

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John's Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Albion Street, Cheltenham, Gloucester, GL52 2SN	
Current inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Gloucester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Date of inspection	6 October 2017
Date of last inspection	20 September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 115669
Headteacher	Juliette Moxham
Inspector's name and number	Margaret James 698

School context

St John's VC Primary is a smaller than average school with 195 children on roll who are drawn from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Currently 42% of pupils are from a range of minority ethnic groups and 32% of pupils speak English as an additional language, a figure which is well above the national average. Almost 17% of pupils are in receipt of pupil premium funding. In February 2017, OFSTED judged the school to be Good. The current headteacher was one of the co-headteachers in post at the time of the previous section 48 inspection in 2012. The school works closely with the parish church and the local congregational church and hosts a Sunday School-type club run by parents for pupils of the school on a Sunday afternoon.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's VC Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The headteacher's strong Christian vision to lead a school focused upon enabling all to flourish and to live life in all its fullness is a defining feature of St John's.
- As a result of the vision, the school community is regarded by all as being a close-knit family in which meeting the needs of each person is the responsibility of all.
- As a result of the whole school commitment to nurturing every individual, children are empowered to live out Christian values in many contexts. This includes in relation to their learning and their care for others.
- The leadership of religious education (RE) is a strength of the school and the subject is regarded by all as being closely linked to the mission of the school as a church school.

Areas to improve

- Bring together the current thinking around spirituality so that it explicitly informs a coherent approach to reflection, the spiritual aspect of the school's Christian values, and children's ability to connect with and develop their own personal spirituality.
- Take steps to release children more deeply into the leadership of collective worship, for example, in taking the lead with content and delivery, as part of their spiritual development.
- Periodically, review governors' monitoring of the impact of the school's vision, values and ethos to ensure that this continues to provide an insight into the impact of initiatives to enable the school to keep developing as an effective church school.

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

Distinctively Christian values are a deeply embedded aspect of life at St John's and all speak of them with an impressive degree of understanding. Children of all ages describe ways in which they apply Christian values to their everyday lives both at home and in school. For example, the compassion which defines the way in which children treat each other is attributed even by the youngest to the teachings and the life of Jesus. Children explain that living out Christian values enables them to live in the way that Jesus did and to treat others in the way that he would have done. Older children go deeper in their explanations with comments such as, 'Christian values have Christ in them and so we live by them out of respect.' Teachers explain how the ethos of the school shapes their approach to the holistic education and support offered to all children and their families. They are aware of how this ethos, through the Christian values, shapes all of the school's policies and actions. The staff's commitment to welcoming all to be part of the school family, regardless of background, and the policy decisions which underpin this, are exemplary in living out the Christian ethos. This results in a highly effective emphasis upon the well-being of all members of the school family and to a shared commitment to giving every child a fresh start. This dedication to inclusion ensures that all children and their families are given the freedom to be themselves, to openly share their differing cultures and beliefs, and to live and learn together at St John's in harmony. The context for this whole school approach to inclusion is a deep and shared understanding of the Christian faith and the place which it has within education. Spirituality and reflection are important aspects of the life of the school community. However, the different understandings of and opportunities for pupils' spiritual development are not currently encapsulated within a coherent and active policy. This prevents pupils from having an appropriate depth of awareness of their own spirituality which subsequently limits their potential for spiritual growth. Teaching and learning in RE has undergone impressive improvements over recent years and this has resulted in an increase in the subject's profile amongst both staff and pupils. It is an effective vehicle for helping children to understand the teachings of a range of world faiths, including Christianity, and has a direct impact upon children's understanding of and respect for people who have religious beliefs which differ from their own. Children are confident and articulate in expressing their own beliefs and are comfortable in discussing the differences which they identify in others. One consequence of this ability to accept others is that children are patient and understanding with each other in everyday situations and have strategies for dealing with conflict or disagreements, in line with the Christian ethos of the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The worship life of the school emerges from a whole school commitment to living life in all its fullness. Acts of worship provide a consistent forum for the exploration of Christian teaching, values and Bible stories as well as Christian festivals and the Church calendar. Assemblies, as they are currently called at St John's, are seen as crucial times for the school to come together as a family to celebrate, worship, learn, and reflect. Prayer forms a regular part of collective worship and children have a developing understanding of Christian teaching about prayer as well as about God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Acts of worship are led by a range of school staff, members of the pupil Worship Committee and representatives of local churches. Pupil-led worship is heavily directed by members of staff at present and children feel that they are ready to be involved in more independent and creative ways. Several governors are involved in the leadership of acts of worship and they also attend worship regularly. When in attendance, they use these opportunities to provide the headteacher with feedback which is sometimes used to improve practice and provision. Whilst acts of worship are often recognised as spiritual times, children do not readily make connections between their own personal spiritual development and the teaching about Christian values. The adults in leadership roles have a good understanding of how collective worship extends far beyond the formal daily act of worship. It is regarded by them as being an intrinsic element of the Christian ethos and vision of the school and is rooted in prayer and the commitment to enable all to flourish. As a result, for example, there is a monthly prayer meeting to which all members of the school community are invited and which focuses on the needs of all governors, staff, children and their families. The links which school leaders have with the leaders of local churches also ensure that worship and prayer underpin the life of the school and this broader understanding of worship has a positive impact upon all aspects of school life.

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

The headteacher's Christian vision for the school, 'Where Children Flourish', emanates from the biblical encouragement that all should be enabled to flourish as children of God so that they may have the opportunity to live life in all its fullness. Her commitment to make this a daily reality for all members of the St John's Primary School community is a compelling example of the difference which a Christian education can make to children and their families. It also has a positive impact upon the staff team, all of whom ensure that the needs of each individual are known and addressed. They speak routinely of enabling pupils to 'flourish as children of God' and apply the concept to all aspects of their work. This commitment to the individual extends to other members of staff and to governors,

all of whom speak of the support and compassion which they receive from their colleagues. Governors speak confidently and with an impressive depth of knowledge about the impact on children of initiatives which have been introduced as a direct result of the Christian vision of the school. They are able to describe the monitoring which they have carried out, both formally and informally, of the impact which interventions have made and of the positive difference which the Christian values have on the life of the school. Members of the Vision and Values Committee ensure that the outcomes of the monitoring which is carried out are passed on to the headteacher for action, and they talk knowledgeably about developments which have been made in school as a result. They describe ways in which the Christian vision for the school shapes all actions, decisions and policies and have a common-sense approach to the implementation of ongoing developments.

Partnerships with local churches and schools have been an area of growth for the school in recent years. These links have been developed in the context of the school's vision with its focus upon children being enabled to flourish.

They have the purpose of providing a breadth of opportunities and Christian teaching, a depth of understanding of the needs of individuals, as well as pastoral support for the whole school community. Parents are valued and committed partners with the school team and their understanding of the school's vision means that they are able to be actively involved both at home and in school with what the St John's team are seeking to achieve. The headteacher ensures that she and the wider school community are involved in diocesan initiatives and partnerships which will benefit both the St John's school family and other church schools in the area. The leadership of RE is a significant strength of the school. Decisions and actions taken over recent years have ensured that the subject has a high priority in all year groups. The support for staff given by the subject leader and the steps taken to provide high quality resources mean that teaching and learning in the subject are of good quality.

The headteacher's passion for education, her commitment to the school, and her understanding of the place of Christianity in the life of a community is a driving force in the positive direction which the school is taking.

SIAMS report October 2017 St John's VC Primary Cheltenham GL52 2SN