



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Thomas of Canterbury Voluntary Aided Infant School

Sawyers Hall Lane
Brentwood
CM15 9BX

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex

Date of inspection: 11th December 2014

Date of last inspection: October 2009

School's unique reference number: 115184

Headteacher: Caroline L'Estrange

Inspector's name and number: Rosemary Privett 321

School context

St Thomas of Canterbury is an urban, average sized Infant school. Its partner Junior school is next door. Most pupils are White British. The number of pupils who need additional educational support is below the national average. Recently the school has seen a relative increase in the number of pupils who are eligible for Pupil Premium funding. The number of eligible pupils is , however, still below the national average .The current headteacher was in post at the last SIAS inspection.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Thomas of Canterbury Infant as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- The longstanding strengths in the school's Christian leadership means that Christian principles are deeply embedded and underpin all its work
- Everyone can explain the impact of the school's Christian character because it is clearly communicated in relationships, through religious education [RE] and collective worship. It is also expressed very clearly through communications with parents, the parish and the wider community
- The outstanding quality of worship and RE which enables pupils to develop into caring and compassionate individuals with a real grasp of their place in the ongoing life of the Christian church

Areas to improve

- Investigate more age appropriate ways for pupils to be involved in the evaluation of worship to ensure that it is always relevant and purposeful

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

Distinctive Christian values are made explicit and are deeply embedded in this high achieving school. The headteacher, staff and governors lead by example in expounding gospel-based values ensuring children are loved, motivated and feel respected. As a result, children are proud of their school. They talk confidently about why it is special to them. The symbol of a burning candle and the phrase, 'We follow Jesus by letting our little lights shine,' is prominently displayed around the school. The core values are listed in the body of the candle. This simple, age appropriate image is embraced by pupils enabling them to grasp the values which lie at their school's heart. They speak confidently about Jesus as 'light of the world'. They explain how they try to show the values in all that they do both at home and school. This leads to very responsible behaviour and a strong sense of social justice. Pupils are proud of their many charitable fundraising activities seeing them as a way of serving others, as Jesus did. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent so attainment is better than in schools nationally. The school has robust strategies to deal with attendance issues, applying these with sensitivity and compassionately. This approach helps attendance remain consistently high. A very strong emphasis is placed on meeting the needs of vulnerable pupils. The progress seen in their academic achievement and behaviour is testimony to the high quality of teaching, pastoral care and Christ-like compassion given to all. Through staff meetings, training and quiet days there has developed a shared perspective on spirituality. This helps develop a spiritual dimension which permeates the whole curriculum, supporting the spiritual and moral development of pupils well. There is a strong and mutually supportive partnership with St Matthew's School in Kenya. This enables pupils to understand Christianity as a worldwide religion. It helps pupils understand the similarities and differences between their lives.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

High quality and inspiring worship is the heartbeat of this school. Strong links with the parish church ensure that the Anglican tradition is upheld and celebrated. Its impact stretches beyond the daily act of worship. Pupils have an excellent understanding of worship, which belies their age. This is because the familiar structure of Anglican worship is used regularly. The half-termly Eucharist, in which Year 2 pupils play a key role, holds a special importance for both school and parish. Consequently, pupils have a very clear understanding of its meaning. All classes are actively involved in planning and leading their class worship, based on one of the core values. Worship clearly engages pupils and is making a difference in their, and their families', lives. The thoughtfully planned 3-year programme encompasses themes like prayer and love alongside challenging concepts such as the Trinity. Themes begin with the pupils own experience and move outwards to focus on Jesus and the life of the church. In this way it supports pupil's spiritual development and reflection on important Christian concepts as well as their own faith journey. The importance of creating a sacred space for worship is taken very seriously. Simple images are displayed to support the theme. Other symbols such as an Advent ring, a cross draped with material to match the liturgical season and lighted candles, help pupils understand Christian symbolism. As a result, they talk confidently about the meaning of key Christian festivals and beliefs. Prayer is central to school life. Pupils speak with understanding about how prayer helps them talk with God. A Year 1 child said, 'We don't always have to say words to God. He knows what we need even when we don't say a word.' The impact of worship is monitored and evaluated by adults. The school has rightly identified that pupils are not involved deeply enough, in age appropriate ways, in this monitoring process.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils learn exceptionally well because teaching is good, with much that is outstanding. It

draws on a range of sources and activities that engage pupils and supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. Learning is creative and exciting with appropriate support and challenge. Consequently, pupils enjoy RE. They have a good recollection, age appropriate understanding and reflective insight on topics studied. A coherent syllabus is in place enabling pupils to develop a very good understanding of Christianity. Very careful lesson planning highlights times when deep and probing questions are asked of pupils. This results in even the youngest pupils being confident, thoughtful and mature in their discussions. Since the previous inspection, the school has developed a wide variety of resources to support staff in teaching about other religions. Staff confidence has consequently grown. The curriculum for the Early Years Foundation stage has been enriched to include cross-curricular topics on India and China. Through this they learn about the lifestyles and religions of these countries in practical and interactive ways. Rigorous monitoring by an effective co-ordinator means that the high profile of the subject and the standards in RE have been maintained. As a result of inspiring and excellent teaching, all pupils achieve very well. About a third make rapid progress and attain levels above national expectations. Assessment is very good. A recent improvement is for the teachers to feedback using specific questions for pupils to respond to in order to extend their thinking.

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

The inspirational and practical leadership of the headteacher and her deputy ensure that this school promotes a distinct Christian vision rooted in its core Gospel values. Through their nurturing ethos they ensure that this is a highly effective school, which effectively promotes pupils' spiritual development and high academic achievement. The headteacher is held in very high esteem. Her high expectations for academic excellence as well as her strong personal vision for the school are explicitly articulated. Senior leaders, including governors demonstrate a determination for the continued development of the school as a Church school. This means that the school never stands still. Staff and parents support this vision. Outstanding leadership of worship and RE ensures that they are central in helping to define the school's Christian character. The longstanding and mutually supportive links with the parish church enables the school's vision to be understood more widely. The staff team, including their professional development needs, are supported well by able and committed governors. The training budget includes funding for diocesan training. Attending these courses is enabling staff to develop their skills as church school leaders. The Chair of governors is also the incumbent. His strong presence is greatly appreciated. The school and its parents benefit from his spiritual and pastoral leadership. As one parent says, 'It completes the circle!' Self-evaluation as a church school is managed efficiently with robust procedures to ensure its continuing development. The thread of the school's distinctive Christian character runs through all its development priorities.

SIAMS report December 2014 St Thomas of Canterbury Infants School, Brentwood CM15 9BX