

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Benhall St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary

School Lane,
Benhall,
Saxmundham,
IP17 1HE

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	St Edmundsbury and Ipswich
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Local authority	Suffolk
Date of inspection	6 th February 2018
Date of last inspection	21 st October 2014
Type of school and unique reference number	124721 VC Primary
Headteacher	Katie Jenkins
Inspector's name and number	Anna Reeder 659

School context

The village school has 97 pupils who mainly come from outside the catchment area. The school is organised into 4 mixed age classes. An additional classroom has been built since the last inspection. This year the school has over-admitted in its reception intake. There are 21 children entitled to pupil premium and 8 children with identified special educational needs. The headteacher has been in post for 2 years. A new rector was appointed in September 2017, after a period of 4 years interregnum. The school is linked to two local churches at Benhall and Sternfield, one of which is accessed by a coach, the other by a 20-minute walk.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Benhall St Mary's as a Church of England school are good

- The well-established ethos of care, support and respect for all underpinned by core Christian values has created a nurturing, creative and supportive community.
- The personalised development of every child means that pupils are unique and treated as individuals, and as a result make good progress.
- Pupils understand how the school's Christian values impact on their lives and help them to make thoughtful choices

Areas to improve

- Explicitly articulate the school's core Christian values across the school community to enable all stakeholders to recognise and acknowledge the difference they make to daily life
- Develop a self-evaluation document that relates specifically to the SIAMS evaluation schedule to measure the impact of actions put in place to develop the school as a church school.
- In worship develop pupil voice as a form of monitoring to measure impact of changes.
- Develop an area where pupils can reflect quietly in the outdoor environment to broaden the opportunities for prayer in the school day.

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

Pupils talk perceptively about how the school's Christian values change their way of living. They are able to explain how the current value of respect is seen in their philosophy lessons where respecting others' opinions has led to a better understanding of different points of view. In peer critique sessions pupils respect each other's learning to the extent that they can offer points for improvement in a supportive way. The religious education (RE) and personal, health and social education (PHSE) curriculum allows time for debate and pupils understand the importance of all views being respected. A Y6 pupil spoke about how perseverance lifted her spirits when she went through a whole week where she couldn't give up. 'It was so good to feel that I didn't know how to do some things, yet!' RE teaching and worship link the Christian values to Gospel teaching and enable children to make the connection with known biblical stories. RE also promotes a great understanding of diverse cultures, and how Christianity differs around the world. Older pupils studying Islam talked about how this had helped them understand that Muslims are also people of faith, and that the Koran, like the Bible, can be interpreted differently by different people. The Christian character is becoming more evident in school, with reflective areas established in every classroom and an altar in the hall but the current signage and vision statement do not currently make it clear that this is a church school. The reflective areas are well used, and pupils spoke about how it is helpful to write down what is on their minds. "I don't have to keep that feeling inside". Foundation Stage pupils were seen interacting thoughtfully with the resources. Both class mates and teachers respond supportively to any issues or comments raised here. In the outcomes of the national tests in 2017 Key Stage 2 pupils' progress in reading and maths was well above the national average. All outcomes across all key stages were an improvement on the previous year. Disadvantaged pupils typically make similar progress to other non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. Vulnerable children are known as individuals and provision is tailored to their needs, for example, a child with below 50% attendance was given a personalised programme to encourage her participation in school and to reduce stress which worked highly effectively. Behaviour is good, and the well-established buddy system provides excellent support for the youngest pupils. The school has established interventions to build confidence and self-esteem in their pupils which have been successful in improving well-being and attendance as well as academic outcomes.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Since the start of the academic year, the headteacher and new rector have worked together enthusiastically to plan school worship which has brought about rapid change after a period of stasis due to a 4-year gap in clergy involvement. The rector and headteacher meet regularly to evaluate and improve worship. Values for Life lead the planning of worship. Church-led collective worship is now occurring fortnightly in school supported in addition by the Open the Book team. Children have a good knowledge of Bible stories because of this. Church services led by the clergy and visits are now re-established. Harvest and Christingle and Christmas services have been formalised and parents are invited. Additional worship opportunities have been established this year in Church including an Easter service for the first time - which will include work around stations of the cross leading up to the main service - and an end of term summer service. This has helped pupils to develop a deeper understanding of the seasons of the church's year and important Christian festivals. Collective worship has been formalised with a set pattern to ensure all staff and children are consistent in approaches to worship and know how to lead. Pupils bring candles into the hall from their classrooms to put on the altar to signify the unification of the school and to mark the start of worship when they are lit. "We come together as a school, not as individuals, and we become a community." With the Reverend's support Anglican liturgy has become established. The worship guidelines that have been agreed enable child led worship to be successful. Opening and closing Anglican gathering and sending responses are led confidently by pupils as well as a prayer. Pupils enjoy taking on leadership roles in worship and spoke about how it makes them feel involved and valued. Worship leaders select music and prepare the worship space. Worship leaders are ready now to move on to leading whole acts of worship and to be involved in the evaluation process. The pupils have developed a broader repertoire of known hymns and Christian songs. New resources have been purchased to support this development. The school has written a school prayer which is familiar to everyone, and classes also have their own prayers which are shared frequently. The Lord's Prayer has been re-introduced to the school through a series of worship sessions led by the rector, and is now well known, even by the youngest pupils. The consistent liturgical structure pulls the school together in joint worship. The Foundation Stage class worshipped in their classroom following the same format as the rest of the school. They were engaged and thoughtful and had chosen the story of The Good Samaritan to discuss who in the story showed respect. They sang a well-known song, Jesus is a superhero, with confidence and joined in with a class prayer. Y6 leaders led the prayer and worship monitors from the class reverently set up the class altar with a candle, Bible and special cloth. Worship has enabled pupils to understand the part that prayer can lead in their lives. They understand that this is how they can talk to God, and that prayer can take place at any time of day, in any space. "Our assemblies have time for prayer, I like to use this time to think. I pray at home now. I prayed to God to score a goal, and it worked!"

