

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Nicholas Church of England (VC) Primary School

Sarajac Avenue, East Challow, Oxfordshire, OX12 9RY

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Date of inspection	13 June 2017
Date of last inspection	May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VC Primary 141459
Headteacher	Andrew Browne
Inspector's name and number	Sandra Symms 805

School context

St Nicholas C of E Primary is a smaller than average, rural primary school with 94 pupils on roll. The school became an academy and joined the Vale Academy Trust (VAT) in October 2014. The school moved from special measures to good in all areas in the last Ofsted inspection in June 2013. The headteacher was appointed in December 2014 after serving as the interim headteacher from October 2012. The socio-economic structure of the school is mixed with approximately a quarter of the pupils eligible for free school meals. This is twice the Oxfordshire average. The majority of pupils are White British. Four pupils have a statement of special educational needs and 8 pupils attend from a traveller site in the village.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Nicholas as a Church of England school are good

- The vision, passion and drive of the headteacher, supported by staff, governors and the Vale Academy Trust promotes an inclusive Christian ethos and a nurturing school community where everyone feels valued and respected.
- Distinctively Christian values linked to the growth mindset model of learning are deeply embedded throughout the school, making a difference in the daily lives of all pupils.
- The school's Christian character shapes its approach to issues of attendance and exclusion so that all families feel supported and included as part of the community.
- Leaders are ambitious for the school and have a thorough understanding of the school's needs based on effective self-evaluation.
- Pupils understand the purpose and value of personal prayer with the school's prayer space playing a key part in pupils' spiritual development.

Areas to improve

- Provide high quality experiences in the curriculum so that pupils can develop and deepen their spirituality and express their thoughts in more depth using a rich variety of styles and media.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to plan and lead worship so that they can clearly identify the distinctive features of Anglican traditions.
- Develop pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith and provide experiences and opportunities for pupils to further strengthen their cultural development so that they develop a high degree of understanding and respect for diversity.

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

St Nicholas Primary School is an inclusive, caring community which lives out its vision of providing 'Life in all its fullness' for all pupils through the embedded values of community, respect, hope, forgiveness, courage and friendship. Values are displayed and made explicit through displays and on the website with links to Bible verses and stories so that they are distinctively Christian and understood by the school community. Values, closely linked to growth mindset when pupils adopt a 'can do' attitude, inspire pupils to work hard. They talk about their hopes for the future through the setting of goals. Pupils take courage from the story of David and Goliath and try to be 'brave and strong and trust in the Lord' (Psalm 27:14) when faced with a challenge such as singing a solo or learning something new. As a result, pupils' achievements are improving.

Improving attendance is a key focus for the school. The school celebrates and rewards good attendance through certificates for Star Attenders. Class attendance is encouraged and included in newsletters. Attendance issues are dealt with in a supportive, caring way so that pupils can attend regularly, meet their goals and enjoy life in all its fullness. As a result, attendance is improving across the school. The decision to exclude a pupil is always a last resort and done for the good of the whole community. However, all children are valued, forgiven and given a fresh start on their return to school with a new hope for their future, showing the high profile that the school's Christian character has.

Pupils say that the values help them to behave well, to be good friends and to treat all members of the school community with respect. They value restorative conversations with staff that support any friendship issues and recognise the power of forgiveness when things go wrong. Pupils and parents say that this is a kind school with no bullying. As a result, behaviour and relationships between all members of the school community are good.

The school has a clear definition of spirituality which is seen as the progress and growth which comes from the understanding and experience that life is more than it seems. Experiences such as exploring the life cycle of a butterfly and enjoying God's wonderful world provide opportunities for pupils to develop their spirituality. However, they are not yet able to express their thoughts clearly or with any depth.

