

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John's Church of England Primary School	
School Lane, Crowborough, East Sussex, TN6 1SD	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chichester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	East Sussex
Date of inspection	7 February 2017
Date of last inspection	21 June 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	VA Primary 114549
Headteacher	Laura Cooper
Inspector's name and number	Hilary Ferries 276

School context

St John's CE Primary is a one form entry Church of England Aided School, just outside the town of Crowborough. It has a smaller than national proportion of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium, with special educational needs or with English as an additional language. The headteacher has been in post for 13 years. The priest in charge has been in the parish for one year. The school was judged to be good by Ofsted in February 2016. There has been a significant turnover of governors since the last SIAMS inspection. The new church hall opened recently.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's CE Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Committed and enthusiastic leadership of the school that drives all areas of church school improvement through the Christian values.
- Excellent relationships based on the Christian values that lead to a positive and supportive learning environment which enables all to succeed.
- High quality self-evaluation that enables the school to know itself well and continually improve as a church school.
- The open approach to and celebration of the Christian nature of the school.
- Outstanding spiritual development that contributes to the high level of reflection and discussion.

Areas to improve

- Develop the links between the school community and the church community to enable them to grow in support and encouragement for each other to further develop the Christian community.

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

St John's mission is to 'educate the mind, body heart and soul of every child that comes here...by offering each child an exciting, challenging and stimulating education during their time with us based on the Christian values of Wonder, Excellence, Love and Forgiveness'. All members of the school community articulate these values and this commitment to the care and development of every aspect of the child, through the mission, results in high attainment and progress for all pupils, including vulnerable groups. The mission and the Christian values, known as 'wonder-elf', permeate life at St John's. They were recently refreshed after discussion with stakeholders and are displayed everywhere, although as one pupil said, 'the values are not the posters, they are in the people that make the school'. Parents and pupils talk about the importance of the values to them and the difference they make to their lives. One parent said, 'they teach the values I want my child to have and in a really nice way'. The Christian character is also evident in the deeply caring and excellent relationships in the school community. One example of this is the buddy system. All reception pupils have a buddy who writes to them before they start school, plays and reads with them when they start school and has opportunities to work with them in planned activities throughout the years. The buddy relationship carries on all through school and often beyond. Pupils speak of the benefits of having a buddy and also look forward to being a buddy when they are older. This strengthens the sense of a school family and brings the values alive.

Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. They are woven throughout the curriculum and into school life so pupils have a strong sense of how they are expected to behave, can support others and show respect to all. The behaviour policy is based on the values of forgiveness and love and members of the school community talked about the effectiveness of this and the outstanding behaviour in school, which was observed during the inspection. The reflection journals and 'big questions' in every class enable pupils to respond to a variety of issues and they display a high level of reflection and spirituality. Displays around the school celebrate the Christian character of the school, including Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith and pupils speak confidently about this. The religious education (RE), which is taught in a creative and imaginative way, contributes well to their understanding of Christianity and other world religions.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is of central importance to the school community. One pupil described it as an 'opportunity to get together to reflect on God, Jesus and our values'. Well planned themes, based on the church year and the school values, provide a strong basis for pupils to learn about the Anglican tradition and the biblical base of the Christian values and to relate these to their lives. The priest in charge leads worship weekly at the church and links the themes to the teaching of Jesus and the church year, which supports pupils' understanding. He has worked with the school leadership to widen and deepen worship and link it effectively to Anglican traditions. Pupils talk confidently about the major festivals and the different services that are held to celebrate them. 'Assembly homework' and take away tasks from worship, give pupils the opportunity to reflect on and respond to the messages personally and explore a little deeper with their families. Pupils value these opportunities and often respond with the impact that the worship session has made on their lives, whether by writing prayers or through personal reflection. Having different leaders of worship, such as Rainbow Theatre and local ministers, as well as members of staff, gives them different experiences and viewpoints and contributes to their understanding of the Christian faith. The priest in charge also comes into school to read Bible stories to Reception class and year one which increases pupils' familiarity with the Bible. This further supports the link with the church and parents and staff welcome this

An area for development from the last inspection was for pupils to plan and lead worship regularly and this has been addressed well. Year six lead worship for their houses and year five use the structure from 'Flipping Praise' to plan their worship sessions. Pupils evaluate the worship they have led to identify how they can improve it further. Their evaluations include the pupil response to their talks as well as of their own leadership and several pupils have said that it has made a difference to their confidence and understanding. Pupils have been introduced to the Trinity through a range of innovative ways and analogies and were keen to talk about these.

