

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Aidan's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Derwentwater Road, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, NE8 2HQ

Current SIAMS inspection grade Outstanding

Diocese Durham

Previous SIAMS inspection grade Outstanding

Local authority Gateshead

Date of inspection 23 February 2018

Date of last inspection 18 March 2013

Type of school and unique reference number Primary 132145

Headteacher Lesley Steele

Inspector's name and number David Tait 887

School context

St Aidan's is an average sized voluntary aided primary school situated in central Gateshead with 214 children on roll. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported through pupil premium funding is above average. The proportion of pupils with disabilities or special educational needs is also above average. The vast majority of pupils are of White British background. The school is actively involved in supporting other schools in the region. The headteacher currently works four days each week with the deputy headteacher leading the school for a day each week in her absence.

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

- The Christian ethos of the school is deeply embedded and impacts significantly upon pupils' lives and their achievements.
- Collective worship is at the heart of the school and this continually serves to strengthen its Christian character.
- Pupils develop a strong sense of spirituality through opportunities for both reflection and prayer as they progress through the school.
- The school's Christian care and support for each individual ensures pupils are keen to learn and behave very well. It also impacts positively on the strong quality of the relationships evident at every level across the school community.
- Religious education (RE) and collective worship make valuable and sustained contributions to the Christian ethos of the school and to the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils.

Areas to improve

- Continue to develop leaders, including governors, as future leaders of church schools to secure the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- Ensure that all of the school's written policies reflect its practice in terms of its Christian distinctiveness so that this is clear to all stakeholders.

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

Explicit and distinct Christian values, including peace, hope, wisdom trust, thankfulness, forgiveness, compassion and friendship are the very heartbeat of the life of St Aidan's and they drive its every action. A shared and deep-rooted belief in the values amongst all members of the community ensures that they are incorporated into all aspects of learning. Throughout the curriculum, and in the response of the pupils to their learning and in their relationships, the school's gospel values are evident. The values guide pupils' thinking and actions. Behaviour is excellent. This is a direct result of the working out of the school's values. Pupils are able to draw moral lessons from the Christian values of the school and apply these in practice. As one child commented, 'Jesus loved his disciples, so we should love each other'.

The pupils' moral, social and cultural development is nurtured through a variety of rich experiences. These include a wealth of educational visits and charitable work linked to supporting the local foodbank. The curriculum is creative and inspiring and adults seize every opportunity to promote reflection and develop spirituality. Reflection areas throughout school are highly valued and regularly used. Children enjoy coming to school and as a result, attendance is good. The school makes a considerable investment of both time and resources in working to reach and support all families. A culture of welcome ensures that parents feel part of the school family and leaders work tirelessly to address any issues around attendance. This is a direct practical working out of its Christian character. Parents value highly the work of the school, which they assert 'sits at 'the heart of our community'. Relationships within the school are very strong at every level and staff and children speak warmly of the Christian love which the headteacher and other leaders show to them. Pupils know that their own views will be listened to with respect. St Aidan's is a happy and inclusive school in which all are welcomed equally.

Pupils attain well because of the attention which is given to learning and the belief that all must be nurtured as children of God. Pupils make good progress in their learning with additional support given as necessary. As a result, outcomes are above the national average and progress is good for all groups of pupils.

RE makes a significant contribution to the Christian character of the school. Units of work are thoughtfully planned using a range of appropriate resources and linked with the values and this helps to enhance the spiritual development of pupils. As a consequence, pupils are enthusiastic learners in RE. Pupils show excellent knowledge of other faiths and of the global nature of Christianity.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is a cherished and inspiring part of school life and has a significant impact upon pupils' spiritual and moral growth and how they develop as individuals. Pupils readily explain the importance that worship holds for them and how it allows them to feel 'calm, at peace and close to God'. The pupils appreciate the importance of each occasion and particularly looking forward to the weekly 'Pause for Thought' worship held in the school chapel which sits both physically and metaphorically at the heart of school life. A rich variety of worship styles and a range of different leaders of worship, ensure that pupils are familiar with diversity in worship. They have a strong understanding of local Anglican traditions and the weekly Eucharist celebrated in the school chapel, in which pupils play a significant leadership role, contributes significantly to this.

The worship programme is based upon the seasons of the Church's year and is linked to the school's Christian values. Worship underpins the school's Christian ethos as it allows pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding as each value and theme is explored. Leaders ensure that helpful and progressive materials, which build upon themes, are available to support all who lead worship. As a result, worship is of a high standard. A strong focus on Jesus Christ enables pupils to understand fully a rich variety of bible stories and the significance that Jesus has for Christians. Pupils readily link the Bible stories to the school's gospel values and can explain the meaning of them at a personal level, noting, for example, how the story of the Ten Lepers illustrates the need for thankfulness. The parish priest's regular involvement in planning and leading worship affirms the strong sense of trust and respect between church and school. In worship, which is often led by the 'Leading Lights' group, pupils are fully engaged, keen to listen and to take an active part. Worship is clearly of great value for pupils: their enthusiastic singing and unwavering attention illustrative of their high regard for the importance of prayer and the time offered for their personal reflection. Pupils have a highly developed understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and as such are able to offer insightful perspectives on the Holy Trinity. As one child remarked, 'God the Father made us all, Jesus the Son died for us and the Holy Spirit gives us life.'

