

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Sissinghurst Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Common Road, Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2BH

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Canterbury
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Kent
Date of inspection	26 June 2018
Date of last inspection	8 May 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	118717
Headteacher	Cathy Penfold
Inspector's name and number	Elizabeth Pettersen 557

School context

Sissinghurst Church of England Primary School is a smaller than average primary school set within the village of Sissinghurst. The majority of pupils are White British. The number of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding and who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is below the national average. The school was graded as good in an Ofsted inspection in March 2018.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Sissinghurst as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school's motto to 'Enjoy, achieve and celebrate together in faith', accompanied by the values of friendship, wisdom, koinonia and endurance, underpin all school activities. This provides a strong and secure base for positive and mutually supportive relationships amongst and between all stakeholders.
- Varied opportunities to develop pupils' uniqueness as a child of God, such as through the work of forest schools, enables pupils to gain in confidence and self-esteem as well as develop a deepening spirituality.
- The involvement of the local church in leading 'Open the book' worship has inspired many pupils to lead worship with eagerness and confidence, as well as with maturity.
- RE is led with clear direction and guidance by an enthusiastic subject leader. As a result, staff feel confident in the delivery of the new Understanding Christianity resources.
- Strong links between the school and the church promote the school's Christian mission of service to the community.

Areas to improve

- Provide opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 2 to deepen and develop their personal prayer life through the modelling and writing of different styles of prayer.
- Ensure pupils know the steps needed to improve their work in RE, so that all pupils' thinking is challenged and developed.
- Extend the opportunities for staff to develop their leadership skills through professional development, so that they are prepared for future church school leadership.

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

The school's motto, 'Enjoy, achieve and celebrate in faith', firmly underpins all activities that take place at Sissinghurst. All staff are motivated to do the best for each child, academically, emotionally and spiritually. A celebration of each child as a unique child of God is at the heart of decision making. As a result, pupil voice is central to the plans for the future direction of the school. This is seen in numerous ways. For example, the school values were reviewed following the previous denominational inspection. This involved a day of activities with pupils on different values, including bible stories and circle time activities. From this, the values of friendship, wisdom, koinonia (fellowship) and endurance, with linked bible stories, were chosen. These values now are the foundation and motivation for all interactions and influence the high quality relationships amongst all stakeholders. Pupils of all ages bond together well, manifested in the buddy partnerships between Year 5 and 6 pupils with pupils in Reception and Year 1. This enables pupils to settle in to school life effectively. Pupil behaviour is, at all times, polite and respectful. They are able to articulate the importance of the values when any problem occurs. One example is choosing wisdom to make the right choice to walk away when this will help dissipate an argument. They also know that endurance is key to their success in their learning. Pupils gain confidence from the way that their opinions are valued at the school council meetings. Within this group, they have helped plan for the creation of a new Key Stage 2 library area and the new spiritual garden. This, in turn, generates great enthusiasm for these projects and a pride in the school. The school sees the development of the whole child as crucial in the achievement of pupil progress and attainment for all. As a result, standards across the school are above national averages. Time spent in the forest school is seen as a key way to develop wellbeing. This enables pupils to develop a sense of awe and wonder in God's creation and allows pupils to have times of peace and calm. Their eager conversation about the activities, such as making creations out of natural materials and making camps in the woods, demonstrates the impact on their wellbeing and self-esteem. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is further effectively nurtured through a range of activities including trips to local venues. These have include Sissinghurst Gardens, as well as a Year 6 visit to Hardelot and a range of visitors to develop specific skills such as in science and K'Nex. The school has developed a range of engaging prayer stations through the building, both in the classroom and in the main corridors. They often reflect a topical theme. A corner during the inspection focused on the world cup and invited pupils to pray for the nations of the world. The impact of this is that pupils feel confident to pray, to thank God and to seek his help. Opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 2 to deepen their prayer life are currently under-developed. They are able to articulate mature concepts, but they write quite simplistic thoughts and ideas. Pupils' understanding of our multicultural world is effectively developed through the links with a school in Malawi, as well as through work with other charities such as Christian Aid. This also demonstrates pupils' willingness to help those in need, as Jesus would expect them to do.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship at Sissinghurst is seen as the starting point of the day when all members of the school community can 'come together to be one', as well as to experience a time of peace and a focus on God. Parents are welcome to join all school worship, recognising that this is an important part of the day for the school community. The Friday celebration assembly is a time when the school focuses on values. Pupils are rewarded for their part in showing the values in the school day as well as for their success in out of school activities. This helps to build the community around the shared values.