There are close and growing links with the church congregation. Parents are invited and welcomed to the weekly school worship held at church and to the weekly church Mass for the school and parents interviewed were very supportive of this. The recent opening of the new church hall has meant that the congregation no longer meet for coffee and hold their events in the school hall and so there is a plan in place to build closer relationships between the church and school.

Prayer is very much part of the school day and as a result, pupils talk about this in a very natural and open way. Prayer corners and reflection areas in every class are well used by pupils to have quiet times and to respond to big questions. Prayers are said in school before lunch and before going home and the pupil surveys show the importance to them. One pupil wrote 'you are never alone when you pray to God'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Religious education (RE) is treated as a core subject by the school leadership and pupils display a high level of engagement, understanding of beliefs and knowledge of world faiths. Excellent teaching and an exciting and dynamic RE curriculum provide outstanding opportunities for development and pupils say how much they enjoy the wide range of experiences the curriculum provides. One example, seen during the inspection was year 6 learning about prayer in the Mandir through the use of artefacts and discussion. This is based on the East Sussex curriculum with elements from a scheme of work from another diocese and reflects the Church of England national requirements. Visitors also lead RE sessions, such as 'Walk through the Bible' which contributes well to pupils' knowledge and understanding. Their responses and written work in RE are carefully assessed and tracked so next steps for learning can be planned to address any misconceptions and there is very good progress for all groups of pupils. Specialist teaching in key stage two means that there is strong subject knowledge. Pupils say 'it helps us understand why we do things' and they apply what they learn to their experience. The positive relationships and culture of respect for all in the classrooms mean that pupils can share and develop their views. Pupils are keen to contribute to discussions: they take time to think and the open response from the teachers allows them to explore the themes in depth. One pupil said, 'you can write what you think; there is no right or wrong.'

The headteacher is also the RE subject leader and she ensures the subject is given high status. A clear action plan for the subject is part of the school development plan and keeps the focus on the subject. She carries out a thorough review of the teaching and learning and achievement of the pupils each year which informs the plan. She then monitors through the year to ensure that the plan is being followed. This supports the view of RE as a core subject. In addition to RE lessons, all pupils have a reflection journal which contributes effectively to their RE learning. The journals also link the school Christian values to their reflections and there are examples of opportunities for social, moral and cultural development within the themes of the journals. One pupil said 'RE helps me with reflection.'

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

The headteacher and governors articulate, promote and celebrate a clear Christian vision, 'to educate the mind, body heart and soul of every child that comes here'. This is lived by all to create a deeply caring and supportive community. Parents, pupils, staff and governors can talk about what makes their school special, through 'Wonder-elf' - the Christian values of Wonder, Excellence, Love and Forgiveness. The leadership of the headteacher as RE and collective worship leader gives the elements of church school distinctiveness a very high profile and she ensures they are constantly improving and developing. She is also empowering and growing other leaders in the school so that the staff are growing in confidence and knowledge. Arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.

There have been significant changes in the governing body membership since the last inspection and the recently appointed governors have worked hard to ensure they fulfil their role well. They are involved in the life of the school, both in the everyday, through volunteering and supporting and through membership of the ethos committee, which keeps the school as a church school under constant review. Members of this committee regularly monitor and evaluate the school as a church school. They listen to pupil voice, attend collective worship, carry out learning walks with the headteacher and scrutinise the tracking for RE. As a result, they know their school well and are able to support and challenge the headteacher in all dimensions of the school as a church school. They have addressed the issue from the last inspection to monitor RE more fully and talk confidently about the RE curriculum and pupil progress. They review their own performance as governors and ensure that they are driving forward the effectiveness of the school as church school. The school development plan has elements of church school distinctiveness and effectiveness woven through it, which enables leaders to plan strategically for all aspects of school improvement and reflects the mission of the school.

Relationships with parents are strong. They are supportive of the Christian values and ethos of the school, welcoming the open approach from the school leadership. The parish church is next door to the school and there are growing relationships between them, through shared worship and events open to all. This has been identified as an area for development and actions are already in place, although it is early days to evaluate the impact. The headteacher is part of the East Sussex SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) and has contributed to recent developments in the subject, using her expertise to support others.