

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Christ the Sower Ecumenical Primary School (Voluntary Aided)

Singleton Drive, Grange Farm, Milton Keynes MK8 0PZ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	N/A
Date of inspection	22 June 2017
Date of last inspection	22 May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 131164
Headteacher	Huw Humphreys
Inspector's name and number	Janet Northing 792

School context

The school is larger than the average-sized primary school serving the communities living on the western flank of Milton Keynes. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above the national average, with the majority having Black African heritage. A quarter of learners have English as an additional language which is above that of other schools nationally. The proportion of pupils supported through pupil premium funding is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils with a special educational need or disability.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Christ the Sower Ecumenical Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The headteacher, governors and senior leaders consistently apply the Christian values to inform the strategic direction of the school.
- An explicit Christian vision lies at the heart of this inclusive and harmonious school community informing its daily life.
- The exemplary provision for prayer and reflection in the school environment promotes a deep level of spiritual awareness in learners.
- Creativity in collective worship inspires high quality spiritual and moral reflection leading to social action in the service of others.

Areas to improve

- Ensure visits to places of worship reflect the range of religions studied in religious education (RE) to deepen learners' appreciation of the diverse ways faith is expressed.
- Put in place a more effective system of assessing pupil progress in RE that informs planning for differentiation, teaching and learning.
- Establish consistency in the recording of RE as a core subject to clearly evidence progression across the school and demonstrate full coverage of the syllabus.

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

The school's Christian foundation is explicitly communicated through its vision of 'Loving, learning, growing together.' This is linked to the parable of the sower with the school presented as providing the 'good earth' necessary for the community to flourish. Each class focuses on a key Christian virtue underpinned by a scriptural reference and theological commentary. Pupils are able to make links between the Christian virtues and Biblical events and stories. For example, a pupil in the Year 3 Clover class whose virtue is trust described how Mary's response to the Angel Gabriel's message shows that she trusted God. Learners also articulate the impact of the Christian virtues on their learning and behaviour in school. A pupil in the Year 2 Acorn class, whose virtue is courage, related how this helps him to be brave in his learning, especially maths. As a consequence of the school's supportive Christian environment academic achievement is improving for all groups of pupils. The number of learners in Year 6 reaching the expected standard is at least in line with national expectations in reading and maths. Community circles, underpinned by the school's Christian virtues, take place in each class at the start of the day. These support the school's restorative practice in shaping the positive behaviour and relationships evident across the school, leading to an inclusive and harmonious community. In addition, a dedicated learning mentor supports pupils' academically and pastorally, and is also available to offer guidance to parents and carers. As a consequence, these initiatives, underpinned by the school's Christian ethos, impact positively on attendance which is in line with the national average. A clear definition of spirituality informs the exemplary provision for pupils' spiritual development. A chaplaincy team led by the spiritual development co-ordinator ensures a breadth of experiences across the curriculum for pupils to explore their spirituality. 'Soul Space', a room set aside for spiritual reflection and prayer, promotes pupils' awareness of the spiritual dimension of life. One learner expressing their appreciation of this area of the school stated that, 'This is my favourite space in the whole school because you can be quiet.' The richness of the cultural diversity within the school community means that learners have first-hand experience of Christianity as multi-cultural world religion on a daily basis. RE makes a good contribution to the Christian character of the school and to learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC). For example, at the start of each academic year each class spends two weeks focusing on their virtue as part of the RE curriculum. RE also contributes to learners' understanding of and respect for faiths other than Christianity. However, visits to places of worship do not reflect the range of religions studied, so limiting learners' appreciation of the way faith is expressed.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Staff and pupils recognise the importance of worship as a time to reflect and be together at the start of a new school day. A Year 5 pupil felt that, 'The worship at the beginning of the day reminds us that God is always with us and wants us to be kind to others.' Pupils' experience of worship is rich and includes a wide range of Christian liturgy. For example, the paschal candle is lit symbolising Jesus' presence as the light of the world and worship concludes with the Grace. Biblical stories and events are used to exemplify the school's virtues. Creative and inspiring Christian teaching fully informs and engages pupils. As a consequence, Year 5 and 6 pupils' know that Christians believe Jesus Christ is God in human form. Similarly, learners' understanding of the Holy Trinity is well articulated for their age. Pupils readily link their service to others as a response to worship. They explain how they learn about helping other people in the world. A Year 3 pupil expressed how, 'God made the world but some people are not in a good state, so we need to support them to make the world a better place to live in.' This is demonstrated in the pupils' support for the Food Bank and their involvement in the '40 Acts' during Lent. Prayer and reflection are regular features of worship. Pupils make valuable contributions to whole school worship through offering their own prayers. In addition, the provision of 'Prayer Spaces', the 'Soul Space' room and similar areas in their own classrooms and outside environment impact positively on pupils' spiritual development. The members of the school chaplaincy team, which includes clergy from the Watling Valley Ecumenical Partnership, plan worship themes half termly. Pupils experience a wide range of worship leaders including members of the chaplaincy team, clergy from the five churches in the ecumenical partnership and representatives from the Bridge Builder Trust. In addition, learners in Years 5 and 6 have regular experiences of planning and leading 'Share the Word' worship with Year 1 pupils involving liturgy, drama and prayer. This demonstrates good progress since the time of the last inspection. Pupils experience a range of settings for worship that include attending St. Mary's Church and the Bridge Builder's Trust 'Easter Cracked' and 'Christmas Cracked' events. All pupils are involved in the evaluation of worship as this is an annual focus in their home learning and a feature for discussion during community circle time. Feedback is used to inform the future on-going development of worship and the school's provision for spiritual development.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE is viewed as a core subject within the curriculum and makes a valuable contribution to the school's Christian character, and pupils' SMSC development. This includes a two-week cross-curricular focus on the Christian virtues at the start of each academic year in which RE plays a major role. The school follows the Milton Keynes Agreed

