

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Herne Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

School Lane, Herne, Kent, CT6 7AL	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Canterbury
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Kent
Date of inspection	19 May 2017
Date of last inspection	July 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Junior – Voluntary Aided - 118736
Headteacher	Malcolm Saunders
Inspector's name and number	Pamela Draycott - 161

School context

This larger than average primary school has three single-age classes in each year group. Almost all its pupils are White British. The proportion for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage and those with special educational needs of disability are below the national average. Since the previous denominational inspection the school has a new headteacher, it has received an 'outstanding' OfSTED judgement (March 2016) and governors' commitment has been recognised by being recently awarded the National Governor Mark (March 2017). Most pupils come from Christian family backgrounds with a minority expressing no religious affiliation.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Herne Voluntary Aided Junior school as a Church of England school are outstanding

- A strong Christian, inclusive and aspirational ethos underpins the school's work. This impacts positively on the exemplary behaviour of pupils and the compassionate and respectful relationships evident across the school community.
- The worship programme is a strength, powerfully contributing to pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. This in turn positively influences pupils' commendable attitudes to learning.
- Religious education (RE) has a high profile and approaches to learning raise expectations and lead to high standards of attainment and very good progress.
- The strong, insightful leadership of the headteacher, working effectively with governors and senior colleagues, is successfully shaping continued developments in line with the school's clear Christian vision and values. This has the full support of staff who appreciate the effective leadership they receive.

Areas to improve

- Fully implement the planned enhancement of curriculum content and assessment through embedding the use of the 'Understanding Christianity' resource across the curriculum.

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

The school successfully fosters a caring and supportive atmosphere that enables staff and pupils to flourish within its explicitly Christian and inclusive environment. The school's mission statement is, 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself' and is plainly biblically linked. This is consistently used as a basis for making choices about developments as a church school and to encourage pupils to reflect on the impact of Jesus' teaching for life today. Consequently, the school focuses closely on the talents and needs of the individual and on positively helping them to achieve their potential both academically and personally. As a result, pupils' attainment and progress is at least good and often very good, irrespective of their various starting points. In keeping with the school's Christian mission, safeguarding and pastoral care across the school is a strength. Consequently, pupils feel happy, safe and engaged in school life. This means that attendance is high and instances of poor behaviour very low. Relationships at all levels are respectful and supportive and reflect 'loving your neighbour' extremely well. There is a positive learning environment with high quality displays which celebrate the school's Christian foundation excellently.

A wide range of opportunities that promote pupils' SMSC development are in evidence across the school, through the curriculum and the extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Pupils respond excellently. They are welcoming, helpful and polite and are developing their ability to express their thoughts clearly whilst listening respectfully to adults and their peers. They take responsibility for themselves and others in an assured manner. Charitable giving is clearly seen as an expression of the school's Christian foundation, as expressed by a Year 4 pupil saying, 'Jesus was caring and generous and so it's important that you help others when you can. That means being kind by helping charity'. RE is effective in supporting pupils' appreciation of diversity and difference. This includes awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural, world faith. The annual SMSC week and the support provided for a Christian school in Uganda also develop this understanding. Thus RE makes a strong contribution to helping pupils consider the role and significance of religion and of faith in the world today. The RE and the worship programmes effectively express and support the school's outstanding Christian ethos.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is of central importance to the school's daily life. It fosters a respectful and reflective atmosphere which also supports a deep sense of spirituality, belonging and community. It relates Jesus' teaching about loving God and loving your neighbour to the school's life, relationships and behaviours, as well as to key issues in the world today. Delivered in a variety of groupings and enhanced through worship in the parish church, the programme is varied and well structured. Through worship pupils reflect positively on the importance of the Bible and the significance of Jesus for Christians. They also develop an age-appropriate understanding of complex ideas like the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Aspects of Anglican worship, such as the use of candles and different colours signifying different times of the Christian year, are deeply embedded in school practice. Prayer and reflection is fundamental to the school's worship programme. Pupils are keen to join in, often using prayers they have written. They know that there are different types of prayer, such as outlined by a Year 5 pupil as, 'forgiveness, intercession and thanksgiving... Intercession is when you ask God to do something either for yourself or for others'. A Year 4 pupil reflected, 'Prayer makes me feel close to God, calm and peaceful inside. I think God sometimes says 'no' or 'wait' but always answers prayer'. Pupils know and understand something of the significance of key Christian prayers such as the Lord's Prayer and the Grace, both of which are said regularly. Pupils also frequently offer spontaneous prayer for themselves and others during acts of worship. Pupils engage deeply with worship, entering respectfully, listening closely and joining in with the opening sentence and response and prayers with understanding. Singing is enjoyed and, through using traditional and contemporary Christian hymns and songs, enhances the worship experience strongly. As a Year 6 pupil said, 'Singing is important in worship. It helps me feel closer to God.' Pupils have a range of opportunities to plan and lead worship, most especially through the weekly celebration class assembly. Pupils and staff prepare thoroughly for 'our turn. It helps us celebrate what we've been thinking about in our week's "statement to live by"'. The programme is closely monitored and evaluated by leaders and pupils and feedback contributes very well to continued refinement.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE has a very high profile across the school. Attainment is above national expectations and broadly equal with the other 'core subjects' of literacy and mathematics. Pupils make at least good and usually very good progress from their various starting points. A range of strategies which include effective open-ended questioning, various types of written work, small group and individual activities, drama, role-play and art work are all in evidence through the RE curriculum. This range enhances pupils' enjoyment and engagement with the subject and impacts directly on the

