

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

<b>Great Marsden St. John's Primary School Church of England Academy</b>	
Trent Road, Nelson, Lancashire BB9 0NX.	
<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Blackburn</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Date of academy conversion	1 July 2015
Name of multi-academy trust	Cidari Multi-Academy Trust
Date of inspection	29 June 2017
Date of last inspection	7 February 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	VA Primary Academy 141891
Headteacher	Michaela Underwood
Inspector's name and number	Anne B. Woodcock 445

### School context

St. John's voluntary aided primary school became a member of the Cidari Multi-Academy Trust in July 2015. The school is of average size. Although the majority of the 210 pupils are of White British heritage, an increasing number come from Pakistani and Eastern European backgrounds. The school serves a socio-economically deprived area in Nelson, East Lancashire. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding for social disadvantage is well above national levels. The school supports a lower than average proportion of pupils with additional needs. The headteacher has been in post since January 2014. Almost all teachers have been appointed within the last three years.

### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Great Marsden St. John's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The outstanding Christian leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, dedicated staff and skilled governors, directs and inspires all aspects of school improvement.
- Explicitly expressed and displayed Christian values impact strongly on pupils' excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes to life and learning.
- Extremely strong, mutually beneficial links with the church contribute significantly to the school's Christian character and to pupils' spiritual growth.
- The school's highly inclusive Christian ethos nurtures and supports pupils and their families, ensuring that all can flourish and achieve.
- Outstanding collective worship impacts strongly on pupils' very good spiritual and personal development.

### Areas to improve

- Provide regular opportunities for pupils to plan and lead collective worship independently so that they extend their understanding of the nature and purpose of worship.

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

The school's distinctive Christian character is immediately apparent to visitors. 'You know that you're in a church school because it is inclusive and non-judgemental. Christian values are like a golden thread that runs through everything,' explained two parents. A deep understanding of Christian love permeates all relationships. This is because all that is planned and achieved is rooted in the shared understanding of the school's mission and Christian vision. 'Love God, love others, love ourselves, love learning and love life', was agreed as the new vision statement by all members of the school community. Even the youngest pupils know this vision and all strive to use their core Christian values every day. 'We welcome and include everyone. We do our best to follow Jesus' teaching about love and caring for others,' stated a Year 4 pupil. As a result, behaviour is excellent and pupils' very positive attitudes help them to overcome challenges in life and learning. They thoroughly enjoy all that school offers. Pupils strive to meet the aspirational targets set for them so attendance is good.

The school is highly inclusive, reflecting the aim to 'give children the roots to grow and the wings to fly'. As a result, pupils are very well-supported so that all can flourish and achieve. Standards of attainment continue to improve. Pupils make good, sometimes rapid, progress from starting points which baseline assessments show to be below age related expectations. Vulnerable pupils and their families are very well-supported. As a result, parents are engaged in their children's learning and they feel valued and included.

Pupils' spiritual and personal development is excellent. This is because the school promotes spirituality across the curriculum very effectively. Their social, moral and cultural development is very good. Pupils are immersed in high quality experiences which actively promote their thinking and creativity. These include spirituality days and interfaith weeks as well as educational visits. They are reflective, thoughtful and articulate learners who express their ideas imaginatively through art, prose and prayer. This is demonstrated throughout the school in the high quality, vibrant displays of pupils' work, in their class scrapbooks and in their individual workbooks.

Pupils have a very well-developed understanding of their place in God's world and of their responsibilities for others. They raise money for charities because they want to help others, as Jesus did, and because it is one of their '5 loves'. They talk knowledgeably about global issues such as refugees and terrorism. Pupils have a clear understanding of diversity and seek to focus on the similarities of major world faiths and cultures, rather than the differences. Their work in religious education (RE) makes a major contribution to this. RE also contributes very significantly to the school's highly distinctive Christian character.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

'It is interesting because every day we learn new things about our beliefs and that we are all equal in God's eyes,' stated a Year 5 pupil. This statement clearly demonstrates the importance of collective worship in the daily life of the school. Pupils' attitudes are extremely positive because they feel included and inspired by their varied worship experiences. Themes are firmly based on Bible teaching and Christian values. They are explored creatively by a wide range of leaders, including staff and clergy. As a result, pupils have a good knowledge of Bible stories and of the life and teaching of Jesus. They make clear links between parables, Christian values and their own actions. For example, a Year 4 pupil explained, 'Jesus used parables to teach people how God wants them to live their lives. In the Prodigal Son, the dad welcomed his son back because he thought he was lost. God is like that. When we do something wrong he forgives.'

