

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Berteline's Church of England Primary School

Norton Lane, Windmill Hill, Runcorn, WA7 6QN

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Chester

Previous SIAS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Halton

Date of inspection

08 March 2018

Date of last inspection

October 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided 111383

Headteacher

Julie Barron

Inspector's name and number

Ann Lock 919

School context

St Berteline's is a voluntary aided Church of England primary school situated on the outskirts of Runcorn. It is an average sized school with approximately 290 pupils, most of whom are taught in mixed age classes. The vast majority of pupils are of white British heritage with English as their first language. The proportion of pupils entitled to pupil premium is broadly in line with the national average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs or an education health care plan is slightly lower than the national average. St Berteline's is part of a cluster of church schools within the Halton local authority.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Berteline's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- St Berteline's is exceptionally effective in its commitment to fulfil the potential of each pupil as a unique child of God through sustained high standards of achievement and extensive spiritual and social opportunities.
- Worship is inspirational and led with enthusiasm by a wide variety of people, resulting in the development of a spirituality which is awe-inspiring and deeply personal for all.
- Religious education (RE) lessons are imaginative and make a significant contribution to the development of the Christian character of the school, because pupils are actively and freely encouraged to talk about religious ideas and faith.
- Through the inspirational leadership of the headteacher, governors are proactive in monitoring Christian distinctiveness resulting in excellent engagement and systems of accountability.

Areas to improve

- Incorporate the "Understanding Christianity" resource within the school's RE curriculum in order to develop an enquiry approach that engages with biblical text and helps develop religious and theological literacy.
- Take forward plans to encourage greater pupil involvement in the independent planning and delivery of collective worship to further develop the spiritual life of all.

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

St Berteline's is a vibrant school with a strong Christian ethos permeating all aspects of school life. This is evident in consistently good academic success, as well as the outstanding care that it gives to all pupils and staff. School achievement in all core subjects and RE is very good, evidenced through analysis of national and school data. Consequently, attendance is good as children enjoy coming to school based on their motto from Proverbs, 'a love of life, a love of learning'. The motivation for high levels of individual nurture is rooted in Christian values. The expanded mission statement, based on the Bible, states that, 'everyone is treated equally and difference and diversity are valued and respected'. Christian values are woven through every aspect of school life including written documentation and the vast number of artistic displays which enhance the school environment. One example of this is the colourful Year 6 display about the life of Joseph which motivates pupils to think deeply about moral dilemmas from a Christian perspective. Pupils' articulation of the importance of Christian values in their daily lives is impressive and helps them to understand the world in which they live. One pupil said, 'even when it gets hard you should still face God'.

Although school is totally immersed in Christianity, pupils have multiple opportunities to engage with others from diverse faith communities. Visitors with different beliefs have been welcomed into school enthusiastically by pupils, leading to greater understanding of others. Parents have been appreciative of these opportunities because they say that it has helped their children to develop greater tolerance and respect. A recent values week, through art and dance, has similarly enhanced pupils' wider appreciation of Christians from different social and cultural backgrounds. These approaches are examples of the school's outward mind-set and willingness to share good practice with other schools and churches in the parish and diocese. As a result, the school has a generous spirit of Christian giving to charity, including Halton Haven in Runcorn and 'River of Life' in Uganda.

The importance of interpersonal relationships at all levels is a priority. St Berteline's school community describes itself as an extended family to which staff, governors and parents, as well as pupils, are proud to belong. A parent said that, 'the underlying vibe of the school is welcoming.' School relationships are harmonious and pupil behaviour is excellent. Staff are committed to helping children to resolve relationship issues within a framework of Christian values. School is untiring in its commitment to the well-being of all, based on the Christian belief that each person is unique and special to God. A practical example of this is a commitment to buy-in external, specialised professional services, as necessary, to support individuals in need.

The prominence of Christian values permeates every aspect of life at St Berteline's and facilitates opportunities for spiritual reflection. School aspires to assist each pupil on their journey of discovery, helping them to reflect on the big questions of life through thought provoking worship and challenging RE.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship at St Berteline's is an inspiring, uplifting experience. It is thoughtfully planned over a two-year cycle and is vibrant and alive. Singing is an especially important feature of worship at St Berteline's and touches the hearts of all who attend. Pupils share their exceptional gift of singing by frequent involvement in schools' diocesan services at Chester Cathedral. The Bishop of Chester has also highlighted the significant impact that singing has on the essence of worship at St Berteline's. Worship is enhanced by the commitment of a team of volunteers who partner with the school to deliver a creative programme of Anglican worship which delights pupils. Children eagerly talk about the Bible and the importance of prayer. Worship allows pupils to contemplate real life events and contextualise Christian values. One pupil said it helped him 'to forgive people no matter what they do'.

