

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St James' Harlow Church of England (VA) Primary Academy

Paringdon Road, Harlow, Essex, CM18 7RH

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

Chelmsford

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Satisfactory

Local authority

Essex

Date/s of inspection

1 February 2017

Date of last inspection

July 2010

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary academy - 141657

Headteacher

Gina Bailey

Inspector's name and number

Virginia Corbyn 86

School context

St James' primary academy is a smaller than average primary school. The current headteacher has been in post for 18 months, following many changes in leadership over a short period. In November 2014, the school, which had been previously judged as requiring special measures, was judged to be good by OfSTED. The school joined the Vine Trust as an academy in May 2016. The proportions of pupils who are entitled to extra funding due to social disadvantage, who come from a wide variety of minority ethnic backgrounds and who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are all above the national average. A small number of pupils is drawn from Muslim and Hindu communities.

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

- Schools leaders have placed a very clear focus on a set of core values, underpinned by Christian principles, which drive improvement and aspiration for all pupils.
- The worship programme operates effectively as a key component for communicating the school's Christian and inclusive vision and values to all stakeholders.
- Senior and middle leaders have successfully implemented a new set of materials for religious education (RE) which are supporting pupils' understanding of Christian concepts well.
- The school chaplain is a much valued asset providing theological and pastoral support for the whole school community.

Areas to improve

- Embed the biblical basis for core values so that all stakeholder groups, especially the parents, understand the links which are made with the teaching of Jesus.
- Enable pupils to take a full role and more responsibility in the leading of worship for their school community.
- Establish effective ways of assessment in RE which demonstrate the progress being made as a result of the adoption of new materials for the teaching of Christianity.
- Ensure that the development of teaching and learning about other religions is established effectively alongside and in line with the teaching of Christianity.

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

St James' has been on a rapid journey of improvement as a church school over the past two years, following a period of turbulence and instability. Strong leadership at all levels has ensured that a set of core values, underpinned by clear Christian principles, has been established (respect, responsibility, community, friendship, forgiveness and courage). These values have driven improved attainment, achievement and aspiration in the school. St James' was one of the top 100 performing schools based on sustained improvement in attainment from 2012 to 2015. Progress data from this year is being adjusted in the light of the school identifying the need to track progress much more closely in the light of changes to the curriculum and the challenges that this has presented. However, it is possible to see that, overall, most pupils make at least expected progress with some groups, such as EAL pupils and most of the academically more able pupils in Key Stage 2, make good or better progress. All stakeholders articulate a sense of ownership of their values, because they were consulted in choosing them. Pupils are particularly good at explaining how the values help them to learn, showing a clear understanding of applying the value of responsibility to being 'the best I can be'. This extends to offering pupils opportunities to succeed as widely as possible, including in local sporting and musical events. Another important value used in learning is that of courage, shown in the risks taken by staff and pupils in deepening thinking and sharing personal opinions. The embedding of the biblical basis for the values is work in progress and, therefore, understanding and articulation of the values as explicitly Christian is underdeveloped at present.

