

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

### St John's Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

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|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| <b>Address</b>            | Lemsford Village, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 7TR |                         |            |
| <b>Date of inspection</b> | 23 May 2019                                                  | <b>Status of school</b> | VA primary |
| <b>Diocese</b>            | St Albans                                                    | <b>URN</b>              | 117435     |

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                     |              |             |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| <b>Overall Judgement</b>     | <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> | <b>Grade</b> | <b>Good</b> |
| <b>Additional Judgements</b> | <b>The impact of collective worship</b>                                                                                                                             | <b>Grade</b> | <b>Good</b> |
|                              | <b>The effectiveness of religious education (RE)</b>                                                                                                                | <b>Grade</b> | <b>Good</b> |

#### School context

St John's is a primary school with 103 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 above national averages. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2018 following the retirement of a long serving senior leader. An Ofsted short inspection in March 2018 found that the school continues to be good.

#### The school's Christian vision

"I came that they may have LIFE and have it abundantly." John 10:10 ...

#### Key findings

- The exceptionally strong and dynamic leadership of the headteacher has created a vibrant, deeply Christian learning community in which every member flourishes and knows that they are valued.
- The school's evolving Christian vision and values contribute to pupils' excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to life. This good practice is not woven through policies or publicised on the school website to ensure future sustainability.
- High levels of modelling, nurturing and supporting by both adults and children result in rapid progress, mutual appreciation and valuing of each individual's contribution to the life and success of the school.
- Extremely strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with the church, diocese and local Church schools contribute significantly to the school's distinctive Christian character. They impact positively on the spiritual life of all members of the school family.
- Weaknesses in governor monitoring of religious education (RE) and collective worship have limited the impact of improvements to provision and restricted knowledge and understanding of the good practice in place. Outcomes in RE are not consistent across the school.

#### Areas for development

- Embed the chosen vision statement within key school policies, referencing the Church of England vision and associated documents. In this way all members of the school community and prospective parents are able to gain an increased understanding of how practice is informed by the vision.
- Develop the school website to reflect and celebrate the good practice currently found within the school in all aspects of church school distinctiveness.
- Strengthen governor monitoring of collective worship and RE, so that it is more sustained and the impact fed back to full governing body meetings in order to inform and develop provision.
- Increase the consistency of RE outcomes across the school, so that the high quality challenge and opportunities for reflective and critical thinking seen during the inspection, are available to all pupils.

**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**

Pupils and adults flourish through high levels of commitment and determination by the headteacher and staff to the chosen evolving distinctively Christian vision. Although leaders are aware of current thinking and documentation from the Church of England education office, this has not been fully utilised to shape school policies or inform website content. For example, the stunningly high quality displays around church school distinctiveness, spiritual development and collective worship are not promoted or shared. Effective development plans continue to raise the quality of provision in both RE and collective worship. The school improvement committee ably supports school leaders in challenging these plans and cascading to other governors. Practices are improved and developed by productive partnerships with other Church schools, the diocese and a local group of RE teachers. Leaders gain spiritual as well as professional inspiration from attending diocesan services at St Alban's Abbey and training events. Good attention is given to nurturing future Church school leaders through diocesan leadership activities. Previous SIAMS inspection recommendations have been successfully addressed.

High quality curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities enable pupils to flourish through each one being known and valued as unique and special to God, with their own set of talents and skills. Parents describe staff as being 'passionate about every child's right to experience success'. Pupils' overall academic achievement is exceptionally high. Recent advice for Year 6 pupils to rest and relax the weekend before formal testing began emphasises the school's concern for pupils' wellbeing. Attendance is above national averages. Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, as well as the more vulnerable pupils, make good progress over time. Vulnerable pupils' self-esteem and rates of academic progress have been boosted by a bi-weekly nurture club and additional classroom support, enabling them to flourish. Spiritual development is strong, promoted through the chosen values, opportunities for prayer and reflection and through a curriculum which very much challenges thinking across a range of spiritual and ethical issues. Both RE and collective worship are significant contributors to pupils' developing spirituality through an enquiry based approach.