standards and progress they are making. Visits to the church and to a synagogue, mosque and gurdwara extend learning opportunities excellently. The curriculum is effective and well balanced between content that focuses on Christian belief and practice and that which focuses on other faiths including Judaism, Islam and Sikhism. It also provides significant opportunities for pupils to consider the impact of religious teaching and actions on believers and on themselves, irrespective of their own particular faith background. The school has invested in some recent training to improve teaching Christianity further. This is through the use of a new resource and training programme entitled, 'Understanding Christianity'. This provides support for exploring key Christian concepts such as incarnation, salvation and God in age-appropriate ways across the curriculum. Whilst not embedded there is already evidence that its challenging approaches are refreshing teaching and learning and further enhancing the already high standards and pupils' enjoyment. Through RE pupils are successfully developing key skills such as analysis and interpretation. For example, activities that require them to explore skills such as analysis and interpretation as they explore key teachings or texts and outline similarities and differences between different religions. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, with assessment being used effectively by the RE team and senior leaders to track progress and refine teaching. RE is closely monitored by the subject leaders, senior staff and governors. This impacts positively on maintaining high standards. It also expands staff confidence in teaching RE through, for example, targeted training. Leadership of RE is strong. The longstanding subject leader is working closely with a colleague who will take over her role. This approach to succession planning signifies the school's deep commitment to RE.

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

The headteacher, constructively supported by his senior leaders, staff and governors, is ensuring that the school's Christian mission persists in having a clear focus and impacts confidently on its work. Self-evaluation of the school's Christian foundation is detailed and accurate and based on encouraging all to flourish and achieve their potential. The effective governing body is very closely and deeply involved in school life and provides excellent support and challenge to senior leadership. Staff at all levels work collaboratively together with 'the children at the heart'. Governors' commitment has most recently been recognised by them gaining a National Governor Award. Since the previous denominational inspection the school has been through a period when standards fell. This led to a judgement of 'requires improvement' by OfSTED in 2013. However, under the supportive and yet resolute leadership of the headteacher and governing body, clear improvement strategies were effectively implemented. These were clearly based on ensuring that the school's Christian foundation remained the lynch pin for all developments. This resulted in big strides forward so that the school has recently been judged as outstanding by OfSTED. It also means that the school has made outstanding efforts and progress in addressing the key issues for improvement identified in the previous denominational inspection. Governors have secured excellent leadership for both RE and worship which leads to highly successful practice in both areas. RE and worship are well resourced and meet statutory requirements. Recruitment procedures and ongoing professional development for working within the church school sector are relevant for staff and clearly focused on pupils' needs. Thus teachers fully support the school's Christian and inclusive emphasis on the individual. This in turn means that pupils and their families feel valued and well engaged with school life. Parents are supportive of the school and its Church of England foundation. They see this as providing a 'great education for children that is not only about the academic but teaches values, morals and ethics.' There are mutually enriching links with the parish church. The school and the families see, 'St Martin's as our church'. Attendance at special services from school families is high. A display of children's work in the church helps the congregation celebrate the school as 'their school'. Involvement of clergy in leading worship, providing pastoral support and in a governance capacity enhances the relationship. The school draws closely on support from the diocese, for example, which impact directly on school practice. There are strong links with the local Church of England infant school and with other schools in the vicinity. These links have deepened and increased since the time of the previous denominational inspection. The headteacher and governors are beginning to use the expertise they have gained in school improvement to the benefit of others – a practical expression of 'loving your neighbour'.

SIAMS report [May 2017] Herne Junior School (CE VA), School Lane, Herne, Kent, CT6 7AL