

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Saint Christopher's Church of England Primary Academy

Bellflower Crescent, Red Lodge, Suffolk IP28 8XQ

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

Saint Edmundsbury and Ipswich

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Satisfactory

Date of academy conversion

1 November 2016

Name of multi-academy trust

Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust

Date of inspection

28 June 2018

Date of last inspection

9 June 2015

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary 142025

Headteacher

Caroline James

Inspector's name and number

Stephen Green 809

School context

This modern school was expanded in 2014 to include pupils in years 5 and 6. It was subject to OFSTED Special Measures in 2014 and 2015 and converted to an academy within the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust at the end of 2016. In 2017 the academy appointed a new headteacher, deputy head, special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and ethos and spirituality/religious education (RE) lead. Many pupils come from military backgrounds and from social and emergency housing. Many attract pupil premium funding, and 11% have special educational needs. The local church is a partnership of the Methodist and Anglican Church, and there is no Anglican incumbent.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Saint Christopher's as a Church of England school are good.

- Following conversion to an academy within the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT) in 2016 and the appointment of a new senior leadership team in 2017, the school is making very rapid progress in all the areas of concern highlighted by the previous school's last SIAMS and OFSTED inspection reports.
- The school has developed and adopted a new set of distinctively Christian values which underpin almost all elements of school life and are having a major impact upon improvements, especially in behaviour.
- High expectations have led to improvements in teaching and learning which have been noted by staff, parents and governors, as well as improvement consultants and advisors working for DEMAT. Progress is strong and academic results are improving, although they are still generally below national expectations.
- Relationships within the school community are generally very positive and parents speak very highly of the school. The school makes pupil behaviour a priority and has many strategies for support available. As a result, behaviour has improved considerably, and is generally of a good standard.

Areas to improve

- Deepen pupils' understanding of and respect for a range of faiths and denominations by widening the variety of visits and visitors to the school.
- Develop the role of pupils in collective worship by including them more as leaders and helpers and by reviewing the leadership roles older pupils are already given.
- Improve pupils' understanding of the worship traditions of the Anglican church by arranging more visits to the cathedral.
- Create more opportunities for the development of pupils' spirituality by constructing specific reflection areas around the school and providing guidance and encouragement for their use.

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

The school's core Christian ethos and values are demonstrated clearly around the school, in communications with parents and on the school's website. The values are: to be positive, to treat others with respect, to demonstrate independence and determination, and to value equality (PRIDE). These values are justified with references from scripture and have been arrived at following extensive consultation with all groups in the school community and the diocese. All members of the school community have a good understanding of them and they are referred to regularly to reinforce attitudes and behaviour. Examples were seen of mid-day supervisors and the site manager referring to them. Parents spoke enthusiastically of the positive impact the values have upon their children at home. The school's leadership team clearly demonstrate their own Christian values and apply these to issues of attendance and exclusion. Attendance is rising and now good, and the number of exclusions (both from the whole school and internally from lessons) is falling. As a result of the consistent focus upon their Christian values, standards of pupil behaviour have improved considerably since the last inspections (pre-conversion) and these changes have been noted and supported by parents, governors and representatives of DEMAT. Staff work hard to foster relationships with families and there is a full-time pastoral support worker who is available every morning to speak to parents and carers who need support. The school demonstrates its commitment to equality of opportunity by providing a considerable amount of additional support for pupils who have special educational needs, in order to ensure they can access the same opportunities that their peers have. Pupils requiring quiet areas or someone to talk to during the school day are well catered for, and parents speak enthusiastically of the headteacher and pastoral support worker's accessibility for them. One parent described 'the amazing support that is provided for my dyslexic daughter,' while another praised the teaching staff's enthusiasm, saying 'they are amazing. (My children) are such happy boys. The teachers are so passionate.' Academic results in terms of percentages reaching age-related expectations are improving rapidly but are still below national expectations. Progress data is strong. Evidence supports the school's view that its Christian values have had a direct influence upon this improvement.

Opportunities to develop spirituality have been identified during the school day, in collective worship (CW) and on classroom noticeboards. The school is currently building a reflection area on the playground, and the pupils' ethos committee is having a major say in the planning of this. In order to further develop pupils' spirituality, the school is already planning to improve these spaces around the school grounds and classrooms, and to ensure they are used as areas for quiet reflection, meditation and prayer.

Pupils have a history of supporting charities, focusing last year upon local causes with a direct link to the school community.