Pupils thrive within a culture which encourages all to be the best that they can. The school's focus on leadership qualities and character development has resulted in ex-pupils being appointed to secondary head student positions. Resilience and perseverance are epitomised by performance at sporting events, with pupils working as a team and demonstrating the highest levels of sportsmanship. A carefully audited curriculum offers many opportunities for pupils to think globally. Charities such as 'Spotlight on Africa' build pupils' awareness of disadvantage in poorer parts of Uganda. This has resulted in pupils' fundraising following charity workers' visits. Pupils have donated willingly to 'Foodbank Friday' and some have visited the foodbank. Older pupils' understanding of how to make appropriate provision during school visits for people living with dementia has been supported through a local elderly care organisation. Opportunities for courageous advocacy have been demonstrated through challenging a supermarket chain on their continued practice of single use plastic and ensuring that the local fete prioritises recycling.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Pupil buddies, worship leaders and eco-councillors support development of a sense of responsibility for others and a self-giving approach ensuring that skills and talents are utilised for the mutual good. Policies do not reflect the good practice found within the school, particularly around the generosity of forgiveness and the importance of reconciliatory practices. Mental health provision is a high priority for school leaders. This is reflected in a compassionate, caring approach to both staff and pupils, coupled with training provision and links with external agencies for additional support.

Exemplary modelling by the headteacher and her staff on a daily basis result in pupils understanding the importance of dignity and respect and the celebration of difference. Documents such as *Valuing All God's Children* are underused to support policy development. RE offers high quality opportunities for pupils to meet first-hand people from other religions. The visit to the 'Three Faiths' Tour' recently has enthused pupils to appreciate the richness of diversity. Careful preparation is currently underway to meet the requirements of relationships and sex education (RSE) within a church school ethos.

Collective worship is inclusive, invitational and regularly inspires pupils to actively engage with the themes of worship. High quality opportunities to reflect frequently lead into pupils being able and willing to pray

spontaneously. It provides a special space within the school day for all. Staff speak of it as a time when the vision is made explicit through the promotion of monthly values, inspiring all to understand how each contributes to the life of the school. Some spoke of a range of emotions from being humbled by the pupils' prayers to being uplifted and unified by communal praise. Music is a hugely significant contributor towards the quality of worship. A well-established and varied pattern of worship, including weekly church based worship, inspires and celebrates achievements, both past and present, and builds on a rich heritage of Anglican liturgy and prayer. Pupil worship leaders inspire others through their example of careful preparation and sincerity of the message delivery. Governor monitoring is not sufficiently sustained to support improvements in provision, with limited impact.

Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have made significant improvements to the quality of RE provision. Non-specialist teachers are well supported through rigorous monitoring and timely mentoring support. Pupils display an enthusiasm and excitement for RE where they are challenged through deep questions such as, 'How significant is it for Christians to believe that God intended Jesus to die?' Good, explicit links are made to the values within RE lessons, enabling pupils to better understand the links between these and Jesus' life and teachings. Pupils are keen to learn about other world religions. Their ability to compare other beliefs and practices to Christianity is impressive. Pupils speak with genuine wonder at learning about other faith festivals, such as the Hindu festival of Holi. Skills of critical evaluation and reflection are promoted well by teachers who engage enthusiastically in debates and discussions. Teachers' passion for the subject communicates itself to learners. Shared discussions and moderation with other Church schools has reinforced the school's view that its practice is developing well. Regular assessments by teachers and senior leaders confirm rising standards in the subject.



#### **The effectiveness of RE is Good**

Rigorous, regular in-school monitoring confirms that the quality of teaching and learning is graded good overall. Inspection evidence supports this judgement, with examples of outstanding practice seen. Where teaching is less effective, high quality mentoring is having a positive effect with rapid and sustained improvements. Pupils make good progress against the expectations of the local syllabus. This includes pupils with SEND and the most able. A recent focus on improving written presentation has made a significant difference to pupils' work outcomes. Standards in RE are in line with those of English and increasing percentages of pupils are working in excess of age related expectations by Year 6. First-hand experiences through visits and visitors impact very positively on outcomes.

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| Headteacher                 | Mandy Evans     |
| Inspector's name and number | Judith Ruff 528 |