

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John the Baptist Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

The Street, Pebmarsh, Halstead, Essex. CO9 2NH

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Chelmsford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Essex
Date of inspection	9 December 2016
Date of last inspection	November 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 115137
Headteacher	Karen De Pietro
Inspector's name and number	Gillian Holmes 849

School context

St John the Baptist is a very small primary school serving the villages of Pebmarsh, Alphamstone and Lamarsh whilst pupils also attend from the Halstead and Sudbury areas. The school has 69 pupils who are taught in three mixed aged classes. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities is slightly above average. The percentage for whom extra funding is received due to social disadvantage is below average. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. There are strong links between the school, the village and the parish church. The current headteacher has been in post since September 2015.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John the Baptist as a Church of England school are good

- The school is a caring and welcoming place with a strong sense of community. The excellent behaviour and supportive relationships demonstrate well the outworking of the Christian ethos.
- The current headteacher has built a strong supportive team of staff and governors who are working together effectively to ensure that all pupils are being well supported within this improving Church school.
- The school values are explicitly and implicitly underpinning the school's Christian ethos.
- The school is an integral part of the community and works closely with the local church and the village.

Areas to improve

- Leaders, including governors, to employ a robust system to monitor and evaluate religious education (RE) and collective worship to support and embed continued improvement.
- Establish a programme of visits and visitors in RE from a range of Christian denominations and other faiths to increase pupils' multi-cultural and multi-faith experiences.
- Engage pupils and other stakeholders in planning and leading worship.

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

The school has a shared commitment to living out its clearly expressed vision of, 'excite, embrace, encourage and excel within a caring Christian community'. The school's Christian values have been developed since the previous denominational inspection. These values are love, friendship, appreciation, inclusion, trust and honesty. They were developed in consultation with pupils and contribute significantly to the school's Christian ethos. There are suitable links made between them and biblical teaching. The relationships between staff and pupils and the staff and parents are outstanding and a clear expression of the school's values. The standard of teaching in the school is good and the majority of pupils across the school are making at least expected progress. Attainment data fluctuates year on year due mainly to small cohorts. However, 2016 data shows significant improvement on 2015. In keeping with the school's Christian and supportive ethos pupils are valued as individuals. Consequently, pupils' personal development and wellbeing are rightly given a high priority across the school. This means that attendance is high, behaviour is excellent and extremely rare incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively, in line with the school's Christian ethos. Parents praise the commitment and approachability of the headteacher and the excellent communication between the school and parents. The newly appointed special needs teacher has worked with the staff team to ensure that all pupils whatever their starting point have the support necessary to make good or better progress. This is beginning to impact positively on these pupils' rates of progress. RE and worship are used effectively to reinforce the Christian values. Their application addresses well the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development provided by the school. Pupils respond to these opportunities well. Pupils are given an appropriate range of opportunities to consider topical community and global issues and as a consequence initiate a variety of fund-raising events. The RE curriculum is used to support pupils' understanding of difference and diversity, however, pupils have only a limited awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils, staff and governors have positive attitudes to worship which plays an important role in school life. All staff attend daily worship and teachers share in leading throughout the week. This reflects well the importance afforded to worship across the school. Pupils enjoy worship and describe how it helps them to understand more about the Christian faith. This includes developing appropriate understanding of the importance of Jesus for Christians. Prayerful and meaningful worship takes place with a focus on the school's Christian values and biblical teaching. This contributes significantly to the life of the school and pupils' SMSC development. Pupils talked confidently about the worth of reflection which accompanies their prayers. They light a candle in worship as a focus 'to think, to reflect and to pray'. The worship programme is effectively planned by the headteacher with a focus on how Bible stories can be applied to the pupils' situations. One pupil explained the value of the Bible as 'fuel for the heart and soul'. Pupils are aware of the major Anglican festivals and traditions. This is an improvement since the previous denominational inspection. Pupils have an age appropriate awareness of the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Opportunities are given for pupils to contribute towards worship which they do appropriately. They take an active part through reading the responses and prayers and helping to act out stories. Pupils are arranged into mixed aged worship groups. These meet regularly to review worship and for pupils to reflect on what they have heard and its application to their lives. However, pupils do not take a sufficient role in planning or leading worship. The incumbent leads worship in school fortnightly. The school also uses the church for festival services when parents and members of the village community enthusiastically join staff and pupils. This contributes significantly to the school's active engagement with the local community. Foundation governors regularly attend worship and report back to the governing body. The headteacher informally monitors worship but there is no robust system in place to effectively evaluate the school's worship programme.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

Very good progress has been made in leading and managing RE since the headteacher took responsibility. She leads RE diligently and well. She is well aware of current developments in RE, locally and nationally, and is ensuring that the accurate and focused action plan takes account of such. Regular opportunities are given for teachers to attend training to increase their subject knowledge. This has impacted positively on how RE is taught. Drawing on the diocesan syllabus, lessons are well planned. Assessment systems now track pupil progress more closely. This means that teaching in RE is improving and pupils are beginning to make better progress. Teachers make lessons engaging, exciting and challenging. Pupils enjoy RE and are provided with appropriate opportunities to ask 'Big' questions, to investigate, to discuss and to reflect. For example, the older pupils were discussing why accounts of the Christmas story differ in the Gospels. RE is taught through drama and other creative approaches which increases pupils' engagement with the subject. Pupils have a good understanding of Christianity and key aspects of the Bible. They

have a developing understanding of other faiths. There are appropriate links made between RE, worship and the creative curriculum whilst maintaining separate RE lessons. Assessment systems now track pupil progress more closely. However, teachers are not consistently using their marking to ensure pupils know how to improve their understanding. This means that progress is slowed but there are clear signs that attainment is improving. Robust monitoring and evaluating procedures are not in place to identify strengths and to support ongoing improvement across the RE curriculum. The leadership of RE is good but outcomes for pupils are not embedded and so are satisfactory.

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

The headteacher, well supported by her staff and governors has reinvigorated the school's Christian ethos. As a consequence the school's Christian vision and values are more explicit. It has been achieved in consultation with stakeholders. This results in a commitment by the whole school community to live out the Christian ethos. RE and worship meet statutory requirements. Effective leadership of RE and worship ensures that both areas focus on the Christian values and provide valuable support for SMSC development across the school. The areas to improve from the previous inspection have been addressed through support from the incumbent and the governing body. Most progress in this has been made since the current headteacher joined the school. She has ensured that governors now know the school well. They are working alongside the headteacher and external agencies to drive forward all round school improvement. All staff and governors are involved in the school's self-evaluation and strategic improvement planning. Support for staff in visiting neighbouring schools to observe good practice and to attend appropriate training courses is effective in helping the school develop. As a consequence staff are taking on greater responsibilities for leadership within the school. However, the specific focus on developing the school's Christian distinctiveness and effectiveness is not so well focused. Staff and governors have attended diocesan training and issues raised as a result of this have begun to be acted upon. There is now a clear understanding of the importance of developing the school as a distinctively Christian school. Governors have the skills and confidence to begin to fulfil this strategic leadership role effectively. The headteacher and governors are planning for the future sustainability of the school and as a consequence have been liaising with the Diocese. The school is actively involved in links with the Colne Valley consortium of schools. This benefits the staff through shared training and expertise and pupils through extra-curricular activities. Parents are appropriately involved in their children's education and are very supportive of the school as a church school. Their views are frequently sought and acted upon and they are always welcomed into the school. This is evident through the active PTA which supports the school both practically and financially through fundraising.

SIAMS report (December 2016) St John the Baptist CE VA Primary School, Pebmarsh, Essex, CO9 2NH.