

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Toddington St George Church of England School

Manor Road, Toddington, Dunstable, LU5 6AJ

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

St Albans

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Date of academy conversion

1st March 2013

Name of multi-academy trust / federation [delete as appropriate]

Academy converter

Date of inspection

25th April 2018

Date of last inspection

20th June 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

Academy 139372

Headteacher

Jane Spencer

Inspector's name and number

Juliet Lyal 829

School context

A larger than average lower school in semi-rural Bedfordshire, the school has 342 mainly White British pupils on roll from Nursery to Year 4. It is an associate member of the 13 school Harlington Area School Trust (HAST) which co-manages the onsite hearing impaired provision. This academic year has seen a new senior leadership team, office manager, priest-in-charge and RE subject leader. Five new governors have been appointed in the last year. The proportions of pupils who have special educational needs and for whom the school receives additional funding are above the national average. The chair of governors is a national lead governor.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Toddington St George as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The commitment, drive and vision of leaders and managers along with staff, pupils and parents ensure that the distinctive Christian character of the school underpins all decision making. The impact on behaviour, attitudes to learning and pupils' enjoyment of school is significantly strong.
- The impact of the school's Christian character and values on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all learners is very strong.
- High quality acts of worship, shaped by Anglican tradition and valued by all, are creative and inspirational and influence behaviour in and beyond the school.

Areas to improve

- Explore the possibilities of an outdoor area for reflection that pupils can also use as a quiet space during break times and in which outdoor worship may be developed.
- Develop the current pupil led worship in order to embed it into whole school worship planning, delivery and evaluation so that it may become inspiring and transformational for the school community.

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

Its Christian character underpins all areas of the school's life and is important to every person who is a part of it. The impact of this on the school and local community is very strong. Relationships are excellent because of the deeply embedded Christian values held by all and taught on a monthly basis in a two year cycle. Pupils describe how the adults in the school model the values and how they, in turn, strive to live them out. They enjoy opportunities to record their thoughts about the values in reflection journals. Pupils link endurance to the Bible story of Noah and how he endured people laughing at him. One pupil reflected on praying for endurance 'when my grommets were done.' Case studies are compiled to illustrate the impact of Christian values over time: for example, children who were seen to be looking after those in need, or who show the quality of love through forgiveness or compassion through serving others. The school is thoroughly inclusive and its vision, 'Lighting a spark in every child' is clearly reflected in all that the school does. Pupils with hearing impairments and those with special educational and behavioural needs know just as much as every other school member that they are 'loved and valued for all that they are in the eyes of God'. The achievements of all pupils continue to be above national averages and their progress remains excellent, including those whose starting point might be lower than the national expectations. Therapeutic teaching is of high quality and enables all pupils to access the broad and creative curriculum. Staff respond quickly to the learning needs of their children, the impact from which can spread. The introduction of 'finger gym' for example, to a small group of early years learners led to such an increase in dexterity, and thus achievement, that it soon became part of the early morning routine for all pupils. The Christian ethos links religious education (RE), Christian values education and worship and has a strong impact on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of all learners. Pupils understand what is meant by 'spiritual' and value opportunities in school to write, think or pray, and say that their classroom reflective areas are 'a space to go for peace'. As yet there is no designated outdoor area where pupils feel they can go for personal reflection during break times. Some classes also have prayer boxes, prayer books or special books, which pupils contribute to. Attendance is good and, based on the school's vision, clear, sensitive strategies are in place for following up absentees. Pupils' behaviour is good too and supported by the school's 'Respect Ready Safe' (RRS) policy, which is based on the Christian value of forgiveness. Learners are confident and articulate in explaining RRS and understand that some of their peers may find it hard to control their behaviour. Pupils know that they belong to a church school, saying confidently 'we are a Christian school.' They are aware too that 'you don't have to be a Christian to come to St George's.' Lunch time and after school clubs are varied and popular. The oversubscribed eco club responds to pupils' interests in and concerns for the environment and through the Bible buddies club, pupils enjoy deep discussion and reflection. Parents feel valued and cared for and there is strong respect within the school community for people of all faiths and beliefs. They comment that communication is excellent, that the teaching staff are incredibly supportive: 'nothing is too much for them.' Pupils are fully aware that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith, and this awareness is supported by the good quality RE that is taught, as well as through collective worship, links with a school in Tanzania and visitors to the school. RE reflects and contributes to the Christian character of the school, includes opportunities for engaged and lively discussion about religious diversity as well as quiet reflection and digging deeper into topics.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The school describes its worship as 'the cornerstone to our daily life' which indeed it is. Living up to the school's inclusivity, collective worship gives everyone the opportunity to learn about God and Jesus, to pray, reflect and develop spiritually. All stakeholders place great value on collective worship. Families without Christian belief say that they appreciate the opportunities for reflection; pupils, parents and staff can explain how it impacts on their own lives. Collective worship is held daily, usually in the school hall and follows Anglican practice and liturgy. Pupils say that praying grace before lunchtime is important and those that say an end of the day prayer explain that it's a 'good way to say goodbye.' Morning worship for the Year 1 to Year 4 pupils is a calm, spiritual and joyful gathering. It is based around the school's Christian values and explicitly linked to Bible stories. Pupils understand the clear focus on the presence of God and the person and teaching of Jesus. The value for April is wisdom and pupils link this to Bible stories such as Solomon, the parable of the lost sheep, the two builders and the book of Proverbs. Worship in Reception class reflects the same pattern and content, and pupils gradually learn Anglican responses and liturgy. Most of these pupils know when to be still and when to participate and by the summer term are ready to join the rest of the school. Celebration worship, when the successes and achievements of pupils both in and out of school are shared, is a popular way of affirming pupils' identity. Leaders link it to values such as friendship, compassion and perseverance and learners understand this. With the support of the specialist teacher, all worship is signed. Whilst initially for the benefit of the hearing impaired pupils it is also a means for all pupils to communicate which has had a transformational impact on the school community. Consequently the whole school signs as well as speaks or sings the Anglican responses and prayers. Pupils recognise the daily visual clues on the collective worship table - a

