

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Old Newton Church of England Primary School

School Road, Stowmarket IP14 4PJ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Suffolk
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	August 2016
Name of multi-academy trust	The Tilian Multi Academy Trust
Date of inspection	16 March 2018
Date of last inspection	March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary – Academy – deemed VC 143070
Head of School	Laura Schultheiss
Principal	Andrew Berry
Inspector's name and number	Graham Lancaster 713

School context

Old Newton is a small primary school with four classes. The pupils are mainly of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for funding for disadvantage is below the national average. The proportion who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) is broadly in line. The school is one of six church schools within a multi-academy trust (MAT). Neither the principal or the head of school were in post at the time of the previous denominational inspection.

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

- The school's Christian values are deeply embedded. They provide living themes which strengthen the sense of family within the school, nurturing each and every pupil to become considerate, caring and confident members of the community.
- Outstanding leadership has secured significant improvements in outcomes for all pupils, setting the highest ambitions for every individual, including the more vulnerable.
- The rich variety of collective worship ensures the engagement of all pupils and supports the development of their personal spirituality very well.
- Close partnerships with local churches enhances leadership capacity and provides expertise in religious education (RE) and worship and pastoral care in times of need.
- Highly effective teaching of RE results in pupils deepening their understanding of the Christian Faith as well as developing their understanding of and respect for major world religions.

Areas to improve

- Rework the mission statement and associated aims so that they provide a clear, concise vision which complements the Christian ethos of the school.

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

The distinctive Christian character of the school is manifest throughout the school building, lived out in the supportive and caring relationships which exist between all members of the community. Pupils of all ages mix together over lunch and in the playground. They encourage and support one another, for example reporting back to their parents the achievements of their peers. One parent, who recently moved into the village, described how she immediately felt part of the community. The warm welcome extended by other parents in the playground was an important part of this process. 'I feel as if I have always been here,' she said. All stakeholders articulate the ways in which the school's core Christian values have a positive impact on the lives of pupils, whether they are from a Christian background or not. As another parent said, 'they run through everything'. When discussing the values in action pupils draw on stories from The Bible as well as instances within their own lives. A parent described how her daughter frequently refers back to the values she grew to know, understand and adopt for herself while at Old Newton, even though she transferred to high school two years ago. Through this embedded Christian ethos, school leaders with their staff team ensure excellent outcomes for all pupils. These are well above national averages in all measures, including for those in vulnerable groups. The management of pupils' behaviour is premised on the core values, although this is not clearly stated in the school's behaviour and attendance policies. In class and around the school pupils' behaviour is exemplary. The values have a similar positive impact on attendance and there have been no exclusions.

Many opportunities are provided for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development across the whole life of the school. For example, the school council contributes to the selection and planning of a wide range of fund-raising activities, putting their adopted value of compassion into action. A toilet twinning initiative from the local Methodist church resulted in pupils deciding to organise a summer fete to raise funds. This was so successful that every toilet in school is linked with a needy community somewhere in the world. This, together with projects such as the shoe box appeal, enables pupils to understand that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith. Teachers employ highly effective marking in RE to extend learning through challenging questions. The school's adoption of The Emmanuel project has provided teachers with a wide range of teaching ideas for the study of Christianity which they use to great effect. For example, Year 6 pupils were challenged to consider their understanding of the divinity of Jesus by comparing a variety of pictures of him. They had to identify features which they considered human or divine. A wide range of visitors and visits enrich the RE curriculum and develop pupils' knowledge of and respect for major world religions. In one lesson pupils made comparisons between their own school and an inner London Sikh school by investigating their website. This challenged their pre-conceptions as well as developing their understanding. Pupils respond positively to this strong and wide-ranging provision. According to parents, their children show interest in different faiths by talking about them at home. They are eagerly anticipating a forthcoming visit to learn more about a Passover meal.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Since the previous denominational inspection the school has broadened the range of leadership, including equipping pupils to undertake this role. Enhanced opportunities have also been provided for pupils to develop their understanding of spirituality through prayer and reflection. Worship is an integral part of school life. Its impact on the lives of the whole community can be traced through their appreciation and support for one another, their compassion for people in need and their sense of awe and wonder at God's creation. When discussing the value of humility one pupil said, 'I know that I am important to God, but everyone else is too.' Worship systematically explores each of the school's Christian values, drawing on teaching from the Bible, particularly the life and teaching of Jesus. It is carefully planned with pupils' needs and interests in mind and with an effective focus on developing their personal spirituality. In the context of a focus on forgiveness two pupils asked for time to think about a recent terrorist attack. The challenge of forgiving in such circumstances made a deep impact on them both. Together they wrote a prayer which was then shared with everyone. The fire at Grenfell Tower was discussed within worship. Pupils were given the opportunity to reflect, to share their responses and spend time in prayer. They came to understand that in some circumstances there is nothing practical that they could do, but that it was still important to pray. In response to a recent questionnaire one parent wrote, 'Children have the freedom to grow at their own pace and are fuelled with lots of spiritual opportunities to make their own decisions'. A wide variety of leadership is drawn from within the school and from church leaders of different Christian traditions. This includes an 'Open the Book' team whose visits are eagerly anticipated. One member of that team recently wrote, 'it is a delight to be welcomed into a school where the Christian values are not only known about but celebrated'. The vicar leads worship on a fortnightly basis, encouraging pupils to think theologically in ways appropriate to their age. The differing styles and approaches not only lead to high levels of pupil engagement but also provide particular expertise. This was recently the case when pupils and some parents were led through an exploration of the Eucharist by the lay reader.