Pupil involvement in the planning and delivery of worship is exceptional. They have been inspired by the weekly visits from a group from the local church, presenting an 'Open the book' themed worship. This involves the re-telling of a bible story embracing considerable pupil participation. The excitement that this engenders in pupils is demonstrated in the way that they run to school on a Monday morning to be sure of taking part. The story telling method from 'Open the book' deepens pupil spirituality very effectively. As one pupil states, 'It is a better way of learning'. Pupils explain that, 'I really liked the last supper because I now know how the disciples felt', whilst another considers that their favourite one was about the cross, because 'it explained what I didn't understand'. These acts of worship have captivated their imagination and, as a result, different groups of pupils lead worship on a regular basis. This is a fully inclusive activity as pupils say that everyone is welcome to join this group called the leading lights, if they wish. They work with a member of staff to plan worship around a set format that includes Anglican liturgy, the lighting of a candle, the acting of a bible story linked to a value, a prayer and a song. The ability of pupils to lead worship has had a positive impact on their confidence. They say that they like standing in front of everyone and it makes them feel special. They reflect that their acts of worship have great benefit on the school community as they are children spreading the message, rather than the adults.

Monitoring reports by pupils show their enjoyment in, as well as how their understanding of the values has been reinforced by the worship. One pupil commenting that an act of worship made him feel he 'was determined and

inspired not to give up'. Experiences in worship very effectively support pupils' understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For example, following a worship about the Trinity a pupil commented that, 'It made me think about how powerful God is and how he has a plan for us all as we trust him'. Another considered that, 'It made me feel like God was in the room right next to me and protecting me from harm.' The school year is marked by a celebration of key church festivals. Apart from harvest, Christmas and Easter, there are specific celebration days for Pentecost and Ascension, for example. This meets a development point from the previous denominational inspection.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE is seen as a core subject within the curriculum. RE is very well led by a committed and enthusiastic subject leader. The importance of the subject leader's role is demonstrated in the way in which she is given release time for courses and to carry out her role in school. The Understanding Christianity materials have been very effectively disseminated to other staff. As a result, they are confident and enthused in their teaching. They feel very well supported by the subject leader. She has also worked collaboratively with other local schools to refine and develop specific aspects of teaching RE, such as the use of big questions. These are now an effective and challenging starting point for the lessons. A constant review of practice and a sharing of ideas with other schools has resulted in imaginative, absorbing and creative interpretations of the learning topics. This stimulates high levels of achievement for all and is in line with other core subjects. For example, in Year 1 the Jewish faith has been explored through making dough models to illustrate Shabbat, making Challah bread, playing a game called Dreidel and asking big questions about the faith. Lessons are appropriately challenging through a range of engaging activities. For example, a lesson on Muslims involved pupils working through a carousel of picture activities and then meeting a mystery guest. This guest was a boy from an older class who told the pupils about his faith. In another class pupils were being challenged to reflect on how they would spend £70,000, choosing between different groups of people in need. They were happy to debate and change their ideas, really considering which group Jesus would have supported. This ability to learn from religion effectively meets a requirement from the previous denominational inspection. The RE leader carries out regular monitoring activities, including book scrutiny and lesson observations. Consequently, she has a secure understanding of the strengths and development areas for RE which are part of the school plan. Termly tracking of pupils is in place and is used well to support learning. Although books are marked, opportunities to move pupils on in their learning are not consistently identified, thus missing opportunities to further challenge and deepen pupil understanding of the themes.

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

The headteacher, ably supported by the governors, lives out and promotes a distinctively Christian vision for Sissinghurst, firmly rooted in the school's motto and values. Governors see this as creating a school where there is a constant sense of calm in all areas and peace between all stakeholders. They also articulate the fact that the role model of Jesus is central to the daily work of the school. The example for this is set in the story of the Good Samaritan, demonstrating that everyone is welcome. Governor monitoring visits show that the values are integral to the life of the school, impacting positively on excellent behaviour. Governors constantly challenge the headteacher on the school's performance and how it meets the needs of all pupils. As a result, they have a secure understanding of how the school meets the needs of all. Parents are clear that the school's Christian values motivate the fact that their children are accepted as individuals without judgement. This impacts positively on their children's attainment and behaviour. Parents are actively involved in the life of the school, making a significant difference to the school environment, for example. This is seen in the library area for Key Stage 1 which has been constructed by parents who built a wooden tree in the corner to create a special learning space and book corner. The school is actively involved in the local community, as well as being a focal point for village life. An annual tea party for the over 60s demonstrates the school's value of friendship and koinonia effectively. There is a supportive partnership through visits from the priest to school and the school to church. In addition, activities such as Messy Church, are an expression of their shared mission of service to the community. The school works collaboratively with other local schools to develop the quality of teaching and learning. This impacts on ongoing improvements in class and high attainment for all. Although staff are developed professionally within the school and given opportunities to attend a range of courses, specific training of staff in church school leadership is more limited. The diocese has given strong support to the development of RE and to generating ideas for the new spiritual garden. The school meets the statutory requirements for worship and RE in a voluntary controlled school.

SIAMS report 26 June 2018 Sissinghurst Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, Kent TN17 2BH