

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St. Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Elliotts Hill, Brixton, Devon. PL8 2AG	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Exeter
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Devon
Name of federation	United Schools Federation
Date of inspection	30 January 2018
Date of last inspection	5 July 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 113478
Head of School	Claire Webb
Executive Headteacher	Martin Harding
Inspector's name and number	Revd David Hatrey 844

School context

St. Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Brixton, Devon is a smaller than average school. The majority of children come from a White British heritage. The number of children who are entitled to Pupil Premium funding is below national averages. The number of children who have special educational needs and /or a disability (SEND) is in-line with national averages. In September 2016 a new leadership team were appointed.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are good

- Distinctive Christian values are well understood by children who are confident to articulate the difference these make to their lives and learning.
- The children's Christian Ethos Group (CEG) makes a significant contribution to leading worship involving other children.
- The new leadership team have brought enthusiasm and focus to the work of being a church school which has led to significant improvements.
- The work of the RE coordinator is raising the profile of the subject across the school resulting in higher pupil attainment in RE.

Areas to improve

- Embed the new approaches to spirituality enabling children to develop a spiritual vocabulary so they can express their deepening ideas in a variety of ways.
- Develop staff subject knowledge of other major world faiths and extend children's understanding of these through visitors and visits to other places of worship.
- Enable children to play a greater role in evaluating all aspects of being a church school so they feel they have greater ownership in shaping improvements.

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

Saint Mary's have adopted the 5 core Christian values of the United Schools Federation. These are: perseverance, courage, justice, compassion and friendship. Leaders ensure these have a high profile across the life of the school. Children confidently explain what these values mean and look like in daily life and give examples of where they use them. For example, children talk about a project to support a homeless charity in Plymouth demonstrating their compassion. The use of Christian values stickers, values certificates and the prestigious values blog helps children to develop a deeper understanding of how these make a difference to their lives. Staff award Christian values stickers to children who show these values, this helps to develop a deeper understanding of how these make a difference to their lives. Children explain the view that values are given to us by God and that Jesus shows us how they help us to do, "the right thing." Children explain their significance using particular Bible stories which reflects their distinctive Christian meaning. Prominent displays of these stories and dramas prepared by older children reinforce this. Staff model values in their lives establishing warm relationships where each child feels safe and an important part of the family. As a result, behaviour is of a high standard, children collaborate well and show respect and care for one another. Older children spontaneously nurture younger children; they explain that they see themselves as role models to show the importance of Christian values. Standards are at least in-line with national expectations and frequently above. This is because the school is particularly effective in developing positive attitudes to learning in order to achieve the pupils God given potential. There are a number of subjects, for example mathematics, where progress is significantly above expectations. Effective focused support for disadvantaged children enables them to make comparable progress to their peers. Recently developing the provision for spirituality has been a school focus. Staff have agreed a definition of spirituality. This is displayed in classes and children are beginning to talk about what this means for them. Children are encouraged to share their ideas related to 'Big' questions of meaning and purpose, such as, "What is God like?" or "Why do we hurt one another?" They pose their own "I wonder questions" on display boards which becomes a focus for reflection so they appreciate their ideas are important. The introduction of a framework to help them reflect, 'Windows, Mirrors and Doors' is developing the children's ability to explain and express their thoughts. Written responses show that their ideas are deepening. However, at present opportunities for spirituality are not indicated in planning nor are there a wide range of opportunities to express these creatively. The school recognises that the provision of opportunities to develop children's understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural faith are limited. Links with the church are strong and children have a growing appreciation of the role of the local church through the care and worship it offers.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The headteacher has observed good practice in other church schools and implemented changes which have raised the profile and impact of worship at the school so that it is now of a good standard. At the heart of this learning has been the formation of a children's Christian ethos group (CEG). These children plan and lead worship on a weekly basis ably supported by the vicar. They are becoming more creative in involving other children ensuring messages are shared in a way they can be readily understood. Feedback from children indicates that they enjoy being involved and these are the acts of worship they remember. The CEG have written and performed dramas related to the key biblical stories which are recorded for children to revisit. They write prayers and select new worship songs, this has addressed a target from the previous inspection. There is a strong emphasis on visual elements, which was a request from the children. Children explain that this helps them to understand the messages in these stories. Different approaches and settings to worship have been introduced. For example, there is key stage worship which is age related. All staff now lead worship supported by the planning in place, alongside clergy and other visitors, including the 'Open the Book' team who bring various approaches which children look forward to. Children generally feel that worship makes them think, but they could only give a few examples. Prayer is generally well taught; children see this as a way of sharing ideas with God. Younger children use figures to help them, such as 'Andy ask', which helps them to use different types of prayer. Prayers of the older children show a growing maturity where they think more about others and write prayers thoughtfully and reflectively in response to national events. The quiet spaces provided around the school are valued, providing moments of calm. Children can explain their understanding of the Trinity using different models. They talk about the nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and what these mean to them. Their knowledge of Jesus is growing as Bible stories are drawn upon regularly. A termly Eucharist is celebrated in school with children sharing in and contributing to this. Children can explain the importance of this for Christians and what it means to them. Festivals are celebrated with various contributions by the CEG and classes. However, there was some confusion in the understanding of younger children concerning events during Easter. Monitoring and evaluation of worship is regularly undertaken by leadership, notably through conferencing with children. This has led to improvements, such as more visual elements and new worship songs. Governors monitor and their feedback informs future initiatives.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

