

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John's Church of England Primary School

Address	St John's Place, Canterbury CT1 1BD		
Date of inspection	18/6/2019	Status of school	Voluntary Controlled
Diocese	Canterbury	URN	137071

Overall Judgement	Grade	Good
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?		
Additional Judgement		
The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good

School context

St John's is a primary school with 357 pupils on roll. The school has a low level of religious diversity but a more significant level of cultural diversity. This is reflected by the fact that 30 per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language, with 30 different languages spoken. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is higher than national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is higher than national averages. 41 per cent of pupils were new to the school in September 2018. The school serves a community with very high levels of deprivation.

The school's Christian vision

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." - Jeremiah 29:11. The community of St John's champions an engaging curriculum, which encourages reflective and resilient learners. Because of Jesus' love for everyone, we value every child as an individual and support them spiritually, emotionally, and academically.

Key findings

- The school's Christian vision, led and modelled by school leaders, is lived out in remarkable ways at all levels across the school community especially in terms of hope and aspiration. It is not always clear how the school's associated values are linked with this vision especially in policies and development planning.
- A good understanding of spiritual development underpins the life of the whole school community well.
- Relationships based on high levels of trust are apparent amongst all members of the school community and this has a very positive effect on mental health and the upholding of dignity and respect for all.
- Collective worship is inclusive and invitational but not all pupils are able to apply what they hear to their own lives.
- Religious education (RE) is well led and managed and expectations are consistently high. Pupils enjoy the questions which the most recent syllabus enables them to discuss. Assessment is being developed to ensure that all pupils are able to progress appropriately.

Areas for development

- Ensure that the school's increasingly effective and embedded Christian vision is consistent within and drives all of its policies and development plans as well as linking clearly to its associated values.
- Embed best practice in pupil leadership for collective worship in ways which actively engage and inspire the whole school community.
- Develop the current system for assessment in RE further so that teachers are able to gauge progress accurately, enabling pupils to be clear about their next steps in learning.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection finding

St John's distinctive, inclusive and effective vision, based on Jeremiah 29:11, is well articulated by all stakeholders. It is a lived vision characterised by hope and aspiration for all pupils. This is a non-negotiable for all school leaders in all that they say and do. The living and learning values within school are effective and are linked well to biblical stories. Pupils can talk about how they apply them in practical ways. However, it is not always clear how the vision explicitly drives particular policies and how the values are associated with the vision. There are very strong partnerships with the local church and community, all of which are used to raise aspiration. This means that pupils have rich and exciting opportunities which they might otherwise never experience such as those offered through the partnership with the King's School. These include learning a range of languages and Saturday morning music lessons. Links with local businesses helps pupils to articulate realistic goals for their futures based on an understanding of the world of work, as another element in the hope and aspiration of the school's vision.

Staff members understand that the vision defines the way in which they relate to everyone in school, the way in which they plan the curriculum and the ways in which they are supported by school leaders. They speak about having a clear understanding of the 'Christ-like' attitude which they and their senior leaders must model. Their particular gifts are nurtured by senior leaders, and then supported by continuing professional development. Governors monitor the school as a church school very well, demonstrating a deep concern for the most vulnerable pupils and families. Together with senior leaders, they ensure that funding is spent in ways which provide academic, spiritual, emotional and physical support, ensuring that pupils can flourish. This means that, for those pupils who are in school for significant periods of time, there is an upwards trend in progress, bringing them in line or slightly above national averages. Very high levels of mobility and need mean that not all pupils are able to meet national expectations. However, their individual progress is closely monitored and effective interventions are quickly put in place. Attendance is good and exclusions are very rare.

Spiritual wellbeing is well supported, including by the local clergy. Collective worship is quiet and reflective, giving pupils space in their day which they value. The prayer space, which is open to everyone during the day and to Key Stage 2 pupils at lunchtime, is well used. Pupils' prayers show that they understand prayer as thanksgiving, saying sorry and asking God to help them and others. Pupils' prayers also demonstrate their care for others less fortunate than themselves including local homeless people whom they have been out to help on the streets. They have a growing understanding of some of the important reasons for supporting good causes in terms of justice and fairness. Responses to big questions in RE also contribute to pupils' good spiritual development, and across the wider curriculum through 'bubbles' which capture deeper thinking.

Relationships built on very high levels of trust and on justice and forgiveness demonstrate how the vision is lived out day by day. The significant challenges faced by pupils and families in the local community are supported well, within the curriculum and beyond with remarkable levels of pastoral care. The wholly inclusive nature of the school means that pupils flourish in St John's when no place is able to be found for them elsewhere. Resources are very well matched to high levels of need, for example in the Safari room where particularly vulnerable children are supported. Counsellors are available for pupils and families, there is a play therapist, Makaton is used to support communication and inclusivity, and talk time contributes to a calm and nurturing environment for all. These and other approaches support mental health very well in pupils and their families. Staff speak with great gratitude about the care which has supported them through times of personal difficulty. A counsellor is available to them when needed.

Parents articulate different ways in which their children flourish especially through the celebration of difference and diversity. The carefully planned inclusion of all, including those who enter the school speaking no English from a range of cultures, means that acceptance is built quickly. Examples of this include celebrating a language of the month, cultural days and, in Year 2 during inspection, a Muslim pupil acting as the expert in RE lessons about Ramadan. Pupils have good knowledge and understanding of all the major world faiths and can explain how this will help them in their future lives. Pupils with different needs take part in all activities and are given equal opportunities across the curriculum and beyond.

Collective worship lies at the heart of the school, preparing pupils for learning by building community, praise and reflection. There is a strong biblical basis in worship and pupils can articulate the importance of the example of Jesus. They have a growing understanding of the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The local incumbent supports the worship programme very well. The pupil leadership group is growing in confidence although their chief role presently is to support rather than plan and deliver worship at present. All pupils are included and respond respectfully in worship. The celebration of the Eucharist to which all are invited is a reverent and moving experience for staff and pupils. However, pupils are not able to confidently express how worship inspires them or what key messages they are given.

Religious education is very well led by the subject leader, ably supported by senior leaders and by the Diocese. Considerable improvements have been made since the previous denominational inspection. The implementation of a new syllabus, including Understanding Christianity resources, has resulted in an increase in enjoyment and challenge for both teachers and pupils. Conceptual thinking has been broadened and deepened. Pupils talk about their enjoyment of learning about world faiths including from visits and visitors. There are consistently high expectations for RE across the school. However, teachers are not always focussing on RE thinking when assessing individual pupils which limits how they can best help them to make their next steps to progress in their learning.

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