

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Silas Church of England Primary School

Clematis Street, Blackburn, Lancashire. BB2 6JP

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Diocese	Blackburn
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Date of inspection	19 April 2018
Date of last inspection	January 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 132045
Headteacher	Michele Battersby
Inspector's name and number	Jo Williams 863

School context

St Silas Church of England Primary School is a large urban school. Pupils are predominantly from ethnic minority backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is above the national average. There have been significant changes since the last inspection. The senior leadership team has been restructured and there is a recently appointed headteacher and deputy headteacher. There is also a new priest in charge at the church. A review of teaching and learning has resulted in the introduction of a new curriculum across the school. The school was inspected by Ofsted in March 2018.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Silas as a Church of England school are satisfactory

- Although relatively new to post, the senior leadership team have raised the profile of the school's Christian character. However, this could be strengthened further by all staff and governors having a deeper understanding of the school's Christian vision and its subsequent impact.
- Relationships, based on trust and mutual respect, give pupils a sense of belonging in a caring environment.
- Pupils have a respectful understanding of diverse communities and as a result, value others as individuals.
- Pupils benefit from effective partnerships with the local community including the church and the mosque.

Areas to improve

- Enhance pupils' spiritual development by ensuring that the school's Christian character is recognisable to the whole school community. Likewise, ensure that there is a clearer understanding that the school's values are distinctively Christian.
- Provide pupils with a broader experience of worship by extending their involvement in planning, leading and evaluating worship.
- Build on the school's renewed approach to Religious Education (RE) to secure improvement in standards in the subject.

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

The Christian character of the school is visible around the school building. Parents and pupils all express pride in their school. However, they are less aware of how the Christian character impacts on the daily life of the school. Staff and pupils embrace the school's values of love, belonging and thankfulness. Pupils gave examples of how these values supported them at school and home. This included persevering in lessons and helping them to make right choices and 'become a better person'. The headteacher expresses the values through Christian tradition, such as wanting pupils to make the best of their God given talents. These links are not always fully understood by all the school community. Pupils have ownership of the values through events such as the Prayer Day and the introduction of the St Silas promise. This impacts positively on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. This is apparent in the school description of itself as a big family reflecting a strong sense of belonging. A parent commented that 'every child is equal' and a teacher spoke of pupils showing compassion and 'pulling together, loving each other'. As a result, there are strong relationships across the school. Parents gave examples of how any concerns are dealt with quickly by staff. For instance, one parent explained that 'teachers listen, nip things in the bud and everything is resolved'. Another parent described 'happy and thriving children' as a result of pupils' experiences of positive relationships. Pupils have a respect for diversity and a good understanding of diverse communities. A governor reflected that the school equips its pupils to become 'citizens of a multi-faith society which includes a Christian base'. RE supports the Christian character of the school in that it develops pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multicultural worldwide faith. Parents felt the school was special in how it taught pupils respect. Likewise, commenting that it is important to have personal faith, parents agreed that the school is successful in promoting an effective multicultural perspective.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Collective worship is an important part of the daily life of the school. Pupils commented on how they enjoy listening to the stories and receiving awards. Worship is based in the Christian faith, using bible stories and hymns. Core values underpin worship themes which ensures worship is relevant for all pupils. As a result, it impacts on the daily life of the school, linking directly to positive pupil behaviour. Although pupils benefit from embracing these values, they do not fully recognise that they are rooted in the Christian faith. Worship is supportive of pupils' understanding of Christian traditions and they can recognise key events in the church calendar. Three candles are lit at the start of each worship, assisting pupils' knowledge of the Holy Trinity. Worship supports pupils' spiritual development through quiet time. In response to the previous inspection, reflection areas have been developed in every classroom as well as an outdoor prayer garden. Therefore, pupils of all faiths are able to reflect or engage in private prayer at different times in the school day. Pupils gave examples of how they found prayer helpful, such as when facing a school test or thinking about a relative in hospital. A list of key points ensures a focus when evaluating worship. Evaluations are currently undertaken by some staff and a small group of pupils. Although there is not a regular plan for securing routine monitoring, some changes have been made to worship as a result of evaluations. Each year group takes a theme and leads worship in the local church. Pupils expressed their enjoyment in being involved in worship, such as acting out a scene focusing on Fairtrade. However, at present there is limited involvement of pupils in planning, leading and evaluating worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

There have been improvements in RE since the last inspection. The introduction of a weekly lesson, delivered by teachers, is having a positive impact on the subject. RE now has a secure profile within the wider school curriculum. In minutes from an ethos group meeting, it is noted that, 'children felt they had been taught more RE this year than last'. Pupils gave examples of RE lessons they had enjoyed, for example, learning about Mother Theresa and remembrance. The subject leader commented that the pupils loved lots of discussion in RE saying, 'they can air an opinion in a safe environment'. Attainment in the subject is in line with other areas of the curriculum so currently below national expectations. Through a new approach to RE, pupils have begun to use different thinking skills in the subject. For example, pupils were challenged to identify the similarities and differences when looking at images of different places of worship. In a lesson music was played to create a calm atmosphere enabling pupils to reflect on a variety of art work depicting the ascension. Developments in the subject are beginning to have a positive effect on pupils' growing knowledge. However, as yet they are not sufficiently embedded to demonstrate expected levels of pupil progress. The recent introduction of the new diocesan syllabus is ensuring that there is now a balanced RE curriculum. It is predominantly Christian with focused topics on other world faiths. Parents commented that they had learned about different religions because of what their children had shared with them at home. A new subject leader has monitored different aspects of RE and provided feedback for staff. This resulted in some improvements in the subject, such as ensuring the content is made relevant to the pupils.

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

The headteacher describes the school as a place where every child is a precious child of God. Her vision, deeply founded in Christian belief, is that the school is 'God centred, where everyone flourishes'. Consequently, a strand in the school's mission statement provides a faith challenge stating, 'love God and each other'. However, although senior staff hold a Christian vision this has not been communicated effectively to the school community. Pupils are keen to uphold core values and these are reinforced by staff. One pupil described the benefit of the values as 'helping you to aim for your goals'. Staff and governors expressed the values as 'shared values' across different faiths. A governor commented that the community appreciated the values being similar. They are widely accepted and have a positive impact on pupil behaviour and pupils' approach to learning. The school is committed to supporting pupils' wellbeing with staff appointed for this very purpose. Parents agreed that their children were keen to come to school and did not like missing a day. The school leadership recognises the strengths and challenges faced by the school. The headteacher spoke of 'careful evaluation and bold decisions'. New strategic plans for whole school development were introduced mid-year in response to a recent Ofsted report. These plans aim to raise expectations and demonstrate the rigour necessary to achieve sustained improvement across the curriculum. One governor said, 'the ethos of the school means the teachers see the positives. We don't want to limit the children with low expectations.' The leadership is committed to developing future leaders for church schools. Key training is made available to staff. The headteacher has also been nurtured in her role, moving into headship from a deputy role in the school. The improved provision for RE and daily collective worship result in the school meeting the statutory requirements. The school has nurtured some effective partnerships. Pupils enjoy regular visits to the local church and welcome clergy visits to the school. There are also good links with the local diocese with the school accessing training and support. Parents and pupils spoke of an open day at the local mosque that proved very successful, further strengthening community partnerships.

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