

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Bayford Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School and Nursery	
Ashdene Road, Bayford, Hertford, SG13 8PX	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust	N/A
Date of inspection	14 July 2017
Date of last inspection	03 July 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 117387
Headteacher	Jonathan Preston
Inspector's name and number	Lilian Weatherley 42

School context

Bayford Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School and Nursery is a smaller than average school in the parish of St Mary's, Bayford. The school has 94 pupils on roll but with an increasing cohort following the building of a new Key Stage 2 extension. There are currently four classes, each with two year groups. There is also a nursery which runs each morning. The school is situated in the small village of Bayford but also serves the village of Brickendon and the surrounding villages. Most pupils are from a White British heritage but increasingly there are pupils from homes where English is an additional language. The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium and with special educational needs is well below the national average. The headteacher has been in post for four years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Bayford Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School and Nursery are outstanding

- Galvanising the engagement of all stakeholders, the headteacher has led the development of a clear Christian vision based on Biblical teaching that inspires aspirational learning.
- The Christian character of the school has created a distinctively Christian family atmosphere where each child is valued. This has a significant impact on pupils' achievement and behaviour.
- The school's distinctive Christian character not only permeates the life of the school but is having a significant impact on the wider community.
- Religious education (RE) and worship have a high profile in the school and strongly support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.
- Prayer and reflection play an important part in the daily routine of the school and its curriculum. This has a significant impact on pupils' spiritual development.

Areas to improve

- Consider ways in which the staff can take a more active role in leading class worship to ensure that on occasions pupils' thinking can be challenged at an age-appropriate level.
- Develop the prayer spaces in the classrooms to further enhance pupils' spiritual development across the curriculum.

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

Bayford School has gone from strength to strength since the appointment of the headteacher in 2013. His idea to re-launch the school's distinctive Christian character has had a significant impact on all connected with the school. Firmly rooted in the Christian faith, the school's vision, mission statement and Christian values have been agreed by senior leaders, parents, governors and pupils and is based on the school's badge and motto 'So run that ye may obtain' (Corinthians Chapter 9 v 24). Aspiration, high expectations and challenge ensure that all pupils achieve well and that pupil progress is well above the national average. The mission statement 'In God's world we face the race and learn together to go further than we thought possible. To run faster than we hoped...' permeates all aspects of the school and its curriculum.

Based on the school's six key Christian values and supported by spiritual development, pupil attitudes to learning have improved and a calm and reflective work ethic prevails. Pupils are eager to share examples of how lighting candles for the 'Big Write' enables them to reflect and focus on their work. As a result, standards in writing are rising and pupils write thoughtful and meaningful stories. All pupils are able to refer to the school's Christian values of respect, peace, responsibility and love to demonstrate that there is no bullying and that relationships across the school are positive. 'I like how we have a school that is small. We are all friends because this school is very reflective'. The new sacred garden is used as a place not only for spiritual reflection but as a place to resolve conflicts should they arise. As one pupil pointed out, 'we don't really have much trouble here but if there is an argument we know we can go to the spiritual garden.' Pupils enjoy school and attendance has improved significantly. Behaviour is excellent and pupils thrive in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Pupils' voice is very strong and there is an active school council and Year 6 worship committee. Pupils are well mannered, confident and articulate; eager to share their creative ideas for the school. For example, the 'Golden Letters' whereby pupils are able to write a letter to nominate someone for following the Christian values.

The worth of each pupil is paramount and all pupils are viewed as being special in the sight of God. As a result, they feel safe and well cared for. The Ofsted inspection report 2016 commented that 'the schools' work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is 'outstanding'. As parents were eager to point out, 'there is a real sense of community here. We all look after each other. It's like a Christian family'. The wrap-around care and wide range of after school activities support this.

Pupils' SMSC development is a strength of the school and is audited on a regular basis. The vibrant displays create an inspirational learning environment and enhance pupils' learning. Pupils benefit from the spiritual and reflective opportunities planned across the curriculum and the reflective corners in the class rooms. In some classes however these are quite static displays, whereas the Year 3/4 teepee, for example, is a great hit with pupils. They are eager to explain how it is used as a reflective space, but that 'there is a large 'egg-timer' to ensure time is shared across the class.

As the intake of the school is mainly White and British, the school works hard to ensure opportunities are in place for the pupils to gain understanding of a wide range of faiths, cultures and beliefs. The RE curriculum strongly supports this. Pupils benefit from regular visits by leaders from other faith communities as well as enrichment events such as 'Bollywood dancing' and Diwali celebrations. The school is currently planning a multi-cultural faith week to support this. RE has a high profile in the school and is a popular subject with the pupils. The recent staff training on Understanding Christianity is also having an impact on pupils' understanding of Christianity as a world faith.

Music is a strength of the school. There is no school choir as the inclusive nature of this delightful school ensures that everyone is given the opportunity to take part in music performances. The singing is superb and the Year 6 pupils rehearsing for their leavers service singing 'Fly High as an Angel' is guaranteed to produce a few tears.

