

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St. John's Church of England First School

Whiteoaks Drive Bishops Wood Stafford ST19 9AH

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Lichfield
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	1 April 2018
Name of multi-academy trust	Penk Valley Multi Academy Trust
Date of inspection	28 June 2018
Date of last inspection	13 June 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Academy 145380
Headteacher	Emma Challiner
Inspector's name and number	Reverend Alison M. Morris 759

School context

This is a smaller than average sized first school which has 80 pupils on roll. It serves the village of Bishopswood and its surrounding areas. All pupils are taught in mixed age classes. Pupils are mainly White British with a small number from ethnic groups. The number of pupils supported for special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) is small, as are those who benefit from pupil premium funding. There have been many staff changes since the last inspection. The school became part of the Penk Valley Academy Trust in April 2018.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. John's as a Church of England school are good

- The headteacher has established a sense of stability and calm which is bringing about a wide range of improvements based around Christian distinctiveness, values and spiritual development.
- The Christian belief in the value of each individual is demonstrated through purposeful and effective pastoral care and high expectations that are improving engagement with learning.
- Improved relationships due to a strengthening Christian ethos, are creating a unified sense of purpose as the school continues its journey of development.

Areas to improve

- Build further on existing aims and values to develop a clearer vision based explicitly on biblical teaching, that will inform aspirations, decisions and actions within the governance structure of the academy trust.
- Broaden the experience and understanding by pupils of different traditions within the Anglican community and the diverse multi-faith society in which pupils live.
- Ensure that governors undertake appropriate training which will support them in their duties and responsibilities to be effective critical friends for church school development and particularly the impact of collective worship on pupils' spiritual development.

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

Through the faithfulness and determination of the new headteacher, Christian distinctiveness, character and ethos is apparent and is being embedded into all aspects of school life. The motto 'Where everybody is somebody special' reinforces that all pupils are unique at this Christian school. Supported by foundation trustees, staff and the diocese, the headteacher is developing a Christian vision to further enhance the school's Christian distinctiveness. Core Christian values such as trust, respect and love are rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. This is promoted by all staff on a daily basis and is very effectively raising the awareness of the Christian ethos with pupils, parents and visitors. This has a significant impact upon pupils' lives. Both pupils and their parents are starting to recognise a distinctively Christian dimension in the school that is making a difference to their learning and personal development. This is fostering a happy, safe and inclusive atmosphere in which pupils are starting to enjoy learning and to achieve well. This is a significant step forward for this school.

Christian values drive a commitment to meet the holistic needs of each child. Good pastoral care and welfare underpin the school's approach to personal and academic development. Pupils benefit from a safe and nurturing environment where pupils have high expectations. Individual, personalised learning is possible due to the small numbers in this school. Pupils are treated with dignity and they are valued. Enthusiastic and dedicated staff model core Christian values and have high expectations which enhance pupils' learning. As a result, attainment at Foundation stage is above local and national standards while year 4 pupils are working at age related expectations. Effective personal support through the HOPE project ensures that pupils, including the most able and pupils with special educational needs, are making progress.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is being promoted in religious education (RE) as well as in other lessons and collective worship. It is being nourished and challenged by engagement with Christian values. Although staff identify opportunities for pupils to improve their understanding of SMSC, leaders are aware that the impact is inconsistent. Pupils can explain well what it means to be a pupil at a church school and make the link to Christian teaching in the Bible.

Improved religious education (RE) provision makes a good contribution to Christian distinctiveness. It also contributes to SMSC development, as belief matters in this school. Pupils enjoy RE and are challenged by creative learning activities, imaginative topic work and the activities of the 'Young Disciples' club. Most pupils are aware that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith. They have some understanding and awareness of other faiths through visits to places of worship such as to a gurdwara. However, the school has identified that pupils need to encounter the lifestyles and cultures of different faiths in order to broaden their understanding of a diverse society.

Standards of behaviour are very good due to a learning environment which promotes a clear understanding of right and wrong underpinned by Christian values. Positive attitudes to learning by pupils are promoted well within this caring Christian environment. A creative curriculum, blended with some multi-faith enrichment, motivates pupils to attend regularly because pupils say they enjoy what they learn in school. As a result of pupils' keenness to do well and good pastoral care, attendance is very good. An effective school council allows the pupils' voice to contribute to decision making. Pupils are courteous, happy and feel safe with a developing sense of self-awareness through the use of leadership responsibilities for pupils such as worship monitor. They participate in service to the wider community through fundraising and charitable giving. For example, donations to the Christmas Shoe Box Appeal show pupils' attempts to put the school's values into practice. It also raises their understanding of global issues.

Creative displays of Christian values, religious artefacts and symbols in the entrance hall express the school's Christian distinctiveness and encourage discussion. Classrooms have developed Christian focus areas and quiet reflective spaces. These, when used for prayer and reflection, make a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual development. The peaceful, stable and purposeful atmosphere in school is promoting a learning environment which reflects the school's aspirational commitment to improve the achievement of all and encourage them to use their God given talents.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is important and forms the main part of the school's Christian distinctiveness. It evokes a sense of gathering within a spiritual atmosphere. Worship uses a biblical approach which has a focus on the person of Jesus Christ and a developing understanding of the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As a result, older pupils show some understanding of the Trinity.

