

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Horton St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School	
Rudyard, Leek, Staffordshire. ST13 8RU	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Lichfield
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Staffordshire
Date of inspection	21 June 2018
Date of last inspection	22 May 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary - First, 124253
Headteacher	Lesley Montgomery
Inspector's name and number	Marianne Phillips 586

School context

St Michael's First school is a smaller than average primary, with 74 pupils. A nursery provision was introduced 2 years ago. The numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals is below national average. Most pupils come from White British heritage and there are no pupils for whom, English is an additional language. 17% of the school's pupils have special educational needs. This is above national average. The headteacher has been in post for 3 years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Horton St Michael's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school's strong, Christian vision is underpinned by clear Christian values, which are lived out by all and this is effectively driving forward its Christian distinctiveness and the close community relationships.
- The commitment and positive attitude of the pupils, through their work on the worship committee and the school council, is having a significant impact on the spiritual and pastoral life of the school family.
- The strong and effective Christian leadership consistently inspires and encourages everyone to be the best they can be.
- The sense of community and unity is nurtured, through the daily act of worship, that inspires and raises the spirits of every member of the school family and the visitors, who regularly participate in key services, throughout the year.

Areas to improve

- Formalise the existing systems, that underpin the work of the governors, to further enhance their commitment to the school's Christian distinctiveness and the monitoring of the quality of collective worship and religious education (RE).
- Use the understanding and commitment of everyone, to the vision and values of the school, to explicitly shape the curriculum, in sustaining the drive to be an effective and distinctive church school.

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

Horton St Michael's VC First school offers a warm and loving Christian welcome to everyone. It is a unique school that lives out daily the shared values, of loving friendliness. The vision and values, crafted in child friendly language, underpin their 'Foundation Blocks for Learning'. These are guided by biblical references and the teachings of Jesus that nurture and support each member of the school. Consequently, pupils thrive and flourish knowing they are, 'beautifully and wonderfully made', Psalms 139:14, 'created by God in His own image', Genesis 1:27, to 'Love one another', John 13:34. The vision statement, 'Learning, Laughing and Playing together in God's Hands', was written by one of the children. Parents are very positive about the school. 'Christian values are shared and understood, and this creates an extended family atmosphere that is inclusive and nurturing.' They are sure that the school's loving care for each individual 'builds confidence, that each child takes with them, as a strong foundation for their future lives'. Pupils, especially those from the worship committee and school council, know they have individual, important responsibilities. 'We want to help make the school a positive, happy place. We encourage friendliness to ensure everyone enjoys school. God tells us to help and love one another, so we do.' Consequently, relationships are close and supportive, and standards of behaviour excellent. Pupils want to come to school and as a result, attendance is high. They contribute actively, to the decisions that are made. An example of this involved the plans for the new playground, to be built in the summer holidays. The headteacher, shared her thoughts with the school council, but the pupils had different ideas. They were encouraged to draw up their plans and these have been adopted. Pupil and parent questionnaires formally evidence this is a 'listening school'. Their opinions are important and respected. Another 'whole school and community project' exemplifying this involved the creation of the outdoor 'Reflection Area'. Parents, staff and pupils worked together to plan and make mosaic squares, that form the central cross. This is one of many places, provided through the wonderful school environment that effectively encourage prayer and reflection. Pupils questioned feel prayer is important. 'We enjoy praying because we are communicating with God. He is with us here, by our side. He makes us safe and helps us learn.' Forest Schools and RE are also popular areas of the rich and varied curriculum. Pupils enjoy learning about different faiths and cultures. Their project, 'We are part of the World's Family', has involved a visit to the Derby Multi-faith Centre. Discussions have explored diversity and common views, within their school family, which pupils and parents believe, 'is broadening their understanding and building respect and tolerance for others'. The headteacher and her team know their pupils very well. A large percentage of the pupils display a range of additional needs. As a result, attainment on entry is below national levels. Pupils' progress is tracked rigorously to ensure intervention and support meets their needs. Teaching is effective and consistently enables pupils to progress their learning rapidly. Partnership and support from parents is also strong. Homework is a regular feature, through the 'learning links projects'. As a result, by the time they leave school all pupils are in line or above national expectations. Extra-curricular activities, such as participation in the 'Young Voices Choir' in Manchester, enrich and extend their learning experiences. The school leader has encouraged partnerships through visits to Bhutan and membership with the 'Leek Education Partnership' (LEP). Pupils' desire to care for others is reflected through their regular fund raising for Christian Aid and the school in Bhutan. Links with St Michael's Church are strong and have been sustained despite the long term illness of the vicar. The foundation governor and licensed lay minister are regular visitors and passionate in their support of the school. The latter has also become an associate governor who regularly leads worship. The former has co-led RE topics such as 'Baptism' with the pupils. The school has prioritised the need to formalise aspects of their work, to further drive school distinctiveness and effectiveness.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is a vital part of and central to, the daily life of the school. As the headteacher explained, 'it is part of the life-blood of the school, where we gather to praise God, to reflect, to hear Bible stories and to explore the teaching behind them.' Pupils, parents and staff share this view, as evidenced by the effective act of worship, during the inspection. It was a 'reflective worship', planned and led by the worship committee, in partnership with the headteacher. This form of worship has grown, through requests made by the committee. 'Our reflection worship is about thinking about God. It allows us to have quiet times to feel God's peace.' Singing is always a key part of worship and the pupils have favourites such as 'My Lighthouse'. The headteacher, as spiritual leader of the school, with her staff, has developed the hall as the spiritual centre. Reflective boards, prayers and artefacts, chosen to inspire and create an atmosphere reinforce where the school family comes together, in unity to worship. Pupils and staff sing, dance and pray to God. Everyone enjoys the variety, offered, through the worship experiences and share the responsibility to lead. Parents praise the headteacher for the way she has enhanced the importance of the Christian values and her encouragement of pupil-led worship. They explain, 'worship starts the day joyfully and sets the tone for the pupils, uplifting the spirits of all.' Special services they attend, such as the outdoor Nativity in school and the Christingle at church are described as 'magical', where 'pupils sing with their hearts and give peace and happiness'. The emotional and spiritual responses generated, are described as 'tear jerking'. Worship is united and consistently enables the school family to grow spiritually. It provides a daily setting, to explore the school's Christian