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

The governors of the school were focussed in wanting to secure a headteacher for their school. The appointment of the current headteacher has made a significant difference to the capacity of the school to improve outcomes for pupils. Since her arrival much has been put in place to consolidate achievement for all groups of learners. Christian distinctiveness and ethos have been added to the school's development plan, alongside learning walk opportunities to monitor what difference the actions have made. However, although regular meetings take place with the new rector to evaluate the Christian nature of the school, this has not yet been formalised in the monitoring and evaluation plan that contributes specifically to the evaluation of the school as a Church school. The school is keen to promote its distinctive ethos and the website has been significantly updated and now reflects the Christian values of the school. It informs the school community about the current value that the children are learning about. During the 4 year interregnum there was a lack of capacity from church to provide effective support. The developmental points from the previous inspection have been addressed, but some work is on-going due to the lack of a parish church presence for this significant period since the last inspection. The newly appointed rector has become a member of the school's governing board and is strongly committed to forging links with the school. Her input has already made an impact. The relationship with the Church has been re-established and is very positive. Both the school leadership and the rector demonstrate the vision and drive to move things on further. A productive dialogue has been established and the school is happy to take on suggestions and experiment to make changes. Plans are in place to establish an ethos group with strong input from foundation governors; its remit is to focus on the development of the school as a church school. The rector and chair understand that the pace of change will rely on strong governance and are focusing on having the right personnel in place. The school's leadership has been proactive in thinking about future partnerships and is considering a range of options. Their key priority was to appoint a headteacher for their school, and to preserve the school's ethos. They are currently exploring the benefits of deepening working relationships with other local church schools, but this has not yet been formalised further. The school makes good use of diocesan resources. Diocesan advisory support for RE has been valued. The school is using the Emmanuel Project materials to plan good quality RE and now uses scrapbooks for learning journeys to record the pupils' progress in RE. Pupils enjoy RE and its diversity of teaching approaches. The pupils' books showed a range of good quality reflective work across all age groups. The arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. Pupils attend events in Bury Cathedral each year and enjoy meeting other pupils from church schools in the area as well as developing their understanding of Christianity in a special place. The RE leader attends training and the headteacher and chair of Governors attend diocesan conferences which has enabled them to access resources and new approaches to RE teaching. Parents feel their children are happily settled in school and they appreciate the holistic view of education where more than just academic progress is valued and nurtured. Parents feel the school is approachable and proactive. Excellent relationships underpin the school's supportive and warm ethos. "Everybody knows everybody!"