Worship is valued and makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development. It is structured and includes gathering and sending out prayers, readings and song. Through its moral messages, worship is a positive experience for most pupils and affirms and influences their actions and behaviour. Pupils have good attitudes to worship because the thematic approach relates to their own experiences and effectively meets their needs. As a result, they are actively engaged throughout in prayer and fellowship. Pupils are keen to be involved and to sing enthusiastically. They speak positively about worship and its impact upon their lives. It encourages pupils to reflect upon their relationships

and to explore how they relate to and respect each other. One pupil said, 'Everyone can be just as they are in this school.' Their understanding of worship is enriched through the use of visual images, symbols, lighted candles and liturgical colours which evoke an atmosphere of God's presence and a sense of belonging for pupils. A greater sense of spirituality is enhanced through quiet moments which are built into worship to allow pupils to be still and reflect.

Worship is well planned using the Roots and Fruits resource. It follows the liturgical calendar combined with threads of Christian values and beliefs taken from biblical material. Pupil led worship is being developed through class worship. Pupils' knowledge of Bible stories demonstrates the increasing impact that worship has upon their understanding. It also inspires pupils to confidently speak about Jesus's teaching and how it impacts on their lives. For example, one pupil confidently said, 'I follow Him, that makes me a better Christian'.

Key Christian celebrations such as Harvest, Christingle, and Easter take place in St. John's church which nurtures a very substantial spiritual link between the church and school. These occasions embed pupils' understanding of Christian belief, Anglican traditions and practice. These have successfully addressed a focus from the last inspection.

Prayer and reflection are integral parts of daily worship which foster spirituality and allow those who want to, to explore a relationship with God. This encourages a high level of pupils' personal spirituality which is enhanced by regular use of the 'Peaceful Place' and the 'Memory Garden'. Planned and spontaneous prayer also takes place in the reflection areas which exist within the limited space of the school. Appropriate use by pupils of these areas demonstrates their understanding of the purpose of prayer and provides time to express and foster faith beyond collective worship. Pupils regularly write their own prayers and use a prayer box and a prayer bag to take home. Parents say this encourages discussion at home. Pupils regularly use familiar prayers such as The Lord's Prayer and show some understanding of its meaning.

The informal ways in which the impact of worship is evaluated are not yet effective enough to inform future planning. Foundation trustees are aware of this and are eager to ensure that worship continues to develop in ways that are relevant to pupils' lives and their personal spiritual development.

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

Despite the challenges, the headteacher has brought a sense of calmness and stability to this church school. Working in partnership with the diocese and Penk Valley Academy Trust there are signs of school improvement which are impacting positively upon the life of this church school. School leaders have worked to promote and embed the Christian distinctiveness, vision and values through a caring family approach. This is being lived out in many aspects of school life. The school acknowledges that the vision needs further clarity and embodiment of Christian character which is vital to the sustenance of this school. However, the monitoring and evaluating the Christian church school development is limited in impact due to an informal approach which lacks precision.

Foundation trustees are very supportive of the headteacher's leadership but recognise the need for a more rigorous approach to the strategic drive for overall school improvement. Foundation trustees have realised the need to clarify their roles and responsibilities in this respect and change the process. They show their capacity to undertake some effective self-evaluation and develop strategic support. Effective support from the trust is emerging to ensure that the foundation trustees act as critical friends and operate strategically to monitor and evaluate the school's continuing improvement. Through increasing self-awareness, staff and governors reflect an honest and challenging view of the school's future development needs. Plans are in place for the training of all staff and governors on school improvement. This is strengthening the capacity to be more effective. Both change and improvement look sustainable.

Statutory requirements for both RE and collective worship are met. Both areas are well led, conveying enthusiasm to staff and pupils. The Staffordshire RE syllabus provides an effective learning scheme which fosters deep respect for Christian values and beliefs whilst also developing an understanding of other faiths. RE has a high priority in the curriculum but the school has identified the need to integrate the 'Understanding Christianity' resource. School evaluation of RE is being developed by school leaders.

Partnerships are developing well with the diocese, church and local community. Close links with the church, its members and the vicar, nurture the spiritual link and have a very positive impact on the school's Christian distinctiveness. For example, church members lead worship, hear pupils read and visit RE lessons to regularly talk about their faith journey. Very effective relationships exist between parents and the school which is seen in the extensive work and support of the St. John's Supporters which is mutually beneficial to all.

St. John's is a welcoming school where all members of the community feel valued. Parents appreciate the stability provided by the school's leadership and the positive impact this is having on their children's education. They are now confident about the future of this school. A sense of community exists because of the improved and positive relationships between staff, pupils and parents. This is promoting a positive image of the school more widely.