Worship is a participatory, inclusive and affirming experience for staff and pupils. A year 5 pupil stated, 'Now we have the values and there's more to interact with, so people get more about what worship is about.' Pupils understand God as a loving, forgiving Father. Their understanding of the Christian concept of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is impressive, due to the way in which they experience this through the use of traditional Anglican greetings, responses and imagery.

Prayer and reflection are key features of worship. Pupils know the Lord's Prayer. They write and use their own prayers confidently because they have a well-developed understanding of the nature and purpose of prayer. Pupils write many of the prayers used at different times of the day. Pupils use their classroom reflective spaces regularly because they are involved in creating them.

The very strong links with the church enhance worship and contribute significantly to the spiritual development of staff and pupils. The vicar and church youth worker lead worship regularly. The vicar supports planning and evaluation processes and provides much-appreciated spiritual guidance for members of the school community. The church is used for services at festival times. Parents attend these services in considerable numbers because they value the opportunity to share in their children's work and worship. They also attend class-led and celebratory

worship in school. Pupils take responsibility for delivering aspects of these acts of worship. However, they do not regularly plan and lead worship independently.

The monitoring and evaluation of collective worship is extremely robust. Pupils, staff and governors provide regular feedback which is used to inform future planning and provide insight as to the impact worship has on attitudes and beliefs. As a result, collective worship continues to evolve and inspire.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

Pupils are excited and inspired by RE. One Year 5 pupil stated, 'People really enjoy it. It's interesting and everyone wants to learn because lessons are exciting.' Consistently good, often outstanding teaching ensures that the needs of all pupils are met within well-planned lessons in which pupils are fully engaged. Pupils develop essential RE skills through which they explore challenging questions about faith and belief. Standards of attainment have improved dramatically since the last denominational inspection so that they are in line with age related expectations. Many pupils make rapid progress from their starting points and standards of achievement are at least equal to those achieved in other core subjects.

Extremely effective subject leadership has established the very high profile of RE. Teacher's subject knowledge is good due to effective training and support. Rigorous assessment processes have been established so that pupil progress is tracked and gaps in learning are identified to inform future planning. Effective marking supports pupils' learning because it shows them how to improve. This is clearly evident in the high quality of pupils' work seen in their workbooks and in class scrapbooks. Monitoring and evaluation by senior leaders and governors is thorough and highly effective because it has clearly led to continuous improvement and raised standards.

Through their work in RE, pupils gain a broad knowledge of Christian belief. They are challenged to consider their own beliefs and recognise and respect the beliefs of others. They talk confidently about stories from the Old and New Testament. Older pupils link these to similar stories and characters within the Torah and Quran. RE contributes very strongly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They benefit from regular first-hand experiences, visiting places of worship such as a mosque and synagogue and meeting people of different faiths and cultures. As a result, they have a well-developed understanding of diversity which they are able to reflect in their own lives.

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

All members of the school community agree that the inspirational leadership and Christian example of the headteacher has unified the school and brought about rapid changes. These have had an extremely positive impact on all aspects of school improvement. She is ably supported by senior leaders, governors and staff whose overriding commitment is to love and nurture the pupils under their care so that they can flourish and achieve. The difficult challenge of raising standards to address the Ofsted 'special measures' judgement in November 2013 has been met with dignified resolve by senior leaders and governors. Their level of commitment cannot be overstated. Skilled and highly effective governance and leadership ensured the effective transition to academy status and secured transformational changes in teaching and learning which continue to raise standards and improve outcomes for pupils.

Rigorous self-evaluation processes engage all members of the school family, so that all feel valued and all can influence the development of the school. The vision and values work undertaken two years ago was fundamental to all that has been achieved. Governors have secured highly effective leadership for RE and collective worship. They resource and support each area, ensuring that both meet statutory requirements. Issues for development from the previous denominational inspection have been fully addressed. The impact of changes continue to be evaluated so that they lead to continuous improvement.

Partnerships with the diocese, multi-academy trust and church are excellent. Diocesan training has impacted strongly on the teaching of RE and aspects of governance. Working together with the trust and diocese, leaders have overcome difficult financial and human resource challenges. Strategic and succession planning is good because leaders use resources wisely to develop middle leaders and to prepare them for the future leadership of church schools. The school and church work together harmoniously, supporting each other practically and spiritually. Parents recognise and value this collaboration because they know it helps them and supports their children's personal development and well-being. The transformation which has so firmly established the school's distinctive Christian character provides a strong platform on which to base future development.