values and to learn how they can be instrumental in shaping their life choices. All pupils are deeply prayerful and articulate, in explaining why prayer is so important to them. 'We might share things with God, in our prayers, that we might not talk about to others. God doesn't always answer in the way we think, but the most important thing is to communicate with God and to encourage others to understand God's faithfulness.' They know and say the Lord's prayer and the school prayer, but are equally comfortable with spontaneous prayer. Worship is led, monthly, by the licensed lay minister. The church, together with the 'Hugh Sleigh Fund' pays for transport, for visits to St Michael's for services. These celebrate the Christian calendar and strengthen the links between church and school. The range of worship experiences, are effective in developing pupils' understanding of Christian traditions. Bible stories and their RE lessons challenge them to explore the concept of the Trinity, through Christ's Baptism and Pentecost. Regular, rigorous monitoring, undertaken formally, by the headteacher, ensures high quality in RE and worship. Evaluations, through the worship committee, school council and questionnaires provide vital feedback to ensure these experiences meet needs. This results in actions which consistently develop and effectively supports the spiritual lives of the school and community.

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

The headteacher is a strong, effective leader, who has united the school and community, through her clarity of vision. She is passionate about the school and the families she serves. Her faith, belief and Christian witness, effectively underpins the spiritual life of the school. She is well supported by her staff, governors and parents. They are united in their efforts to provide a nurturing, caring, inclusive school, shaped by the vision and values they share. The pupils also understand and endorse their 'Foundation Blocks of Learning'. They are important, 'in helping us to grow as God would want us to, loving and respecting each other'. As a result, they celebrate diversity and encourage all to 'treat others as we would like to be treated.' Relationships are very strong, within the school and between the school and its community. There is also, a very close partnership between parents and the school. They support the school, as 'friends of the school' raising money and giving their time, to provide extra resources. Shared initiatives, such as 'tidy up our school' resulted in volunteers 'adopting' parts of the school environment, and regularly maintaining these. Monitoring, self-evaluation and professional development are tools, used by the school, to raise standards and drive school distinctiveness. This is building capacity and confidence in the future development and leadership of the school, as a church school. The headteacher, supported by the governors, has pursued networking through the LEP. Being a distinctive, Christian school remains an important priority for the school. RE is effectively managed and led by the headteacher. She works closely with the Key Stage 1 teacher to ensure the subject is well planned and taught. She has attended Understanding Christianity training with the diocese and these approaches have been shared and introduced, across the school. The strong links with the diocese have been beneficial in supporting the school's Christian character and professional development. Assessment and planning in RE is organised through a 'steps in' approach. This ensures consistency in quality and, as a result, the school meets statutory requirements for RE and worship. Curricular projects, such as 'I am part of the World's Family', are guided specifically by the vision and 'Foundation Blocks for Learning'. The success of these approaches has led to the school to prioritise the need to use these to shape future curriculum themes. The developmental points from the previous inspection have been met.

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