

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	
Jubilee Road, Shildon DL4 2EQ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Durham
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Durham
Date of inspection	28 th June 2018
Date of last inspection	July 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided Primary 114285
Headteacher	Andrew Farnell
Inspector's name and number	Valerie Hall 859

School context

St John's is a single form entry school which is popular in the local community and oversubscribed. There are significantly more pupils who have special educational needs or those who are eligible for pupil premium funding than national averages. Attendance is in line with national averages and exclusions are low. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin. There is a nursery attached to the school. The school has strong links to the local church and has been a pioneer for the re-developed religious education [RE] syllabus. The school has recently been awarded their Gold RE Quality Mark standard.

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

- The headteacher and senior leaders model Christian leadership, offering daily support where families experience crises.
- Leaders create a place that is a Christian community underpinned by values and a clear Christian ethos, which parents describe as 'a family as well as a school'.
- Additional funding is well used to provide a support mechanism that allows learners to address any issues so that they can settle quickly to learning and become very successful in this church school.
- Links to the local church are highly effective and relationships with the whole community are strong. Preparation for access to Holy Communion, after school clubs and pastoral support for families and staff ensure everyone has access to the love of Christ that abounds here.
- The high quality school premises are a reflection of the deeply embedded values of endurance, respect and compassion. They provide areas of quiet reflection and great beauty which creates an atmosphere of welcome and peace. No space is wasted, including outdoors which includes numerous areas of Christian reflection and calm.

Areas to improve

- Offer personal space for pupils and adults to pray and reflect together to support staff as they help families who may face challenging circumstances.
- Leaders and governors to give consideration to ensure the relationships and sex education policy is reviewed in preparation for implementation in 2019.

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

The school demonstrates overwhelming love for and between every member of the school community. This is rooted in the love Christ has for everyone and is underpinned by the school vision statement, 'Achieving our potential as God's Children'. This drives already high ambition and standards, due to the school's commitment to broadening horizons. A wide range of visits and visitors includes an annual visit to 'Curiosity- A children's Conference' which is aimed at encouraging children to ask 'Big Questions'. The school also provides a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils and is adjusted to the very specific needs of some. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural [SMSC] education is a strength of the school. All children have access to music tuition and singing, as well as baking, gardening and involvement with the 'Burning Bright project'. This includes the publication of pupils' writing and a lantern making project. All these initiatives are aimed at making pupils more confident and articulate and achieving the schools Christian aims for them. As a result of the values, such as respect and koinonia (Greek for fellowship) as well as the Christian mission, pupils' lives are enhanced and they flourish as learners. Relationships are strong within the whole community. For example, pupils are polite and welcoming at all times and pupil behaviour is exemplary. Parents describe how they can ask for support and it is freely given. Staff speak of how they are a support mechanism for each other. Staff mobility is very low and this is attributed to the strong Christian love which abounds here. As the community within which the school is situated is largely White British, staff work very hard to ensure pupils understand and respect diversity. Pupils understand that Christianity is a global religion and have links with a school in Kuwait and are sponsoring the education of a pupil in Manilla. The school uses a number of charity events to promote Christianity as a worldwide religion such as Christian Aid week and Sport Relief. This uses children's experiences to enhance their understanding in a relevant and highly effective manner. This takes place through a balanced curriculum which encourages pupils to voice their opinion, but also through RE and carefully planned worship. RE makes an outstanding contribution to the lives of pupils and families as it helps promote the Christian values and ethos of the school as pupils regularly discuss themes at home. One child described how her views differed from her family but it was accepted by them all. Evidence from RE books and scrap books indicate that human relationships are a constant theme in RE. The impact on pupils' conduct and attitude to one another is constantly evident throughout the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is at the heart of this community and all its members, including adults and parents, enjoy joyful singing and quiet reflection, as well as public and personal prayer. A highly committed clergy team ensure a well planned programme of worship allows a Christian framework to give voice to celebration and in times of trouble. Learners confidently contribute to worship with thoughtful prayer and suggestions. Themes in worship reflect the Anglican church year but also cover topics from pupils' experiences and suggestions. A recent theme of The Lord's Prayer ensured that all pupils had an opportunity to understand its importance to Christians but also to explore some language that pupils had not previously encountered. The prayer is now part of regular worship and children use the prayer with impressive understanding. Every pupil is given the opportunity to contribute to the planning of worship and pupil voice informs future plans. Leaders at all levels evaluate worship systematically and governors are able to suggest improvements as a result. They recognise that staff do not yet have occasions to worship apart from families and children, so they can be supported spiritually to enable to them to fulfil demanding roles. Leaders and governors have a deep understanding of their community and as a result of evaluation, whole school collective worship embraces challenges such as family and gender diversity as well as tackling prejudiced behaviour. There is an annual worship theme called 'Love has no labels'. This addresses many aspects of diversity and allows pupils to voice opinions but also to understand the school stated values of respect and tolerance at a very deep level. Highly effective displays reflect different approaches to worship, with reflection areas in school and outside allowing for many different styles. Pupils make suggestions about the contents of their reflection corners in classrooms and make good use of outdoor reflection areas. These are maintained by pupils as part of their curriculum so worship becomes central to the life of the school. Pupils can speak meaningfully about the life of Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit and what he means to them. They see him as an example to them and they feel that Christ is someone they could try to be like. One pupil cited the story of Lazarus, saying Jesus helped everyone, so they should as well. It is evident in pupils' behaviour that they take this to heart and see Christian support within the school community as vitally important.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE teaching and learning are outstanding, due to exemplary teaching and imaginative planning of lessons. Standards are at least in line with, if not better than standards in English. Work in books is of a very high standard and marked in line with other subjects which demonstrates the high profile the subject occupies. Lessons in Key Stage I give pupils the opportunity to demonstrate impressive biblical knowledge as they can list numerous Bible stories. These

