

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St. James Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School

High Street, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 7PZ

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Carlisle

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Satisfactory

Local authority

Cumbria

Date of inspection

5 July 2018

Date of last inspection

February 2015

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Controlled 112297

Headteacher

Michael Craig

Inspector's name and number

Anne B. Woodcock 445

School context

St. James is a smaller than average infant school in Whitehaven, on the West Cumbrian coast. The vast majority of the 122 pupils are of White British heritage. They come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding for social disadvantage is lower than average. The school supports a lower than average proportion of pupils with special needs and disabilities. The headteacher was appointed for September 2017. The assistant headteacher took up her post in January 2018.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. James Infant School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The inspirational leadership and example of the headteacher, very ably supported by dedicated staff and highly skilled governors, has re-invigorated the school's distinctive Christian character. This has created a vibrant Christian learning environment in which everyone feels valued, so that they can all flourish and achieve.
- The school's six core Christian values, which include trust and friendship, have an extremely strong impact on pupils' exemplary behaviour and very positive attitudes to life and learning.
- Pupils' outstanding spiritual and personal development is extremely well supported through the creative curriculum, excellent religious education (RE) and collective worship.
- Strong, mutually beneficial links with the church contribute to the school's Christian distinctiveness and to pupils' spiritual growth.

Areas to improve

- Develop pupils' awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural faith so that they can more fully appreciate it as a world-wide and diverse religion.
- Engage parents and visitors in the evaluation of collective worship to gain further insight as to the impact worship is having on the school community.
- Share the good practice and expertise of, for example, the governors in order to support other church schools in their development.

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

The school's Christian vision and values are thoroughly understood and embraced by all members of the school family. The vision, encapsulated in the tag line 'learning together, hand in hand', is highly inclusive and aspirational. It seeks to ensure that all are supported so that they can flourish, achieve, develop a love of learning and a respect for God's world and people. The school's core Christian values run seamlessly through every aspect of school life. As a result, they impact strongly on pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Pupils' understanding is remarkable, given their age and experience. 'Jesus taught the values in stories like the Good Samaritan. You treat people as you want to be treated, being kind and showing respect,' explained a Year 2 pupil. A parent stated, 'Christianity is not something in a box taken out at festival times. It is real every day.'

Behaviour is excellent because the pupils strive to treat others with friendship and respect. The caring Christian ethos, which is immediately felt by visitors, is highly conducive to learning. Pupils thoroughly enjoy all that the school offers, so attendance is good. They are unusually mature, articulate and reflective for their age. They are eager to share their ideas and demonstrate their achievements. Consistently good teaching, high expectations and the desire to provide the best possible educational experiences for every pupil, result in good, sometimes rapid rates of progress. Standards of attainment continue to improve, being above national averages, particularly for those achieving levels above age-related expectations. Those with special needs and disabilities are nurtured and supported so that everyone can succeed.

Provision for pupils' spiritual and personal development is extremely good. Vibrant displays of pupils' work reflect the depth of their thinking and the creative ways through which they express their ideas. For example, a Year 1 pupil wrote, 'In life, there is never a time when God leaves our side.' Art, drama, prayer and prose are used across the curriculum. Experiential learning, visits and residential, such as the recent Year 2 visit to Hawes End, provide frequent opportunities for pupils to appreciate the awe and wonder of God's world. As a result, the very youngest pupils have a well-developed understanding of their responsibilities, explaining that we should always try to look after everything that God has created. Pupils take pride in their achievements. Their confidence and self-esteem is supported by meaningful reward schemes and participation in sports and other community events.

RE makes a very substantial contribution to the school's distinctive Christian character. It is a much valued core subject which excites and inspires pupils and teachers. Pupils learn through discussion and a wide variety of practical and creative activities. They explore the nature of Christian faith and belief, often using the local church and clergy to support their learning. However, although the recent 'global Christianity week' provided an introductory experience of Christianity as a multi-cultural faith, this aspect of their understanding is yet to be developed. Through the study of aspects of Islam and Judaism, pupils come to understand some of the similarities as well as the differences in the way people of diverse religions worship God. As a result, they respect the cultures and beliefs of others and are eager to investigate further. Effective use is made of opportunities to meet people of other faiths and share key festivals, such as Eid and Diwali, within the school community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a pivotal and much valued feature of the school's daily life. It is a joyful, participatory and inspiring experience for everyone. Pupils say that they really enjoy helping to act out stories because this helps them to remember the message. They feel fully included. The substantial changes made to the planning, delivery and evaluation of collective worship since the last denominational inspection have had an extremely positive impact on pupils and staff. Detailed planning, firmly based on Christian values and Bible teaching, supports staff as they deliver worship at different times. Pupils have an excellent knowledge of Old Testament Bible stories and the life and teaching of Jesus. They make very effective links between Jesus' teaching, Christian values, their own lives and the world around them. One Year 2 pupil pointed out that some players in a World Cup football match failed to show respect, justice or forgiveness.