Through opportunities to lead worship pupils develop not only their skills of leadership and teamwork but also their self-confidence and sense of responsibility. With support from staff, pairs of pupils in rotation plan and lead worship every Friday. One parent described how her child often talks about worship at home, but particularly when it is

presented by the children. Older pupils have the opportunity to become collective worship leaders. The responsibilities of this particular role include completing an evaluation of each worship session which prompts such as 'what has it helped you to understand about God?' and 'what did it make you think about?' This enables the school to track the impact and refine approaches to worship. The worship leaders recently conducted a survey of all pupils' perception of worship. One request that arose was to learn some new songs. In response the head of school challenged the pupils to find some new worship songs that they would like to learn. These were then learned and introduced. Anglican traditions are well established. Pupils are well aware of the Church calendar, and all join in a prayer of welcome at the start of worship. Major Christian festivals are celebrated in the neighbouring Church which is filled with parents and members of the local community on these occasions. Pupils know the Lord's Prayer. Singing is joyful and accompanied by actions which are led by a mixed age group of pupils.

Prayer is an integral part of worship and closely linked to the current theme. As part of worship, pupils are given the opportunity to add a spontaneous prayer. They are keen to volunteer and confident as they lead everyone in their own prayer. Pupils understand the importance of prayer and have frequent opportunities for prayer and reflection through the day, both formal and informal. The recent introduction of a 'reflection chair' in a quiet outside area has caused great excitement. Two pupils have taken responsibility for designing activities to encourage pupils of all ages to make best use of this special space. Inside the building there are a number of displays devoted to RE and the core values. Although these are attractive and exemplify the high standards of pupils' work they do not provide the opportunity for response to challenging questions or issues and therefore do not stimulate spiritual reflection.

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

Since her appointment the head of school has raised expectations in all areas of school life. She is the leader for both RE and collective worship and there have been significant improvements in both areas since her appointment. Parents are particularly appreciative of her impact in placing more emphasis on the Christian ethos of the school through the core values. The Christian vision for the school includes the aim to provide the best education where children are valued as unique individuals. With the support of the MAT principal and governors the head of school has formed a highly effective staff team. This results in excellent teaching throughout the school, ensuring that every pupil makes the best possible progress as well as enjoying their learning. As one pupil said, 'I like the challenge, it makes me think'. Full advantage is taken of the small size of cohorts to know all pupils very well. Imaginative and careful planning of lessons and proactive marking in all subjects, including RE, ensures all are challenged to take their next steps forward. Where required additional support is provided without delay and the impact carefully tracked. One parent, whose son has additional needs, described how her son is 'flourishing since joining the school'. Senior leaders are far from complacent. They are constantly seeking to secure further improvements. They aim to make the experience of every pupil as enjoyable and fruitful as possible, equipping them for their next stage of education and life beyond. However, at present there is some confusion in the way the school's vision, mission statement, core values and aims are expressed on the website and in the prospectus. The influence of the Christian ethos on school policies is also unclear. Self-evaluation draws on evidence from across the school community, particularly from governors. However, it is over-long and not focussed sufficiently on specific criteria. In spite of this, pertinent priorities for improvement are drawn from this process and progress made is carefully tracked by leaders and governors. Governors know their school very well. This enables them to provide challenge as well as support as they monitor the progress of the school against the school's SIAMs action plan. For example, following a recent learning walk focussed on Christian distinctiveness a visit note was completed which noted positive developments but also raised areas for discussion at the next governors' meeting. The school accesses opportunities for training from the diocese and actively draws on the increased resource available through the MAT to provide professional development for staff. This serves to equip future leaders of church schools. For example, all senior teachers across the MAT are working together, receiving training and support from the principal. As well as developing their general leadership skills this enables them to explore together the particular opportunities and challenges in church school leadership. Mutually beneficial links also exist with other local schools beyond the MAT.

There is a very strong, mutually beneficial and supportive partnership with the local church. The school promotes church activities through its newsletter. In turn members of the church provide expertise in collective worship and RE. This has led, for example, to pupils developing a secure age-appropriate understanding of the Holy Trinity. Parents regard both church and school as central to the life of their community. As well as his presence as a governor and leader of worship, the local vicar provides much appreciated pastoral care. This was particularly evident following the death of a previous member of staff. RE and collective worship are very well led and managed, and statutory requirements are met. Both contribute very well to the effectiveness and to the Christian character of the school. The recommendations from the previous denominational inspection have been thoroughly addressed and the school has moved forward rapidly under the current leadership team.