

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Bowdon Church of England Primary School

Grange Road, Bowdon, Altrincham WA14 3EX

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Trafford
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	N/A
Date of inspection	24 November 2017
Date of last inspection	November 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 106338
Headteacher	Sharon Martin
Inspector's name and number	Robert Haigh 660

School context

Bowdon Church School is a much larger than average-sized primary school serving a wide area characterised by socio-economic advantage. The school, which moved into its new building in 2015-16, is four years into a planned expansion to three forms of entry. It is annually oversubscribed. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is below the national average, as is the percentage with a statement for special educational needs and/or disabilities or an education, health, care plan. The school is an active member of the local cluster of primary and secondary schools.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The visionary leadership of the headteacher and her senior colleagues, supported by dedicated staff and governors, means the school's deeply Christian ethos creates a vibrant and harmonious learning community.
- A belief in the God-given value and uniqueness of each child inspires meticulous pastoral care and a culture of Christian nurturing which have a positive impact on pupils' well-being, confidence and eagerness to learn.
- The school's core Christian values are embedded and consistently practised. They support the growth of character, facilitate learning and enrich the loving and respectful relationships throughout the school family.
- A rich experience of worship and religious education (RE) takes pupils on an exciting exploration of faith and belief which strengthens their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.
- The school is a beacon of Christian love, care and hospitality within the local community. The strong partnership with churches and with families brings school, parish and home together in harmony.

Areas to improve

- Develop the contribution of the pupils' worship group to the planning, leading and evaluation of collective worship to enhance their spiritual understanding and leadership skills.
- Enhance the school's physical environment so that it proclaims Christian distinctiveness throughout and more effectively supports the spiritual well-being of the school community.

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

The school is a vibrant and harmonious community of faith and learning. Everyone is engaged in its mission of 'Pursuing excellence together, secure in the love of God'. The school's embedded Christian values support this and underpin all aspects of its practice. They are also a topic of conversation at home and parents say these core values permeate the school. Pupils explain the positive effect of the values on their attitudes and behaviour. A Year 4 pupil remarked, 'We see our Christian values as life lessons both for now and in the future.' All pupils are known well and cared for deeply as God's children. They feel happy, loved, safe and secure. This, together with a strong sense of belonging, explains their outstanding behaviour. They are polite, courteous and respectful. When problems do occur the values guide responses and interventions.

The school's nurturing, Christ-centred environment is also very conducive to learning and achievement. The atmosphere is calm yet pupils fizz with drive and aspiration. Their love of learning is reflected in their above-average attendance. Ambitious targets are set from the outset and pupils respond with determination to succeed. Progress and attainment in all key stages are outstanding. Pupils have access to a richly creative and stimulating curriculum and an extensive range of activities which make a positive contribution to their SMSC development. High expectations are combined with impressive support, which for the vulnerable is transformational. Those with special needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to others.

The school's vision of excellence, however, involves more than academic success. It is a challenge to fullness of life for each person and to be a blessing to others. As a result, this is a community living well together. Relationships are excellent in the warm family atmosphere. Pupils work well in groups to achieve good outcomes. They show compassion in the way they speak about other children's needs and their willingness to support them. A Year 6 pupil expressed the thoughts of others when she said, 'We respect everyone in our school family. We live, care and forgive under God'. Older pupils look after younger ones in the playground and around school. This buddy system has a positive impact on the confidence and self-esteem of both groups.

SMSC development is evident in religious education, worship and the wider curriculum. Pupils are articulate and reflective. They explain the influence of faith, belief and morality in their own lives with confidence, insight and maturity. The interactive faith and values displays in corridors nurture pupils' spiritual and moral development. The striking use of stained glass and an illuminated cross at the entrance proclaim Christian identity, although some parts of the interior of the new building are as yet bereft of such enrichment. The emphasis on learning Bible stories, drawing from the beliefs of other religions and discussions of current affairs means that pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong. They show empathy for victims and the disadvantaged. Through their enterprise and other activities, pupils organise much charity fund raising, which they say reflects the teaching of Jesus about service, compassion and justice. The activities of the enthusiastic eco club are inspired by and promote a sense of wonder at God's creation. The link with partner schools through Ugandaid enables pupils to understand that Christianity is a multi-cultural global faith. The study of Christianity and other world faiths in RE promotes pupils' understanding of cultural diversity, tolerance and shared values.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The whole school community recognises the importance of worship. It is inclusive and binds the community together. Gathering for worship is seen as special. It is variously exuberant, reflective, affirming and challenging. Evaluation from pupils and adults shows how worship prompts their deeper thinking about faith and inspires service through social and charitable activity. Well-planned themes enable pupils to understand Bible teaching, Christian values, the church's year and the faith experience of other religions. Church celebrations of Christian festivals and cathedral visits enhance pupils' understanding of Anglican tradition. They are also able to see the relevance of Christian values and biblical teaching to their own lives. They are prompted to ponder the big questions that matter to them and are helped to understand the challenges faced by Christians today. Through worship, therefore, a Christian perspective on the world is permeating pupils' consciousness.