wooden cross, three lit candles, and the Bible placed on a liturgically coloured cloth - which support their age appropriate, good understanding of the Christian belief in God as three in one. When the candles are lit pupils describe a sense of wonder when they all say or sign 'God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.' Pupils have a good understanding of the church year because the worship leaders ensure that planning for collective worship is thorough and consistent. Teaching and sometimes business staff attend worship. Their participation means that the stories and messages can be followed up later in the day in a meaningful way. Pupils appreciate having post-it notes to write or draw their reflections on worship and to share with their peers, if they so wish. Staff appreciate the 'peaceful time to reflect' and that collective worship is a 'time to come together as a family.' They valued the staff reflection time, led by the priest, following the death of a colleague in December 2017. Parents and governors are regularly invited to attend worship and do so, finding the pupils to be calm and engaged. Singing and signing the Lord's Prayer is a particularly spiritual moment of worship when pupils choose to listen or participate with clear respect for the beliefs of others. Pupils value the 'time to think, sing and pray together' and are growing in their understanding of the nature and purpose of personal and collective prayer. They know that the headteacher and some staff pray the prayers pupils write for the prayer boxes, which were inspired by the prayer board in St Albans Abbey. Year 4 pupils enjoy responsibility for setting up the hall, selecting the music, worship songs and slides. The 'Hooked on Worship' team of volunteers have half termly opportunities to help to plan, deliver and evaluate worship. This is approached sensitively and wisely by the headteacher. Pupils take this voluntary role seriously and would like to do more. Following the arrival of the new priest, the school is planning to embed pupil led acts of worship ensuring that pupils fully understand the potential impact of this spiritual responsibility. Invited visitors, including the local 'Open the Book' group also lead worship, all of which develops pupils' understanding of diversity within Christianity. The local church is not large enough to accommodate all pupils and parents so most annual services take place at school or, on occasion, the local Methodist church. The Year 4 Leavers' Service, however, takes place in St George's Church to which only they and their parents attend.

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

The school has continued to make significant progress since the last inspection in 2013, building on the Christian distinctiveness and becoming a school with an even stronger sense of Christian identity, belonging and inclusivity. Christian values are firmly embedded with stakeholders asserting that they are 'what our school is all about'. The headteacher's leadership remains excellent and with the strongly committed group of governors and senior staff provides balance and expertise to the leadership and management. Both foci for development from the last inspection have been addressed. The recent changes in teacher and business staffing, a new priest and new clerk to governors is having a positive impact on all stakeholders and has secured the Christian leadership of the school for the future. The current staffing structure introduced in September 2017, which includes two assistant heads, continues to evolve and will be reviewed by staff and governors in July. Following a vacancy, the arrival of the priest in September 2017 has enabled her to work with the school to renew and strengthen the school and church links. Activities have included foodbank harvest gifts, shoe box appeal, Christingle and the Christmas tree festival. She is also a foundation governor, works part-time and visits the school to lead collective worship at least once a month and to support RE, both of which are given a high priority by this school. Pupils, parents and staff welcome her visits and there is an increase of pupils attending 'Messy Church'. Governors know the school very well and make frequent visits, supporting trips and attending social and curriculum events as well as in their formal governor visit role. Governors also participate with teachers in school training opportunities and in diocesan training days which strengthens their involvement and support for the school. Prayers are said at the beginning and end of full governing body meetings, which leaders say is an opportunity to focus on God and on their role as church school governors. They say that 'every element of discussion on the agenda is underpinned by the school's Christian ethos.' The effectiveness of the school as a church school is also part of the agenda of the curriculum and school improvement committee which reports back to all governors. Training given by the diocese prepares staff for future leadership of church schools. The new senior leadership team was formed following the promotion of the deputy headteacher to another church school. Staff also participate in the local authority and HAST continuing professional development programmes and diocesan subject specific training is in place for the newly appointed RE subject leader. All staff have received training in Understanding Christianity either through the diocese or in school which has increased their confidence as well as enabling pupils to deepen their own understanding. The school offers school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) primary trainees experience and teaching of RE, which is viewed as a core subject. Associate membership with HAST has created strong links between both church and community schools and the sharing of some safeguarding policies with the nearby middle and upper schools, for example holiday absence, has proved invaluable. The SEND links between these schools are described as 'exemplary' and all of the lower school pupils benefit from the curriculum and extra-curricular partnerships. Evidence indicates that the school's distinctive Christian character has supported these links, consequently benefiting pupils in all 13 schools. Pupils visit the local middle school, which is not a church school, frequently and by the end of Year 4 are very well prepared for what

parents describe as an 'almost seamless' transition. Leaders of Toddington St George have recently formed a working party to consider what impact there would be on the school as a church school if it were to enter into the proposed multi-academy trust with HAST. Leaders say that the school Christian vision and values will, as always, fully underpin their decision making.

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