

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Oswald's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	
St Oswald's Road, Hebburn, NE31 1HT	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Durham
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	South Tyneside
Date of inspection	12 October 2017
Date of last inspection	15 October 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided Primary 108711
Headteacher	Helen Smith
Inspector's name and number	The Revd Canon Steven Harvey 891

School context

St Oswald's CE VA Primary School is an average-sized primary school of 210 pupils. The majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs, are both above the national average. Pupils' attainment on entry is below national expectations, and the majority of pupils enter the school with knowledge and skills that are below those typical for their age. Since the last inspection there have been significant changes to the school's staffing, particularly within the senior leadership team.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Oswald's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school's distinctive Christian vision and values are deeply embedded in the daily life of the school and shape its approach to all aspects of its life and work.
- Collective worship has a central place in the life of the school community.
- Subject leadership of religious education (RE) is outstanding.
- The school's senior leadership team and governing body articulate and promote a compelling vision for the school which is rooted in Christian beliefs and teachings.

Areas to improve

- Extend the opportunities for pupils to be involved in the planning and leading of collective worship, so that more pupils have the experience of contributing to this central part of the school's life.
- Develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of different Christian traditions in their local region, so that they have a greater appreciation of the variety of styles of worship to be found in Christian churches in this country.
- Develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith, in order to enrich their knowledge of, and respect for, the diverse cultural expressions of Christianity as a global faith.

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

The school's Christian vision and values are explicit and deeply embedded in its daily life. The recently adopted ethos and values statement is displayed prominently throughout the school, and pupils are proud to draw attention to this as 'reminding us of our values'. Pupils are articulate in talking about *Aspire* ('we aspire to be the best we can be'), *Believe* ('that I can achieve'), and *Connect* ('even with those who are not my friends'), and about 'God's plan for us' (from a biblical text which is key to the school's understanding of its purpose and work).

The school's Christian character has a very high profile and shapes its approach to all aspects of its life and work. Pupils recognise the impact of the school's Christian character on their lives and achievements. They speak of being cared for, of 'being helped to become better people', of being affirmed and encouraged, and of feeling safe. They are aware of the high expectations which the school has of them and they respond very positively. Progress scores from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, and the proportion of pupils meeting the nationally expected standards at Key Stage 2, are both significantly above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils, and those with special educational needs, also make strong progress across the school. Attendance is above the national average. Pupil exclusion is extremely low, reflecting the care and support which the school gives to pupils who make mistakes. Pupils recognise that this care and support are rooted in the school's Christian character and values.

The school is a warm, friendly, caring, and welcoming community with a strong 'family feel'. Parents and staff are committed to the school's Christian character and recognise its positive impact on the life of the whole community. Pupils' excellent behaviour, and the caring relationships they have with each other, are widely attributed to the school's Christian character. Staff feel valued and nurtured, helped to grow spiritually themselves, and encouraged to be aspirational in their work and professional development.

The school's inclusive understanding of spirituality is widely understood and appreciated. The school is committed to seeing everyone as being on a spiritual journey, 'even those who don't believe in God'. Pupils respond well to the many opportunities to explore spirituality, and not least through their engagement with prayer stations, the 'Prayer Station HQ', and the beautiful nature garden.

Pupils have a well-developed understanding of British values. They speak articulately about diversity and the importance of respecting difference. 'Not everyone here is a Christian', said one pupil, 'but there is respect for all'.

Pupils are excited and challenged by RE and recognise the significant contribution it makes to the school's Christian character and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, pupils speak of how their work in RE helps them to understand and engage with worship more fully and, as a result, to grow spiritually.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is central to the life of the school community. Its place at the beginning of every day reflects the determination of leaders that God should 'come first here'. The importance of collective worship is widely appreciated and clearly articulated. It has a deep impact on the community, enriching the lives of pupils and families both in and beyond school. Pupils speak very positively about collective worship and the opportunities it gives them to reflect, to pray, to worship and to learn about the Christian faith. In a group discussion, pupils spoke of collective worship as helping them to come to belief, to grow in faith, and to think about 'big questions such as how the world was made'. Parents recognise and value the importance of collective worship in the personal development and wellbeing of their children. They speak of collective worship influencing pupils' lives beyond school; 'they share their experience of collective worship at home' was a typical parental observation. The invitation to families to attend collective worship on Fridays has met with a very good response; for many, the school has become a place of worship.

Collective worship is distinctively Christian, inclusive and inspirational. It is also aspirational, and this has a particularly important and valuable impact on the lives of pupils, given the social context from which they come. Biblical material and Christian teaching, particularly about the person of Jesus, are at the heart of each week's theme. Staff explore the theme more fully in class worship, and the resources which are created and used promote a high level of engagement and of spiritual and moral reflection. Pupils are helped to explore spirituality and are challenged to develop the aspirations they have for both their own lives and the lives of others.