A culture of prayer enhances the life of the school. A Year 6 pupil commented that, 'It is natural to pray here'. Pupils understand the purposes of collective and private prayer in the journey of faith. They use the lunchtime prayer clinic to write and share prayers for the prayer trees and a variety of worship occasions. Pupils have helped create engaging worship points in their classrooms. They respect the tranquil memorial garden as a sacred space for quiet contemplation and prayer. These opportunities deepen their knowledge of the value and significance of prayer. Their growing understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit enables pupils to speak about the Trinity with confidence. Members of staff, parish clergy and visitors play an important part in the pattern of worship. Parents, parishioners and governors attend worship and there is a clear sense of the family coming together. As a result, pupils are welcomed into the wider worshipping community and feel a sense of belonging. Different contexts, leaders and styles ensure they understand how varied worship can be. Pupils contribute to times of reflection and worship which build their confidence. There are, however, not enough opportunities for them to independently design and lead worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The importance of RE in the life of the school is demonstrated by the high priority it is accorded as a core curriculum subject. Standards are comparable to those in other subjects. Teaching is predominantly outstanding and never less than good, leading to pupils' consistently good and often outstanding progress. Effective teamwork between teachers and highly skilled teaching assistants creates a strong sense of collaboration in learning which pupils copy. Lessons meet the needs of all by using varied and differentiated activities which engage pupils, promote their enjoyment and develop essential knowledge and skills. The subject is taught in a creative and interactive way with an emphasis on investigating religious concepts and exploring Christian values. The diocesan syllabus and the Understanding Christianity programme provide exciting enquiry opportunities which deepen pupils' theological understanding. As a result, they have an increasingly secure knowledge of Christianity and other faiths. A Year 5 pupil said, 'We need to know about different religions so we can connect with other believers.'

Pupils question, investigate and reflect in response to a range of engaging activities. Their excellent conduct in lessons is a key factor in their successful learning. They concentrate and apply themselves extremely well. They share ideas, use resources independently and require minimal direction in organising themselves. There is a clear balance between learning about religion and opportunities for pupils to reflect on the significance of their learning. Pupils think deeply, express their ideas confidently and support each other in focused discussions. Year 2 pupils demonstrate a high level of curiosity in exploring the biblical narrative of the journey of the Magi and its significance for their lives today. Year 3 pupils examine what the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector teaches about prayerfulness and the importance of incorporating concerns, fears and pleas for others as well as themselves in their prayers. A range of focused and challenging questions encourages pupils' involvement and their desire to contribute. This approach builds their confidence, deepens their understanding and promotes their speaking, listening and writing skills. A variety of faiths are introduced within the RE curriculum and by visitors and trips to places of worship. This enables pupils to live out the school's values of tolerance and respect.

A range of resources enhances teaching and learning. Informative marking guides pupils who respond diligently and so extend their understanding. Teaching and learning is monitored through a programme of book scrutiny, lesson observations and moderation. Effective assessment tracks attainment and progress. Governors and leaders ensure that the school meets the demanding Statement of Entitlement for RE in Church of England schools. This ambition for RE enables the well-trained staff, supported by a visionary subject leader, to deliver high quality lessons.

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

The school's core values impel leadership and management. The headteacher's dynamic and inspiring Christian leadership is rooted in a deep personal faith. She leads with the determination to ensure that pupils' lives will be enriched by the best in care and teaching, as well as by the knowledge that they are children of God. She is supported by a committed and effective deputy, dedicated teaching and support staff and a vigilant governing board. Together they live out and promote a 'can do' culture which fosters all aspects of pupils' academic development and personal well-being through Christian care and love. The drive to improve the quality of the education offered and the effectiveness of the school's Christian distinctiveness are paramount. The school development plan is based on accurate self-evaluation and analysis. It provides strategic direction and includes detailed action plans for RE and worship. It identifies well-chosen activities to meet the ambitious improvement targets the school sets itself. Key policies refer to Christian values in practice. Governors are pro-active in their monitoring of every aspect of the school. They know the school well and offer robust challenge and generous support which enhances the impact of leadership at all levels. Governors ensure that collective worship and RE meet statutory requirements, are well resourced and retain a high profile. Both aspects benefit from careful monitoring and support by senior leaders and increasingly effective links with the governing board. The areas identified as needing improvement at the last SIAMS inspection have been addressed.

The same support shown to pupils is extended to staff who enjoy their work and feel valued. Professional development and succession planning for church school leadership are emphasised. As a result, staff and governors are enabled to learn and contribute which enhances their own expertise and effectiveness and the school's Christian development. The school is outward-looking and has mutually beneficial links with the church, diocese, local authority and its nearby and international partner schools. The school and parishes enjoy a close working relationship. This strengthens the spiritual and pastoral bond between the school, its families and the church. The school knows its pupils and their families very well and meets individual needs through a culture of Christian nurturing. Parents say there is always someone to ask, to listen and to care. This also has a positive influence on pupils' dignity and confidence. Parents overwhelmingly support what the school is achieving. They see their children's happiness and progress as rooted in its Christian character.

SIAMS report November 2017, Bowdon Church of England Primary School, Bowdon, Altrincham WA14 3EX