Strong relationships at all levels are characterised by friendship and forgiveness, and this has resulted in an inclusive and supportive community. Parents and carers say that the school listens and responds to their concerns, and that staff in the school treat them as valued members of their community. High expectations of behaviour based on the value of respect result in positive attitudes to learning and to each other, leading to good attendance because children want to come to school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is strong. The spiritual development of pupils is well supported by opportunities for prayer and reflection throughout the school. Age appropriate prayer areas in all classes are used well, and pupils know that prayer involves trusting God, asking God and making requests for others. One pupil described prayer as 'private communication with God'. Parents speak about the ways in which the school promotes moral development through the core values, which their children are able to apply outside of school. The diversity of the school community is used to promote understanding of different faiths and cultures, including within the RE curriculum. This means that pupils understand that, 'we get to know how those of other religions feel in our school'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship plays a central part in the life of the school. It has been an important part of establishing the vision and values of the school over the past two years. Pupils have a good understanding of what it is to worship God. They know that worship is about spending time together, praying and praising God through song, and they are familiar with aspects of Anglican practice such as the Lord's prayer and special greetings. They also talk about the ways in which worship encourages a response from them, for example through looking outwards and beyond the school in their support of Operation Christmas Child and Christian Aid. Their recall of important messages from worship shows that they understand how God sees them and helps them and that they can demonstrate a familiarity with Bible stories. They value the fact that they are given practical ideas for reflection which means that they have ways of putting the words from worship into action during the day. Worship provides a focus on the person of Jesus but there is limited understanding of the importance of the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit within this context. Pupils are developing a number of roles within worship and are proud of the practical support that they provide for their school. However, their areas of responsibility do not enable them to take a full role in the leadership of worship. Parental attendance has increased steadily at church services for major Christian festivals and through a weekly invitation to Friday worship during which achievements, including awards for showing the school's values, are celebrated. The school chaplain is closely involved in the planning and leadership of worship. This means that the links with the church are given a high profile and all stakeholders are able to articulate the importance of these links in expressing the Christian distinctiveness of the school. Particular strengths of worship are the offering of pupils' own prayers and the quality of sung worship through which pupils can express their enjoyment of and engagement with the worship of God.

The effectiveness of religious education is satisfactory

The recent implementation of a set of materials based on the understanding of key Christian concepts is re-invigorating learning and teaching in RE across the school. Subject leadership is has been secured and is well supported by the senior leadership team. Pupils are enthusiastic about being asked to explore questions in different

ways and for themselves through the new curriculum materials. They talk about RE making them think hard and about the expectation that they express their own opinions clearly and listen to others' opinions with respect. Teachers are more confident in planning and teaching RE, being well supported by the chaplain and by the two subject leaders for their subject knowledge and for their delivery of the new curriculum. The teaching across the school on the day of inspection was consistent in its use of discussion and interactive approaches. This resulted in pupils being able to express well their ideas about incarnation which is the Christian belief about Jesus being 'God made man'. This means that, overall, the expectations in RE are much higher than they were at the time of the previous denominational inspection and that teaching and learning in RE has improved. However, as the new curriculum is the main driver for the improvements in RE and this was only implemented from January 2017, the impact is not yet evidenced although assessment systems are in place to do so. Under the previous syllabus, standards were broadly in line with national expectations but lacked challenge particularly in terms of higher level thinking. Pupils are clear about the need to know about religions other than Christianity. The school is rightly addressing the need to find materials about other faiths which are appropriately designed to complement the new resources for Christianity.

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

School leaders, led inspirationally by the headteacher, have developed a set of values and a clear vision since the previous denominational inspection. The vision and values have successfully underpinned a challenging journey and they have helped to bring along stakeholders on that journey. At the heart of the vision is the desire to ensure the best for every pupil as a child of God. This has resulted in rapid improvement for the school in the form of much better outcomes for all pupils. The ownership of the school's values by all stakeholders means that there is a commitment to live them out both in the school and beyond. Parents, in particular, are able to explain how their children consistently shape their own behaviour around respect and responsibility in particular. Staff members speak of being valued within a community which supports them personally and professionally. The governing body is very effective in its monitoring and evaluation of the school as a church school, including in knowing what is still to be done. There is a clear and detailed development plan for the school as a church school, many aspects of which have been successfully addressed, including issues from the previous denominational inspection. Statutory requirements for collective worship and for RE are met. Links between church and school are very strong. The appointment of a local curate as chaplain to the school has resulted in the provision of very valuable pastoral support for staff, for families and for pupils. In addition, the chaplain is available on one day a week and at other times to answer questions which arise from the new RE curriculum from both staff and pupils. There are many examples of ways in which the Diocese, including through the Vine Schools Trust, is supporting the school very well. This is particularly evident in improving standards and in developing the RE curriculum. Above all, the school is proud to have returned to a place from which it is confident to reach out to its local community in Christian love and service.

SIAMS report (February 2017) St James' CE primary (VA) academy Harlow Essex CMI8 7RH