The quality and impact of religious education (RE) is good. A scrutiny of books and data show that standards across the school are rising. More children are achieving age related expectations as well as the higher levels of attainment in both key stages. This is in-line with other core subjects. There are two reasons why the quality of teaching is rising. Firstly, the focus on teaching has enabled teachers to apply new approaches to challenge children's thinking in RE. Children are encouraged to use the higher order thinking skills. Teacher questioning is a strength and challenges children so they reflect at a deeper level. A good feature is the way children are nurtured to take responsibility for their own learning, where they determine which of the activities to tackle which has the appropriate degree of challenge and is the next step in their learning journey. Staff monitor this well, creating a culture where children feel secure to aspire to more demanding questions. Children enjoy the range of opportunities in which they can present their ideas. This ranges from making videos, dramas, discussions, enabling them to be creative. Making a video clip to explain the importance of the Eucharist for Christians is a good example of this. The second reason is the enthusiasm of the new coordinator, who supports staff in extending subject knowledge, notably in Christianity. The introduction of 'Understanding Christianity' resources have been influential, providing an enquiry based approach which engages children as they think through and justify their beliefs. Children's views of RE are positive, they enjoy sharing their ideas and refine these in the light of others' comments. They feel RE has a relevance to their daily lives. Additional support from the federation lead RE teacher has raised the impact of RE teaching through supporting the coordinator and individual staff. Lesson observations identify strengths and aspects which can be developed further, which ensures that the quality of teaching continues to rise. Internal moderation of standards has improved the accuracy of assessments. The book scrutiny shows that marking is effective, with constructive feedback which often challenges children to think at a deeper level. RE makes a good contribution to spirituality, through asking 'Big' questions, where children are nurtured to verbalise their ideas. At present teacher's knowledge of other world faiths is not as well developed so they are unable to extend children's knowledge or respond to their questions. There are limited opportunities to visit other places of worship or welcome those from other faiths to the school. Monitoring and evaluation is thoroughly undertaken using a variety of means to determine strengths and areas to develop which inform the school's action plan.

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

Leadership and management is good. The new leadership team have brought enthusiasm and focus to the work of a church school. They have ensured that all targets from the previous inspection are being addressed. Through ongoing astute evaluations, they have identified strengths and areas to develop. This is particularly evident in the developments in spirituality and RE. 'Dream, Believe, Achieve,' is the established school vision which is prominently displayed. Leaders articulate and promote a distinctly biblical interpretation of this, where each child is special to God and unique and with their own God given talents. The school perceives its mission is to enable children to fulfil this God given potential. Children explain their understanding of the vision in the way they use Christian values in their lives. They talk about looking to Jesus as an example of how we can live our lives. They explain dream as determining what they can achieve and having the belief that they can achieve this. Achieve is not just seen in academic terms but how they share and care for one another as part of a community where Christian values are lived out. In order for each to achieve there are a range of interventions from dedicated teaching assistants to support them linked to good relationships with parents. Leaders undertake monitoring and evaluation in a variety of ways. There are regular pupil conferences to ascertain their views of RE and worship and how these can be improved. Observations and work scrutiny in which governors play an active role inform development plans and lead to future initiatives and improvements. At present children make a limited contribution to determine what new ideas should be introduced and opportunities to fully engage the children's CEG are not always taken. The federation makes a significant contribution to daily life notably through the lead teacher for RE who contributes alongside the subject leader to ongoing professional developments. Lesson observations by leaders from other schools in the federation support this. A strength of the federation is the way staff are prepared for senior leadership roles in other church schools. There is a real sense of the federation working as an extended family. Further professional training is drawn from diocesan advisers, the best examples being the introduction of the 'Understanding Christianity' resource. Leaders ensure that both collective worship and RE have a high profile, meeting statutory requirements with good support and resources. Partnership with the church and parents are strong. The local church through the vicar supports worship and there are valuable contributions to governance. Parents speak highly of the school and the close relationships with staff. The school plays a key role in the life of the community specifically its work with the local dementia care home, this is a treasured link. The community rightly holds the school in high esteem.