Even the youngest pupils have a remarkably mature understanding of God, which they articulate extremely well. 'God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit are like a triangle that makes the Trinity,' explained a Reception pupil. 'The Holy Spirit is everywhere, inside your heart and everywhere.' They talk confidently about the life and teaching of Jesus, referring to the Last Supper, miracles of healing and the way in which he prepared his disciples to 'do His work on earth.' This high level of understanding is supported by the very strong links with the church. The lay reader is a frequent visitor, leading worship in school and church. She provides much appreciated support for staff. Her contribution ensures that pupils are familiar with aspects of traditional Anglican practice. Festival services at Christmas and Easter are held jointly in church with the junior school. Parents attend these services in considerable numbers. They also value the opportunity to share in their children's work and worship in class-led school worship. Pupils take an active role in these services, sharing their prayers and reading from the Bible. As a result, they have a

well-developed understanding of the essential features of Christian worship

Prayer and reflection are key features of daily worship. Pupils know traditional prayers and graces, such as the Lord's Prayer. They write and use their own prayers in worship and in private. Considerable use is made of the classroom reflection spaces, which always include a variety of Bibles and faith stories, crosses and other Christian symbols. Pupils use these freely in their role play, as well as when they wish to be still and quiet.

The monitoring and evaluation of collective worship by governors and senior leaders is robust. Records of monitoring by governors, together with staff and pupil evaluations, indicate the impact of worship. They also show how changes have been made to improve the worship experience. However, feedback from parents and visitors is not included, so opportunities to assess the impact of worship on the wider school community are missed.

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

The energetic, inspirational leadership of the headteacher, who is extremely well-supported by skilled governors and dedicated staff, has re-invigorated every aspect of church school improvement. Although only in post for a year, he has built on the established foundations to create a harmonious, united team dedicated to achieving the shared Christian vision. Relationships across the school are extremely caring. All members of the school community feel valued and supported. They know that their well-being is considered at all levels of decision-making.

Governors have been instrumental in driving the school forward, managing challenges and working to address the significant issues raised in the last denominational inspection. As one governor stated, 'The support of the governors has helped to manage difficult times and brought the school closer together as a result.' Monitoring records show how governors challenged and held leaders to account regarding the pace of change. Rigorous self-evaluation processes engaged all members of the community in a full review of the mission, vision and values statements. As a result, everyone shares and seeks to uphold the agreed vision. Governors ensured that, through the appointment of the headteacher and assistant headteacher, the vision would be driven forward to continue to improve outcomes for all pupils. Governors meet with staff and pupils regularly. They share work scrutinies and attend RE lessons and collective worship. As a result, they know the school very well. They ensure that the needs of all pupils are met through the wise use of human and financial resources. Governors have secured extremely strong leadership for RE and collective worship. Both are well-supported and resourced. Both meet statutory requirements.

Highly effective use is made of partnerships with the diocese, peer-to-peer support networks and local school clusters. Diocesan support has been instrumental in supporting governors and developing RE. Training and professional development supports curriculum development and governance. Governors have a very clear idea of their strategic role, as evidenced by the recent decision to establish nursery provision within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Middle and senior leadership roles are supported by training opportunities which prepare future church school leaders. Governors are therefore very well-placed to support other church schools in their development.

Pupils and parents know that their opinions are valued and acted upon. Parents state that action is taken promptly when they make suggestions. The relationship with St. James' church continues to be strengthened to the mutual benefit of both the school and the church. The school is active in the community. Charitable events, such as collecting for the food bank, help pupils to understand that, through the Christian value of service, they can make a small difference in the world.

SIAMS report July 2018, St. James Church of England Infant School, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 7PZ