

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John's Church of England (VA) Primary School

Address	Main Road, Lacey Green, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire, HP27 0PL		
Date of inspection	1 May 2019	Status of school	Academy inspected as VA. Oxford Diocese and Bucks Schools Trust
Diocese	Oxford	URN	145422

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Good
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Good

School context

St John's CE (VA) is a primary school with 238 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages. The headteacher has been in post since the beginning of this term. The previous headteacher died unexpectedly in June 2018 and the school was led by the deputy headteacher. Since the last inspection the school has joined the Oxford Diocesan Bucks School Trust (ODBST).

The school's Christian vision

'Nurturing Potential within a Christian Ethos'

We work to enable all pupils to achieve their full potential within our Christian family. We nurture individuality; providing challenge, developing self-esteem and promoting care and respect for each other and God's world.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)

Key findings

- St John's is effective as a church school within its community. Pupils and adults are nurtured, supported and cared for because of the commitment of all stakeholders to the school's Christian vision and values.
- Pupils and adults are enabled to reach their full potential at St John's and beyond. This is due to the commitment of leaders in the school to a vision rooted in biblical teaching and the life of Christ.
- All are welcomed, valued and cherished at St John's. The school is highly inclusive and has found creative ways to support pupils and families, including those with a military background.
- Collective worship is valued by all although these times are not consistently focused on the school's vision and values.
- Pupils achieve well in RE by the time that they leave St John's because senior leaders have ensured a curriculum that is engaging and creative.

Areas for development

- Broaden the children's experience of diversity through visits and partnerships so that children are inspired to take action in the service of others and to become courageous advocate for change.
- Ensure that medium term planning for collective worship is sharply focused on the school's Christian vision and values. Make it clear to all how previous experiences can be built upon so that the impact of the values on the life of the school can be monitored and evaluated.
- Develop a whole school understanding of spiritual development so that pupils are enabled to articulate their own deepening spiritual journey.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

St John's is a school that lives its Christian foundation through a daily application of its vision and values. St John's broad and balanced curriculum, both in the classroom and outside, ensures that pupils are developing a 'have a go' mentality. Pupils interpret the verse from Philippians, seen throughout the school, as 'showing anyone can do anything'. They feel safe when disagreeing and are willing to explore each other's points of view with respect and honesty. This is because the rich and varied curriculum enables them to express their thoughts and ideas, showing a great understanding of difficult concepts. Pupils achieve well at St John's and most make good progress as they move through the school. Where standards are not as high, as in writing, staff are committed to working together to achieve more. This is because staff are clear that the Christian vision of the school really does 'nurture potential'.

The six core Christian values of the school are held in high regard by all. 'They inspire us to become a better person in life and to learn from one another,' explained a child in Year 3. Visible in all areas of the school, together with the biblical verse central to the school's vision, they shape its life. Collective worship focuses each half term on one of these values. The absence of formal planning of worship means that there is little cohesion and experiences are not built upon in a structured manner. At present there isn't a common understanding of the difficult concept of spirituality. This means that times when spirituality might be developed tends to be 'of the moment' rather than planned for. Consequently, planning does not foster a progressive understanding of how spirituality can be built on as the children mature.

All pupils flourish because staff provide challenge and support in numerous ways, always underpinned by a shared understanding of this vision. One outworking of this is seen in the learning mentor who works with vulnerable pupils. She is valued for her work with both pupils and families from military families, ensuring that they settle into the community quickly and successfully. Her introduction of the 'Read2Dogs' scheme is having a real impact on the reading skills of some vulnerable pupils. Pupils know that she is accessible to all and describe how they know that she will help them. 'She has your back' explained a child in Year 6 'and takes the pressure off your shoulders if you are having friendship issues'.

When reaching difficult decisions, such as joining the trust and recruiting a headteacher, governors are adamant that the school's vision should be central to the process. The ODBST is seen by all to have been highly supportive during the recent bereavement. It has not at present engaged with governors so that they are confident in ensuring that the school is effective as a Church school. Governor monitoring of collective worship and RE is frequent but is not yet sharply focused enough to inform school improvement. Partnerships with the diocese are strong and the school has engaged well with training for staff. Governors have worked hard on the areas for development from the last inspection and these have been largely addressed and next steps identified. Policies do not always reflect the unique role of the school's vision and values. St John's has adopted many of the trust's policies. It has yet to personalise them to reflect the important role the vision and values have in practice. Staff speak warmly of the support that governors give them personally and as a team. This is because governors are committed to ensuring that the vision encompasses all at St John's. Staff undertake regular training that enables them to reach their potential too.

Religious education is taught using both the locally agreed syllabus and the materials from *Understanding Christianity*. This results in lessons that increasingly enable pupils to talk about difficult concepts with clarity and a deepening understanding. They feel safe to disagree with each other and with teachers because they understand how important it is to treat each other with dignity and respect. Pupils have a good understanding of several religions and RE reflects the school's vision. This is because their learning about the Bible helps them to relate the teachings of Jesus to their own lives.

The school has worked hard to expand pupils' horizons through a wide variety of visitors to the school. A visit from the local Imam, shortly after the shootings in New Zealand, gave a powerful message about how different communities come together at difficult times. Nevertheless, pupils are still too sheltered in their outlook. Many pupils do not understand Christianity as a world faith or Britain as a place of many faiths. They see diversity as people with learning difficulties or behaviour problems.

Collective worship reflects the close partnership that the school has with the local church. Clergy are frequent visitors and enable pupils to experience Anglican traditions, such as lighting a candle. This is currently missing in some worship times, which are more focused on achievement or learning about British values. The collective worship team are tenacious advocates. They sought the views of the whole school and put in place significant changes. Year 6 now write and lead prayers, focused on the current value. Pupils have homework, centred on the values, every holiday. This has resulted in a display that shows a wealth of ways that the values are lived out in their daily lives. Worship is inclusive, those of all faiths and with none attend, as do all staff. It reflects the Christian faith through the use of Bible stories, such as David and Goliath and the feeding of the 5000. Older children have an age appropriate understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, although this is not so for younger children.

Prayer is important to everyone at St John's. It is inclusive and takes a variety of forms. Prayers written in response to 'What is Spirit' by Year 5 and 6 show a great depth of understanding. The school prayer, written by Year 6, is used throughout the school at the end of the day and focuses on how tomorrow is a fresh start. So powerful is this model that it has been adopted by St John's partner school in South Africa. Prayer is seen as a natural way in which to reflect on significant issues, locally, nationally and internationally. The prayers written following the death of the headteacher are moving tributes to a much loved person. Pupils really appreciate how open teachers are in discussing difficult issues. They say that it makes them feel safe in an unpredictable world. St John's is a school that has lived its vision and values through adversity and has emerged as a strong and vibrant community ready for the challenges ahead.



The effectiveness of RE is Good

By the time pupils leave St John's all have achieved well in RE and have made good progress. However, this is not reflected consistently throughout the school. This is recognised by the RE lead because of regular monitoring by her and governors. Staff training is already having an impact, ensuring that recorded work is focused on pupils' learning so that progress is more assured. Assessment systems have become more rigorous and more accurately reflect the standards achieved by pupils. Pupils enjoy their RE lessons because the curriculum is engaging and encourages debate. Regular RE theme days have enabled pupils to explore key festivals in more depth and show good progression of learning across the school. The 'Hunger Cloths', produced by older pupils during a day focused on Easter, clearly demonstrate their understanding of how Christianity impacts on the lives of people today and across the world.

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