The school has reviewed and updated its religious education (RE) curriculum to include elements of Understanding Christianity and the Emmanuel Project. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of the faiths they have studied. However, they have less appreciation of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith and although the local church is an ecumenical partnership between the Methodist and Anglican Churches and the main representative of the local church is a mission enabler, they have limited understanding of the breadth of other Christian denominations. Pupil and parent feedback and collections of pupils' work demonstrate that they enjoy RE and that along with the CW it has a strong impact upon their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

An American parent spoke particularly enthusiastically about the school, saying how delighted and surprised she has been since arriving with the school as a faith school that reflected her own faith and values. She praised senior staff and said how hard they had worked to help her and her young child settle into the school community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is recognised by all groups in the school community as a crucial way to reinforce and enlarge upon the school's Christian ethos and values. It is well supported by staff and pupils and has an appropriate focus upon the life of Jesus Christ. Feedback and observations demonstrate that worship is generally inspirational, and the school has worked hard to ensure it is totally inclusive. Parents are invited to join CW every week and Year 6 pupils have a voluntary 'Collective Worship Squad' who take CW into other classes and lead it. Their role is increasingly to plan and deliver this worship themselves, and there is evidence that both they and the pupils whose classes they visit enjoy and gain much from these experiences. As one child wrote when asked their opinion, 'they're more inspirational because they're children running an assembly as good as the teachers.'(sic) Other pupils assist whole school worship by organising music, audio-visual aids and reading from the Bible and their prayers. The school is exploring the possibility of extending these opportunities to other pupils both within year 6 and in younger year groups. The school would like the opportunity to share worship with parents in the local church, which it visits on a few occasions during the year, but the size of the church makes this very difficult. Pupils occasionally visit the cathedral but as part of their RE and not CW. Parent helpers are invited on these trips but not specifically to share worship. Worship is usually led by school staff and is received enthusiastically. Pupils demonstrate respect and reverence and the venue is very suitable. The local mission enabler regularly leads CW and has a valued role within the school. She is a member of the governing body and leads a weekly after school children's church known as Blaze

within the school. The parish had no Anglican incumbent at the time of the inspection and no evidence was seen of other members of the local church who were not members of the school community assisting in leading worship. Pupils have a reasonable understanding of traditions and terminology found in Anglican worship, with good understanding of the nature of the Holy Trinity and the purpose of Baptism. However, they have a more limited understanding of Holy Communion.

CW is monitored by senior staff and governors with opinions regularly sought from pupils and parents. Feedback informs future practice and ensures pupils and parents have a sense of ownership of worship. Pupils and the local church do not yet have a role in planning future programmes for worship.

Pupils understand the purpose of prayer and pray regularly throughout the school day. In addition, they are invited to write prayers which are collected in a prayer box and sometimes used in future worship. There is a termly parents' prayer group chaired by the mission enabler within the school. The school is trying to encourage the development of pupils' spirituality by providing areas to encourage reflection and private prayer, and there are many displays around the school which allow pupils to contribute their own thoughts and reflections. Some pupils have begun to contribute items of special significance to themselves into classroom reflection areas, giving them a greater significance and importance. Many of the comments from pupil feedback and the prayers seen reflect pupils' valuing of prayer as a way of expressing their personal concerns, thanking God that the school is keeping them safe or asking for help with a difficult relationship. Others, however, demonstrate a deeper thinking and desire to support those further away or causes which pupils have read or heard about.

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

School leaders consistently and confidently articulate and live out a vision rooted in their distinctively Christian values. Parents and governors are quick to recognise this and point to this as being a major reason for the considerable improvements that they have seen in the school since its conversion to an academy at the end of 2016. The school's leaders have a thorough understanding of the school's performance and can describe how this relates to past performance and also to that of other schools. DEMAT has provided much valuable advice to school leaders and is providing a leadership consultant who is much appreciated within the school. It is also enabling the school to compare pupils' work with that of other church schools, and to share good ideas. The school has been able to access training and advice from both DEMAT and the diocese of Saint Edmundsbury and Ipswich, and there is evidence that the partnership of the two dioceses is proving to be very beneficial for the school.

The school's senior leadership team is very new to the school but has already had a major impact in driving up standards of teaching, learning and pupil behaviour. These changes have had neither time nor sufficiently regular reinforcement to become embedded, but have already been noted and appreciated by parents, governors and representatives of DEMAT and the local diocese. Procedures are robust and instil confidence in the likelihood of sustained improvement.

The school is very open and willing to listen to the suggestions of others. During the inspection parents regularly commented upon this, as did DEMAT's school improvement consultants. The process of self-evaluation is based upon an accurate understanding of the school's performance and the views of all groups in the school community. Governors have acted upon recommendations from previous inspections and now have a strong role in monitoring and most visit the school at least termly to improve their understanding and support school staff.

The leadership of RE and CW is given a high priority, with staff training from the ethos and spiritual lead, the diocese and DEMAT demonstrating this. Financial constraints have made resourcing challenging, but the new schemes for RE and CW provide continuity within year groups in order to overcome these.

The school recognises sustainability as being extremely important and has endeavoured to make permanent appointments and provide training with this in mind. The school plans governor and staff development strategically both to support the school's present leadership team and to provide future leaders for church schools.

The local church makes a strong contribution to school life through the enthusiastic and effective actions of a mission enabler. In addition, the diocese and DEMAT have supported the school both in its conversion to academy status and in the process of appointing and supporting the new headteacher. However, the size of the local church makes it difficult for pupils to worship together there and for parents to join them. The school has identified the need to look for opportunities to further develop links with the local Anglican church and is looking for additional opportunities for pupils and parents to visit the cathedral to supplement the visits it already makes there.