Prayer has a central place in collective worship. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of prayer and speak with confidence of the use they make of prayer in their daily lives. One pupil said that 'prayer has changed my life'. Prayer stations, in the main hall and in each classroom, are resourced with a Bible, a cross, and a candle, and with engaging material related to the week's theme. These stations are well used by pupils and support their spiritual development.

Collective worship reflects the Anglican tradition most clearly. Services are held in the parish church on such major occasions as Christmas and Easter. A range of people, including local Anglican clergy, contribute to collective worship. Visitors from other denominations are less well represented and this restricts pupils' knowledge and understanding of other Christian traditions.

Collective worship is strongly related to the school's ethos and values statement. Pupils are articulate in making connections between collective worship and the school's core Christian values. Several pupils spoke of 'Aspire, Believe, Connect' as speaking to them of Christian teaching about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; 'it all links together like the

Holy Trinity' said one pupil. Pupils speak with enthusiasm and conviction of the positive impact which collective worship has on their behaviour, their relationships, and their concern for others. The regular fund-raising for a range of charities, including those with an international focus, is related to the school's values and its emphasis on connecting with others, and enhances pupils' knowledge of local, national and global communities.

Pupils, especially those who serve on the Christian Council, have opportunities to plan and lead collective worship; there are fewer opportunities for other pupils. Monitoring and evaluation of collective worship are very well-developed. Feedback from a range of stakeholders is used effectively in enhancing even further the pupils' experience. For example, a senior leader has recently made the levels of pupil engagement in collective worship a focus of his national professional qualification for senior leadership. Among the changes introduced in response to pupils' evaluations has been the introduction of 'Praise through Music'. In subsequent evaluations, pupils have spoken of their increased engagement.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE has a very high profile. The giving of the whole of Monday mornings to RE expresses the importance which the school attaches to the subject. While the majority of time is given to Christianity, ensuring that pupils develop a very good knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith, other world faiths are also studied and pupils are enabled to explore links between different beliefs and practices.

The range of learning activities provides for the needs of all learners, and pupils learn exceptionally well. Standards of attainment are high, with a significant proportion of pupils attaining higher than national expectations. Achievement is at least as good as, or better than, that in other subjects in all classes. Pupils speak very positively about RE and the contribution it makes to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They value their learning about other faiths – learning which 'helps us to understand and be respectful of difference'. The subject is making a very valuable contribution to pupils' ability to live harmoniously in a multi-faith society, although their understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith is underdeveloped. Secure foundations are laid in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where outstanding teaching was observed. Following the recent introduction of the 'Understanding Christianity Project', the beginning of each lesson is given to a discussion of the appropriate 'Big Question'. This makes a significant contribution to pupils' development of higher order skills as they progress through the school.

Pupils are challenged and helped to think deeply about current issues and they develop an impressive ability to reflect on questions of meaning and purpose. For example, recent natural disasters were considered in relation to Christian belief about a loving God. This was related to the theme of 'growth', from the school's ethos and values statement, in exploring how it might be possible to grow through the experience of such events. Pupils recognise and value RE's close and supportive links with the school's core values, and how it helps their ability to engage with collective worship.

The outstanding subject leadership makes a major contribution to the high status of RE. Monitoring and evaluation are rigorous and result in action plans which impact strongly on standards of teaching and learning. Regular lesson observations, work scrutiny and learning walks show that RE teaching is frequently outstanding and never less than consistently good. A focus for development from the last inspection, to develop assessment in RE, has been fully met.

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

The school's senior leadership team and governing body are deeply committed to St Oswald's as a church school. They are confident in articulating and promoting, from personal conviction, a compelling vision which is rooted in Christian beliefs and teachings. The inspirational leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by her senior colleagues and governors, is having a profound impact on the Christian character of the school. Leaders understand and articulate the impact of their vision on the wellbeing and flourishing of the whole school community, and particularly on pupils' aspirations, on their personal development, behaviour, attitudes and relationships, and on their standards of attainment.

Robust arrangements for monitoring and evaluation are in place, led by leaders and governors. These enable leaders to have a thorough understanding of the school's performance, and result in well-focused strategic planning for improvement. Well-informed and skilled governors are effective in offering both challenge and support to senior leaders.

The continuing professional development of staff has a high priority and has a significant impact on the life and work of the school. There is a strong commitment to preparing staff for future leadership of church schools. Governors respond well to training opportunities to support them in their governance of the school as a church school.

There are well-established and mutually beneficial partnerships with the local Anglican church and with the diocese. Work with other local Church of England schools enables sharing of good practice. Links with various groups in the local community enrich pupils' knowledge, understanding and experience. Parents and carers speak very positively about the school being welcoming and helpful; 'nothing is too much trouble'. Home-learning projects were identified as a particularly helpful way of enabling parents and carers to feel that they are involved with, and making a contribution to, their children's education. Leaders have ensured that the areas for development identified in the last inspection, in 2012, have been addressed effectively. They also ensure that arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.