All pupils understand the importance of charitable giving and service in their lives, and there is an extensive list of charities who have written to the school to thank the children for their gifts including the Down's Syndrome Association, Jeans for Genes and Breast Cancer charities.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship has a high profile, meets statutory requirements and underpins the life of the school, with times for prayer and reflection punctuating the school day. The newly formed worship committee is having a significant impact on the way worship is viewed by other pupils and is led and managed. They take their roles seriously. They meet regularly, lead, plan and monitor the delivery of worship. They then feed-back to staff. They see the importance of times for reflection and have incorporated a greater use of candles for reflection as well as prayers for the morning, lunch time and evening use, based on the school's six key Christian values and Biblical teaching. Although the school uses the Christian publication 'Roots and Fruits' as its basis for worship, this is often enhanced and supplemented by the incumbent or ideas from the headteacher and worship group. Worship is regarded by all as a special time in the school day.

The quality of the daily whole-school worship is excellent and has a significant impact on pupils' spiritual and moral development. However, it is usually led by the headteacher or the incumbent and this does not allow staff to develop their skills in leading worship or give opportunities for worship to be aimed at a specific age group. Older pupils and some members of the worship group felt that there were often examples in the news where their worship might offer greater challenge if aimed at an older age group. For example, the older pupils wanted to discuss the Grenfell Tower incident and felt that that might not be appropriate for all ages.

The worship observed, which was based on the value 'love', was taken by the incumbent who is a regular visitor to the school and leads worship each week. Pupils entered in a respectful manner and were clearly engaged with the theme of love and justice. The worship group ably dramatised the story and then moved around to collect views from the discussions and report back to the incumbent.

Pupils all know the Lord's Prayer and age-appropriate hymns. For example, they sang 'Love is something' with passion on the day of the inspection.

All worship begins with the lighting of three candles and the pupils interviewed were all able to explain the symbolism of the candles and depending on their age, talk with confidence about the Trinity. They explained how the incumbent had used the Rublev Icon 'which you can see in the hall' to explain the importance of the Trinity for Christians and why we light the candles for God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. The worship sessions taken by the incumbent are not only enjoyed by the pupils but greatly enhance their theological understanding.

Pupils have very positive attitudes to worship and see prayer to be important in their own lives. They appreciate opportunities to visit the sacred garden or to pray about things that are important to them throughout the day. When questioned, pupils felt that even more space and time could be given over to prayer. 'I feel we need some more time in the day to think and reflect and possibly write some prayers.'

The detailed planning shows that daily acts of worship provide many opportunities for pupil participation and discussion. There is evidence that prayers written by the pupils are used on a regular basis in whole school worship and within their classes. Pupils also say how much they enjoy leading worship.

Although there are several opportunities for visiting the church for worship at Harvest, Christmas and Easter, the church is on the opposite side of the village and health and safety prevent walking to the church along the dangerous main road.

The alternative way across the field path is often prohibitive due to the extensive mud. This is a frustration to the school and the stakeholders. The school hall is small and cramped and does not allow parents to attend worship regularly.

Parents and governors feel that a creative extension to the current school hall would rightly engage the village community more, enable parents to join with the pupils for worship and create a more useful space for the pupils, their worship and spiritual development.

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

Since the appointment of the headteacher, the school's distinctive Christian character has gone from strength to strength. The idea to re-launch the school's Christian character has had a significant impact on the school and the village. All stakeholders were invited to be part of the re-launch and create a new vision and mission statement with a clear set of six Christian values on which to base the strategic direction of the school. This resulted in all those involved in the school being able to fully articulate the school's Christian vision and the Biblical foundation on which it is based. They also explain how the history of Bayford, its founders and the 'hound' on the badge were used as an inspiration. All of those interviewed spoke passionately about the headteacher's 'outstanding' leadership and the ways in which he has calmly and quietly moved the school's distinctive Christian character forward and dealt with some serious staffing and budget issues. All the issues from the previous inspection have been addressed and the school's Christian character has a high profile. The SIAMS self-evaluation is a key document in the school and the school has recently undergone a SIAMS health check and addressed some of the issues raised. Ofsted 2016 also praised the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation. There is an active governing body which played a key part in the re-launch. Governors have a clear strategic plan in place, based on this self-evaluation and the school's Christian vision and mission statement. They measure progress and regularly review the school's distinctive Christian character.

RE is viewed as part of the core curriculum and the National Society 'Statement of Entitlement' is firmly embedded in practice. Recently all staff and some governors, as well as the incumbent attended training on the 'Understanding Christianity' resource, which is already having an impact on standards. Statutory requirements are met and RE forms a key part of the school development plan, with a regular programme of monitoring in place to bring about improvements. Links with parents and the community are strong. Parents contribute fully to school life and praise the ways in which they have been included in the school's Christian character re-launch. From this input they ensure that the school's values are reinforced at home. They also praise the ways in which the school's vision and values have impacted on standards. There is an active PTA which works closely with the village community. For example, when the school was raising money for a sacred garden, the annual village garden day raised money to support its creation.

Relationships with the parish clergy and the diocese are effective. Staff regularly attend diocesan training and parish clergy alongside the parishioners fully support the school. Examples of this are the church warden reading Bible stories to year R, another priest sitting on the governing body and pupil's art work being displayed in the church.

Bayford is truly an example of an excellent church school in the community. It exemplifies how when all stakeholders work together to create a Christian vision, and mission based on Biblical teaching and values it benefits not only the pupils but has an impact on the whole community. In the words of the headteacher; 'Happy children in school being filled with the Grace and Love of God but filtering this out towards the staff and community by being part of God's world.'