples of courageous advocacy.
- Consolidate learning in religious education [RE] by ensuring that learning tasks are consistently designed to show theological understanding.

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**

Christian vision and values permeate the life of the school. This is immediately evident in the consistency and readiness with which pupils, staff, parents and governors express how they genuinely support 'everyone to be flourishing in learning and love within a happy, Christian family'. The executive headteacher describes the teaching of Jesus, 'care for one another as I have cared for you,' being the inspiration and motivation to use the talents in the school to support the development of the federation. School leaders and governors, through exemplary leadership, have embraced and nurtured the new partnership and, with shared vision, staff and pupils in both settings are thriving.

One governor explains how the vision and its biblical foundation is the lens through which they see their work as leaders. This features throughout meetings and is intrinsic to decision making, ensuring that staff and pupils are supported and resourced to enable them all to flourish. Governors have a strong understanding of the school's distinctiveness as a church school through regular visits, for example, the RE link governor supporting improvements including the use of Bible stories in worship. Pupils are admitted from two local schools and represent the diversity of the local community. Pupils want to come to school and attendance is good.

The powerhouse of the day to day life of the school is clearly the daily act of worship. It is placed strategically at the centre of the day and described by both adults and children as a place of calm and quiet apart from the busy life of the school. School leaders rightly describe it as the heartbeat of the school. This is because from this distinctly Christian and uniquely inclusive setting, the vision and values are made alive and relevant and then lived out by all who learn and work together. Spiritual and moral development is consequently very strong.

Teachers have received training which enables them to support pupils to lead with an understanding of Christian worship, making it relevant to their peers. A Year 5 class led worship on the theme of compassion creatively and imaginatively, showing how the story about Jesus and a sick person can apply to their own lives. Other pupils subsequently spoke of how they recognise times when they have shown compassion, but also how they have failed to do so. Worship is open to those of different faiths or no faith through invitational 'time to think, time to pray'. One pupil describes how, 'You can agree or not, but it makes you think.' Another explains how it makes her think about God's love and 'Should I do what Jesus does, do I want to be a good person?' Pupils appreciate dedicated reflection areas in classrooms and the prayer garden which they use at different times. The day always ends with a class prayer.

Partnership with the church is strong. Working together with the local churches, a range of clergy and church workers lead worship weekly in school. At the end of each term, school worship is held in St. Peter's church, increasing understanding of Christian worship.

Weekly bulletins from the school provide information about the content of worship. As a result parents recognise the understanding their children demonstrate, particularly about their values and behaviour. A number of parents describe how this has led their children to take action where they have recognised a need. Examples of this have led to support for charities or speaking up for the vulnerable.

The ultimate worth of each child is rooted in the belief that each one is created in the image of God. This results in a curriculum and approaches to learning and pastoral support which focus on each individual child. Consequently, pupils feel secure and valued, behave well and make good progress. This nurtures pupils who are confident to speak not only about their strengths, but also about their challenges, such as needing to control their emotions, or learning to stay on their chair.

The ethos of welcome and inclusivity is profound within what pupils describe as the Thomas Coram family. One pupil explains, 'It's fine to be different, we're all people, we respect each other no matter what.' In this accepting family setting, pupils demonstrate exceptional confidence in speaking both for themselves and for others as illustrated by a pupil requesting to organise a book sale for hurricane victims. He subsequently wrote how they had raised enough 'to buy 6 cooking sets for families without power'. Others show great courage in their advocacy, where pupils with a range of special educational needs, speak about how this affects their day to day lives, drawing support and admiration from their peers. Remarkably, this has proved to be an inspiration to pupils with similar needs within the school and beyond. A range of charities are regularly supported including DENS, a local charity providing support for the homeless and a food bank.

School leaders and governors show commitment to health and wellbeing of both pupils and staff. They ensure that staff receive support and professional development to carry out their responsibilities. Partnership with the Diocese is highly valued resulting in greatly appreciated training and support, including the development of the

RE curriculum. The executive headteacher supports other schools, including Diocesan schools. Partnerships with local schools are effective in sharing good practice and leadership support, including for the RE leader.

New scheme materials for RE are leading to systematic learning about Christianity and different faiths, with progression from one year group to another. Evaluations have found teacher confidence has also greatly improved. As a result, standards have risen and the areas for improvement from the previous SIAMS inspection have been addressed. Consequently, pupils are deepening their knowledge and theological understanding and confident to talk about their learning. For example, describing the Holy Trinity, one child explains how God the Father sent Jesus to show the world God's love and how 'the Holy Spirit is here to help us'. Pupils record their learning, often in creative ways such as designing a tryptic to illustrate understanding of holiness, love and forgiveness. However, this is less effective where the task does not enable them to express fully their religious understanding. Spiritual development is evident, as in a prayer where the pupil wrote, 'Help me to make our world more like heaven.' Pupils enjoy learning about different faiths and describe how these can often share the values held by the school.

Pupils speak enthusiastically about Thomas Coram after whom the school is named and how his values, in line with their school vision and values, still inspire them today. They speak of his perseverance and resilience in his work with the poor. One pupil describes how this led him to become an eco-warrior, saying, 'It makes you feel you can make a difference.' Another, motivated to be a peer mediator, speaks of the need for justice and forgiveness.



**The effectiveness of RE is Good**

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good because all pupils, including those who have special educational needs, learn well and make good progress. This is as a result of confident teaching by all class teachers who have been supported through training in school and, in some cases, through the Diocese. Improvements are led by the RE leader working with the former RE leader. Their monitoring, as part of the ongoing programme within the school, is supporting the improvement in standards.

Executive Headteacher Head of School	Rob Halls Jackie Cutler
Inspector's name and number	Mel Adams NS 58