Syllabus for RE and the Oxford diocese schemes of work. This enables pupils to appreciate the beliefs, practices and value systems of other world religions in addition to Christianity. The diversity of cultures and languages within the school community provides a rich resource for first hand learning about religious faiths and practices. However, learners' appreciation of the diverse ways faith is expressed is limited by the fact that visits to places of worship do not reflect the range of religions studied. Across the school, the standard of teaching is consistently good with some evidence of outstanding practice. The teaching of Christianity is particularly strong and enables pupils to acquire a breadth of knowledge and understanding through the learning opportunities they have. For example, learners demonstrate a secure knowledge of a wide range of Bible stories and events in the life of Jesus Christ. Pupils readily apply their skills of enquiry, analysis and interpretation when considering the impact of religion on believers. For example, pupils in Year 2 considered how belief in God as creator of the world led believers to take responsibility for caring for the world. Assessment in RE shows that standards of attainment are at least in line with other core subjects and sometimes higher. This shows good progress since the time of the last inspection. The school is aware of the need to put in place an effective system of assessing pupil progress in RE to ensure that learning is appropriately differentiated to meet the needs of all learners. Children's RE books show marking is routinely linked to the learning outcomes. However, the written recording of RE is not consistent across the school and does not fully reflect coverage of the syllabus or the progress of pupils. The RE subject leader is experienced in her role and is currently receiving further professional development through attending the Understanding Christianity training offered by Oxford diocese. She is also involved in regularly delivering input on RE to staff to ensure they are aware of current developments in RE. Monitoring and evaluation of the subject is focused on improving outcomes for all learners and involves foundation governors. This results in the identification of priorities for inclusion in an RE action plan.

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

The headteacher, governors and senior leaders of the school consistently express a deeply Christian vision underpinned by explicit Biblical principles. The school's Christian foundation is the bedrock of an inclusive and harmonious school community that clearly celebrates its rich diversity on a daily basis. The leadership of the school recognises the value and uniqueness of each pupil in the eyes of God. As a consequence the school seeks to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that promotes wellbeing and develops the whole child. This results in exemplary provision for pupils' SMSC development and standards of attainment and progress that are at least in line with the national average in reading and maths. The school's provision of a learning mentor and chaplaincy team promotes the wellbeing of the school community through the quality of nurture and pastoral support they offer. Meetings of the full governing body commence with prayer, and strategic decisions are guided by the school's Christian vision. The headteacher's report to governors includes an evaluative section on the work of the foundation and admissions committee so ensuring that governors are kept well informed. Governors also keep up to date with the national church schools' agenda through reference to current documentation that impact on the school's practice. Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the school's distinctive Christian character, collective worship and RE informs the on-going development of the school as a church school. Staff are supported in their professional development and encouraged to fulfil their potential as leaders. In this way the school is preparing for future leadership across church schools. The leadership of RE is effective in bringing about improvements in the practice of the school. The work of the chaplaincy team ensures that collective worship lies at the heart of each school day informing the way it conducts its corporate life. Both RE and collective worship more than meet statutory requirements. Parents are fully engaged in the life of the school. This is demonstrated in their involvement in the parent council, Friends Together, leadership of extra curricular activities for pupils and their support for collective worship. Strong links with the local community through Community Friends enable the school to support local events. Links with St Mary's Church and the Ecumenical partnership are mutually beneficial.

SIAMS report June 2017 Christ the Sower Ecumenical Primary School (VA) Milton Keynes MK8 0PZ