



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Nicholas CE VC Primary School

South Street
Tillingham
Essex
CM0 7TJ

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex

Dates of inspection: 20 April 2016

Date of last inspection: 20 May 2011

School's unique reference number: 115122

Headteacher: Robert Pike

Inspector's name: Mike Dean

National Society QA Officer: Lyn Field 151

School context

St Nicholas school serves a small rural community where pupils are of predominantly White British heritage. Pupils often enter the school working below expectations for their age. The number of those eligible for pupil premium funding is around the national average. The proportion of pupils requiring support with special educational needs is above average. Since the previous denominational inspection, the school has been through a period of significant changes in leadership. The current headteacher was appointed in January 2014 and a new deputy from September 2015.

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

- Determined leadership of the headteacher has ensured that, following an uncertain period, the school's Christian character is firmly back in focus
- The headteacher's vision, embedded through values appropriately linked to Christian teaching and aspiration, is impacting significantly on the school
- Collective worship has greater impact than at the time of the previous inspection
- A strengthened partnership with the church's current lay leadership has made a marked contribution to this

Areas to improve

- Develop a common understanding of spirituality across the school community to inform provision of opportunities to promote learners' spiritual development
- Ensure monitoring to evaluate distinctiveness, including that for collective worship, is regular, robust and fit for purpose, feeding directly into ongoing development
- Strengthen systems by which governors hold school leadership to account for the ongoing development of all aspects of Christian distinctiveness

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

A distinctive vision promotes the development of the Christian character of the school. This is underpinned by core values linked to biblical principles and conduct. As a result, pupils flourish and make good progress, with disadvantaged pupils performing well. A sound Christian ethos is reflected within the school's mission statement: 'Learning Today for All our Tomorrows in a Caring, Christian Community'. Modelling of the school's values by staff contributes directly to the good relationships across and between stakeholders. Parents recognise these relationships as a strength of the school. Pupils are clear about the importance of applying each value in their lives as 'something we should follow'. They recognise that school values often link to Jesus and to how He lived. They reference these values to their own behaviour and hold each other to account. Consequently, parents and staff comment on how pupil behaviour has improved since the introduction of these values. As a result of the school's care, support and appropriate challenge, pupils are happy and secure. Bullying is rare and pupils link this to the scriptural directive to 'treat people as you wish to be treated'. RE is used effectively by the school as a means of promoting spiritual, moral social and cultural development. One result is a positive view amongst pupils in relation to how RE helps them to reflect upon belief. Pupils develop an understanding of the diversity of religions and of some of their similarities. For instance, Year 6 pupils compared Christian and Hindu creation stories. As a result, one pupil noted, 'Christians and Hindus can have a conversation with each other and they can understand each other better'. They also recognise that a whole group cannot be blamed for the actions of a very small number. Displays help to reinforce developing opportunities to explore deep questions about life, meaning and purpose. For example, one class had reflected upon what one question they would ask God if they met Him. Another considered how God is creative. A tangible vein of spirituality runs implicitly through the school's ethos and character. This has supported pupils to begin to develop a growing spirituality themselves. For example, pupils and staff talk positively about the way classroom prayer/reflection areas are used. Pupils explain how they use these as a space to say thank you to God or to ask Him things. Pupils engage with questions around meaning and purpose with thoughtful reflection and honesty. As a result, their response is often mature and considered. However, the school community has not defined a common understanding and interpretation of spirituality. This limits further opportunities to develop spirituality in pupils and in the broader community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The new headteacher has worked hard to increase the profile of collective worship in the life of the school. As a result, the Christian character of the school has changed for the better and stakeholders acknowledge this as a contributing factor. Parents from a variety of backgrounds value their children's involvement in collective worship. They rightly note its impact on school life and behaviour. The Collective Worship policy indicates a clear intention to engage with the central teachings of the Christian faith. This, and an expectation that all play an active part, is borne out by planning. Informal evaluation of collective worship has fed into development planning. This has resulted in some effective steps being taken to develop collective worship in school. However, school systems are currently not robust enough to methodically evaluate the impact of collective worship on pupils. Pupils are not systematically involved in evaluating acts of worship, including elements led by themselves or others. Stories around Jesus' life, teaching and example are used to reinforce the Christian perspective on school values. In consequence, pupils note the frequency with which bible stories are used in collective worship. They can clearly recount the significance of the cross to Christians, in terms of its link to Jesus' death and resurrection. They identify God the Father as the Creator, and God the Son as Jesus Himself. They describe spirit as 'the inside of someone' and God the Holy Spirit as '...A bit in us...He is watching us'. Prayer and reflection have a central place in times of worship. As a result, pupils value prayer. They offer their own prayers as an integral part of worship, selected from class books of prayers they have composed. They also make use of class prayer/reflection areas.

Staff appreciate the opportunity to take advantage of rare time and space for their own reflection during collective worship. Use of liturgy, a candle and liturgical colours means that an appropriate Anglican character is given to the worship. In the absence of a current incumbent, members of the church ministry team lead worship on a weekly basis. Through this partnership, key messages around links between core values and Christian teaching are reinforced. Church services are a focal point, bringing the school community together. Parents are encouraged to participate and, recognising the value of these occasions, attend where possible. Leaders have increased pupil engagement with worship by involving pupils in planning and leading parts of these services. For example, Year 5 children reinterpreted the Easter readings, explaining how and why they chose to do this in a particular way. Together, these elements demonstrate how the school's current focus on worship contributes to an emergent spirituality in pupils.

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

The new headteacher took over following an unsettled period in school leadership. Since then, high expectations and a strong drive for improvement have been a consistent feature of the school. The headteacher, supported by his new deputy, has shown determination and commitment in sharpening Christian distinctiveness. Christian vision that expounds the Good Samaritan as a key role model has contributed significantly to this. This has rejuvenated the school's Christian character and ethos. The leadership is greatly appreciated by parents, who value the way in which partnership between home and school has been strengthened. They comment on how values and Christian character are modelled through the headteacher's strength of character, fairness and capacity to communicate. In consequence of this renewed partnership, difficulties are dealt with more quickly than in the past. The headteacher has ensured that values that link to learners' behaviour, attitudes and spiritual development form the bedrock of collective worship. These are linked wherever possible to biblical teaching and the example of Christ. As a result, pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved. Staff have appreciated the way in which the headteacher's vision has brought everyone together. Working as a team, they have drawn up and implemented plans to continue to develop and enhance the school's Christian character and ethos. Support from the diocesan adviser to assist with this has been welcomed and advice taken on board. Consequently, things are now moving forward more quickly. Some stakeholder evaluation, such as pupil and parent questionnaires, has been carried out to inform future development planning. However, evaluative processes are currently not systematic enough to ensure this rate of progress is maintained in the longer term. The headteacher recognises that the school is on a journey and has looked to the diocesan adviser to support his own leadership development. Governors are very supportive of efforts to enhance the school's Christian distinctiveness. However, governor monitoring is not sufficiently robust to hold leaders to account for this area. The partnership and working relationship with the local church has been strengthened. Planning for collective worship is now co-ordinated, ensuring a clearer focus that reinforces the importance of core values to pupils. Statutory requirements for the arrangement of collective worship and RE are met. All of this has helped to shape a school with a strong pastoral foundation, balancing high expectations with deep-rooted care and concern. This has resulted in a happy, secure and successful school community.

SIAMS report April 2016 St Nicholas CE VC Primary School South Street Tillingham CM0 7TJ