include the Good Samaritan and how Jesus turned water into wine. Pupils use knowledge to identify true Bible stories and then describe the purpose of a gospel. Pupils explain the relevance of the stories to their lives and say that the Good Samaritan story tells them that they can be kind to anyone. Their in-depth understanding of some biblical ideas shows impressive maturity and capacity to reason. Pupils hold opinions about matters of faith that they are proud of, such as personal belief. One child spoke about how her belief differed from that of her family but she showed great pride in her belief. The school is developing its use of the 'Understanding Christianity' resource to great effect. Governors have monitored the subject through reports from leaders and through independent scrutiny of lessons and are keen to promote the children's understanding of 'Big Questions' and the application of the subject to everyday life. They comment positively about how pupils' skills are enhanced by the outstanding work of the teaching staff in this subject. The subject leader is knowledgeable and as deputy headteacher has sufficient experience and seniority to ensure that the subject is given a high priority. He uses his skills and talent to coach and mentor less experienced staff so that standards remain high at all times. Continuous professional development in the subject is ongoing and is linked to national and diocesan priorities. The school has recently achieved the gold RE Quality Mark award. The school is part of an RE network and frequently shares good practice in marking and work scrutiny with other church schools. Pupils understand about other faiths through a series of visits and visitors. For example, they visit the Jewish synagogue and develop links with a Muslim chaplain at Durham University. Since the school is in a community that is mostly White British, it appreciates the importance of promoting tolerance of other faiths and communities. It does so with impressive consistency. The values of the school are taught through both RE and worship. They are intrinsic in the life of school through display and as part of everyday life through reminders by adults and promoted in all subjects. They are displayed on the website and parents speak of the impact of values, in particular tolerance and respect have on them and their families.

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

Leaders at all levels know the school and its community very well and waste no time in responding to need and celebrating success. This is driven by the Christian value of endurance which leaders seek to promote at all times. They wait at the school gates every morning to support families who they know may be in crisis and greet them with love and compassion. They can see through evaluation feedback from families that there is clear emphasis on the wellbeing of the whole community enables pupils to feel settled in school and achieve well as a result. The sense of peace and deep spirituality that is evident in the calm atmosphere and careful use of school grounds ensures this is the case. Leaders express a clear Christian vision for this school where RE and worship meet statutory requirements. Leaders say that their vision is underpinned by the Bible quote: 'For I know the plans I have for you' declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future' (Jeremiah 29:11) Leaders work tirelessly to understand God's plan for each child. This is also extended to adults in school as succession planning is very strong and a whole school priority. Two deputy headteachers have worked at the school for many years and support others to have aspirations. The previous deputy head is now a leader in another successful church school. Links between parish and school are very strong and their outstanding examples of work that have great impact on the Christian community. Increasing amounts of parents attend Eucharist in school. Several pupils each year are prepared for admission to Holy Communion before confirmation. This is greatly appreciated by families who see the links between church and school as highly beneficial. The clergy group also run after school clubs and staff attend parochial church council meetings in order to feedback about the work of the school and maintain strong links. There is a whole school refusal to accept mediocrity and fight for the best for each child. Staff and governors speak convincingly about how they were supported by leaders in challenging times and to strive for the best for each child. Governors evaluate the work of the school thoroughly and with great effect. They have a regular governor week, where they are invited in to school to evaluate an aspect of the school's work. This is in addition to receiving reports from a range of leaders, so they have an opportunity to offer support and challenge with great impact. This has led to numerous improvements, including improving safeguarding arrangements so that the school's abundant hospitality is not compromised. However, the school rightly identifies the need to develop its relationships and sex education curriculum to ensure they meet recommendations. Governors keep a relentless focus on the whole child, promoting the drive for music provision but also enabling the highly successful 'Time for Children' programme to continue. This is a previous joint project that is now fully funded by school and is highly prized by families, pupils and leaders at all levels. A highly trained and much valued teaching assistant is available at all times to speak to children and to support in a wide variety of circumstances. She promotes outstanding links between the school and the wider community resulting in mutual respect and trust. She is loved by the whole community who speak in glowing terms about the support she has offered from bereavement work, to medical support and a shoulder to cry on. The leader of this project speaks of how she relies on her personal faith but how this is strengthened by the Christian love she receives from leaders. Parents cannot speak highly enough about the school from which they derive so much. They describe it as a Christian family. One parent concluded by saying, 'There isn't another school I would choose to send my child to'.