Pupils enjoy Religious Education (RE) and say that it is important because you can learn about Jesus. Big questions such as 'How is Jesus like a superhero?' and 'Is it right or wrong for Jewish people to have food laws?' ensure that RE contributes to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils say that it is important to learn about other world faiths so that 'you don't accidentally insult others' and you can be respectful. This shows that pupils have a developing respect for diversity and difference within other faith communities, however their understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith is limited.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is an important time for the school community to gather together, for worship and prayer. Staff say that collective worship is uplifting and they value the time to reflect. Pupils say that worship helps them to be a better person, a better friend and they learn more about the world and God. Pupils engage positively with worship and office staff love to hear the 'joyous' singing. Worship includes some aspect of Anglican practice such as lighting a Trinitarian candle, singing hymns and saying prayers. Planning shows that worship themes contribute to pupils' spiritual and moral development and follow the church's year supported by the school's vision and values. Popular weekly visits from the Open the Book team focus on Bible stories and pupils love to get involved with the acting and respond willingly. As a result, pupils can make links with Biblical material and their own lives, for example they learn about forgiveness from the story of The Lost Son. They reflect on how they can be a good friend to others, particularly to those who don't expect it, after hearing and acting out the story of The Good Samaritan. Pupils show an understanding of Jesus and his place in worship saying that Jesus is God's son who died on Good Friday and came alive again on Easter Sunday. They are developing their understanding of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Worship themes linked to values also inspire pupils to serve one another by looking out for one another in the playground and praying for one another in difficult times. Pupils are inspired to raise funds for national events such as Children in Need and they enjoyed taking part in their own mini-marathon to raise funds for Downs Syndrome UK wearing odd socks to show how much they value and accept people with disabilities. Prayer is central to the school's worship and is making a good impact on pupils' spiritual development. Pupils value spending time in the school prayer space where they can be quiet, reflective and feel close to God. They say that prayer is speaking to God, a time to say thank you and to ask for courage. One child said that through prayer he feels supported because 'God is always by you when you need him'. Another child added that 'If we have any worries we can send them to God through prayer' showing that pupils understand the value of personal prayer.

Staff, clergy and the Open the Book team plan and lead worship in several settings such as the school hall, local church and classrooms so that pupils enjoy a range of experiences. Monitoring leads to improvements such as the setting up of the school prayer space. Staff feedback resulted in pupils contributing more to worship by writing or finding a prayer to read. Pupils would like opportunities to plan and lead worship so that they are even more involved. This would also help them to identify distinctive features of Anglican traditions.

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

Following a review of the school's values, leaders are confident that the school vision is rooted in distinctively Christian values which are lived out and modelled by all. Staff support this when they say that the school demonstrates Christian values in action through showing respect for all so that everyone feels they are a valued part of the community. Leaders readily and enthusiastically talk about the impact of the values on pupils' behaviour and achievements. Governors say that the school values permeate all teaching strategies with growth mindset helping to develop resilience resulting in well-rounded pupils. Leaders talk about how the values linked to growth mindset are having an impact on pupils' achievements. They say that pupils show courage and belief in themselves, taking risks and learning from mistakes. They add that they 'want children to leave the school with a trust in God that he is there for them, loves them and has a plan for them'. Mutual support between leaders of the school and the VAT result in a cohesive team with all committed to the Christian ethos of the school.

Self-evaluation is a strength of the school and involves all groups, including the diocesan adviser and leaders from the VAT, using various strategies such as tight data analysis, governor monitoring, learning walks, parent surveys and pupil questionnaires. This has led to a detailed school development plan with a determined focus on raising standards, particularly for the disadvantaged pupils. Experts from within the VAT are well placed to support leaders in driving standards. The regular support and expertise of the inclusion manager from the academy ensures that systems and interventions are in place so that no pupil is left behind and all have the opportunity to blossom.

Self-evaluation also leads directly to effective strategies for improving pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Strategic plans include the development of prayer and worship experiences for the whole school so that pupils can engage in prayer and worship both as a community and individually. Curriculum provision and strategies such as asking big questions in RE, growth mindset, improving attendance, creating prayer spaces and organising a range of trips and visitors to support learning ensure that the curriculum contributes to pupils' SMSC development.

The school benefits from strong links with the local church. Pupils attend termly church services and use the church as a learning resource such as working with church members and the British Legion to research the lives of service men and women on the war memorial. Church members, including a foundation governor, organise and deliver an annual prayer space for the school community which deepens pupils' engagement with the school values. Parents and family members value the sense of community and appreciate the inclusive, supportive and approachable staff who model the school values. They contribute to the school in many ways such as fundraising, talking to pupils about their faith and even bringing in their horse so that reception children can learn about caring for animals. These excellent partnerships benefit all pupils by supporting their all-round development and giving them a sense of belonging to a special community where they see people living out their faith within the school and locally.

Support and coaching from partnership church schools in the VAT result in the sharing of good practice and good support for the current RE and collective worship leader. Consequently, he has been able to bring about improvements such as encouraging the use of big questions in RE and giving the staff the confidence to ask them. Excellent links with the diocesan advisor and the close partnership with the VAT support the development of staff and governors. As a result, the headteacher is well supported to maintain and further develop the Christian distinctiveness of the school so that all pupils experience life in all its fullness during their time at St Nicholas School.