Monitoring and evaluation of worship is undertaken by a variety of groups in school, including pupils, staff, worship leaders, parents and governors. As a result of the depth and quality of reviews of worship, leaders are able to continually review and enhance the quality of provision. A direct result of worship reviews is the increased provision for pupil leadership of worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE enjoys the highest status in the school and regarded as the foundation of the curriculum. Standards in RE are high in all key stages and are at least in line with other core subjects. The progress that pupils make from their starting points is at least good and often rapid. Pupils work over time demonstrates that they make excellent progress in both knowing and understanding about beliefs and practices and in considering questions of meaning and purpose, reflecting and bringing their own ideas to the lesson. The overall quality of teaching and learning over time is outstanding. The evidence available in pupils' individual books and in class books demonstrates that pupils are successfully developing their skills in analysis, interpretation, reflection and analysis.

Pupils use both their religious knowledge and personal reflection to consider questions of significance such as 'who am I?' and 'why did Jesus suffer?' Teachers demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge, and their questioning skills require children to explore ideas and to think deeply. Classrooms are places of challenge where questions are asked which encourage children to look at issues from different perspectives. Pupils thrive in this exploratory climate. As one pupil said, 'RE is high impact because you can be creative and you have to understand other people's point of view as well as your own.' Pupils enjoy the rich variety of activities presented to challenge them in RE. These include, drama, multi-media stimuli, including art work, and faith visitors from different denominations and religious traditions. Taken together, these develop pupils' ideas as well as making a strong contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teacher feedback is very thorough and helps children to understand how they can improve their work. Pupils respond readily to challenge questions and this, in turn, deepens their critical thinking.

The RE subject leaders' leadership of RE is of a high standard. She ensures that work is carefully planned in order to suit the context of the school. Links with local Roman Catholic primary schools are strong and faith leaders from other religions support the delivery of the curriculum. Thoughtful and rigorous monitoring enables leaders to identify areas of strong practice and to then use this to support the development of excellent practice consistently across the school. The subject leader provides excellent support and guidance to staff and has a depth of understanding of the nature of the subject. This expertise is constantly supporting the evolution of practice. She has developed an assessment scheme which mirrors that used by the school in other curriculum subjects.

The teaching of Christianity is through and staff are supported in this by the careful selection of appropriate resources. Pupils develop a deep understanding of other world faiths studied and are able to make links between these are other beliefs. The RE leader attends a variety of training opportunities and works closely in partnership with other church school and the diocese. RE is very well resourced.

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

The headteacher, together with her effective leadership team, provides Christian leadership of the highest standard. She is a very visible role model in all aspects of the life of the school and all members of the community speak with confidence of her leadership based on Christian values and principles. She is sustained by her own strong Christian beliefs which are clearly articulated and rooted in biblical values and a distinctly Christian desire for 'life in all its fullness'. Leaders at every level are determined to ensure that each child is able to flourish as a 'child of God'. All of the school community value their leadership and have the utmost trust in them.

The curriculum is carefully planned to give opportunities to develop the whole child with a particular emphasis on developing both local and international links. The school benefits from its participation in the 'Big Local' intergenerational project which supports the elderly in the local community and with links and residential experiences, involving both pupils and their parents, to partner schools in China and Italy. Links with the parish church are very strong. As the parish priest noted, 'the school is the church's second worship centre'. The church provides support for the school through prayer. Parents are fully supportive of the school and value the support they are given in very many aspects of their lives, including, for example, support to enable them to assist in their children's learning. As one commented, 'the school is a big family right at the heart of our community'. Partnerships with cluster schools are strong and the school actively supports other schools both locally and regionally. The school is heavily involved in initial teacher training; providing a Christian context for future teachers and leaders to develop their skills.

The school's strategic planning is strong with elements regarding church school distinctiveness skilfully woven into the development planning. Self-evaluation involves all members of the school community. Governors are highly committed to the school. They are constantly extending their understanding of the school and undertake regular visits and learning walks. As a result, they are fully informed of the school's strengths and the next steps for its development. Governors regularly attend appropriate training in church school distinctiveness and are therefore able to hold the school to account in this context. They have ensured that the school has fully addressed the areas for development from the previous inspection and are ambitious for the school's future development. Upon occasions, however, the school's written documentation does not reflect the schools' distinctively Christian practice and as a result, aspects of the school's Christian character can be unclear to a wider audience.

The headteacher plans carefully for staff development and, alert to the need for succession planning, has nurtured future leaders as leaders of church schools through a range of development activities. Staff professional development

is a high priority with training on RE and leading worship recently undertaken. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and Worship.

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