The school family eagerly embrace new developments within worship, for example, the inclusion of spontaneous prayer by pupils. This has had a positive impact on worship by adding a deeper, reflective, personal dimension. Pupils already enjoy participating in worship through prayer and drama on a daily basis. However, school acknowledge that they are at the early stages of encouraging pupils to have more freedom to plan and deliver worship independently.

Worship is open to all and parents are warmly invited to attend. Planning centres around the rhythm and patterns of the Church of England calendar. This provides structure and building blocks for pupils to grow in faith and understanding of Anglican worship. School systematically invites pupils to evaluate and respond to worship by providing reflection books. These are a valuable record of pupil views and inform future planning, as well as being a source of encouragement and inspiration. Parents are appreciative of the links to worship in home-school communications. One parent noted that, 'the school newsletter always has a thought for the week and a prayer point'.

Worship is clearly focussed on the Trinity with emphasis on the centrality of a personal relationship with Christ. Pupils recognise this and have an age appropriate understanding. They say that the Holy Spirit is their 'invisible friend'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The majority of pupils attain a high standard of achievement and make good progress in RE which is supported by school assessment data. Lessons are systematically monitored by the headteacher to ensure rigorous standards. This is also achieved by scrutinising the school's RE 'process books' which clearly demonstrate progression in learning. In addition, teachers monitor each other's lessons through peer feedback which results in effective professional dialogue. Collaborative approaches result in creative planning and interesting lessons which engage pupils. High standards in RE are consistent with other core subjects and have been sustained over a long period of time.

School are in the process of adopting a new resource 'Understanding Christianity' which will assist in developing an enquiry-based approach so that pupils can explore Christian theology more deeply. They imaginatively incorporate the arts into RE so that pupils develop knowledge and understanding through a variety of media and visitors.

RE is a forum for developing pupils' understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. For example, after the Manchester bombings, they could discuss their responses, such as Christian compassion and forgiveness.

School are committed to staff development and through the diocese have accessed a number of training opportunities. The deputy, who has completed her Christian leadership course, has recognised that this has provided her with fresh vision to refocus on the impact of Christian values within school.

Religious education complements pupils' experience of worship by providing a safe forum for discussion of beliefs.

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

School leaders embody an enthusiastic Christian vision for education based on their mission statement, 'a love of life, a love of learning' which is founded on the Book of Proverbs. They attribute the success of the school over a sustained period to the motivation they have which is rooted in their Christian values. They know their children as individuals and can respond to their personal learning needs. The headteacher and senior leaders are passionate about the school and exemplify an attitude of service based on the example of Christ. Governors provide strong leadership and work effectively with the headteacher to provide support and challenge. They have a high profile within school and are working collaboratively with senior leaders to move the Christian vision forward. A governor summed up their approach by saying that they 'want to embody Christian values and vision based on Scripture'. They are confident and proud of St Berteline's and yet they aspire to grow and convey a Christian ethos in fresh ways which will engage and be relevant to their community in the future. They understand that developing sharper and timely evaluation processes is vital to achieving their vision. They are committed to ensuring that the school's arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.

Genuine Christian care and compassion for all staff results in a long-serving, dedicated team. There are numerous examples of leaders tirelessly considering the well-being of pupils and their families. Parents say that school goes 'above and beyond' in its demonstration of love for the school family. Many individuals and external professional agencies eagerly provide evidence of devoted service by leaders to the whole school community.

Leaders encourage the engagement of staff in the wider district and diocese. Sharing of excellent professional practice ensures staff are kept up to date with educational vision which directly benefits pupils. The involvement of Revd Stephen Torr is important as he brings renewed Christian vision to the school. The close working relationship between the headteacher and the vicar also mutually strengthens spiritual and pastoral relationships in the parish and school. Parents say they want to be involved in the school and they feel valued as partners in their children's education.

There is evidence of financial investment in resources which enhances the Christian character of the school and enriches lessons. A recent example of this is the purchase of new class Bibles, so that pupils can independently undertake research from sacred texts.

School leaders have successfully addressed the issue on the previous inspection report. They have now implemented systems for formal accountability of the development of the Christian character of the school. This has been achieved by the headteacher providing regular updates in her reports to governors. St Berteline's is a forward thinking school, constantly striving to improve pupil learning by linking all that they do to their Christian values. School leaders are excellent role models for all staff and pupils resulting in St Berteline's continuing to provide a positive, learning environment for all.

SIAMS report, March 2018, St Berteline's Church of England Primary School, WA7 6QN