

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Thurnham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School

The Landway, Bearsted, Maidstone, Kent. ME14 4BL

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Canterbury
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Kent
Date of inspection	13 March 2018
Date of last inspection	1 March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Infant 118629
Headteacher	Christopher James
Inspector's name and number	Melanie Williams 911

School context

Thurnham is a large, popular infant school of 273 pupils arranged in nine classes. It serves the village of Bearsted on the outskirts of Maidstone. There are well-established links with the parish church of Holy Cross. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those with English as an additional language or special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below the national average. The headteacher has been in post for seven years. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in 2009 and judged to be outstanding.

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

- Leaders clearly articulate and promote the Christian values of the school throughout their work. This has created a happy, aspirational environment for all.
- Through its distinctive Christian character, the school goes to impressive lengths to nurture and support all pupils, helping them to achieve their best.
- A new leadership structure has ensured that the Christian distinctiveness of the school is strongly apparent throughout the curriculum and has led to significant improvement in religious education (RE) and collective worship.
- Pupils have a strong grasp of the biblical narrative that underpins the school's Christian values and how these are demonstrated in everyday life.

Areas to improve

- Develop the curriculum to improve pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith.
- Ensure that all groups contribute to school life so that pupils benefit from engagement with national and global communities in preparation for life in the modern world.
- Develop pupils' understanding of the school's Christian values in ways that result in all pupils confidently expressing how they apply in and out of school.

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

The school's Christian values of love, trust, friendship, sharing, respect and kindness are well known and understood by the whole community. They are appropriate to the age of the children who can readily relate them to Bible stories and apply them to all areas of life. These values drive the school's ambition to develop well-rounded pupils who feel loved and appreciated and are well-prepared academically and spiritually for the next stage of their lives. The school has an excellent record in supporting its pupils to achieve high standards. These are well above the national average. This caring approach embraces its most vulnerable families. Staff go to considerable lengths to support the attendance of vulnerable children. Every effort is made to adapt provision to support pupils with particular needs. The nurturing environment and values significantly contribute to pupils' social and emotional development. This, in turn, supports their excellent progress and academic achievement. There have been no exclusions for many years. School policies clearly set out how pupils' spirituality is nurtured throughout the curriculum, particularly in RE and collective worship. Parents and teachers report that pupils think deeply about the ideas presented to them and that very young pupils ask penetrating questions reflecting on their RE learning at home. Many pupils speak freely about spiritual matters, identify themes in stories and make links with everyday events. There are regular opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures. For example, there is an annual global citizenship week where pupils can find out about and 'visit' nine different countries. Parents from different cultural and religious backgrounds are sometimes invited to share their experiences with the pupils. However, this is not fully developed. Pupils readily identify ways in which the school's values have shown them how to treat people. For example, one pupil said, 'I show respect by listening carefully'. Another said, 'I showed friendship when I hung up my friend's coat'. Some, however, are less confident in identifying how values impact on daily life. Pupils are taught to be polite and respectful through awards that encourage good manners. There are very few incidents of poor behaviour and these tend to be typical of very young children learning right from wrong. Pupils have a growing understanding of diversity and difference, both within the community and by learning about other religions in RE. As yet, pupils have very little understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith but recent school sponsorship of a child in Uganda has provided one opportunity to address this. RE lessons provide an excellent range of experiences that engage pupils and stimulate their thinking about spiritual ideas. Every classroom has examples of how the school's values are explored throughout the curriculum. There is an imaginative, newly built structure for quiet reflection in the grounds which is being developed with support from local clergy and the Woodland Trust.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The school has organised collective worship so that all members of staff can attend. It is given priority at the start of the day so that the whole school community can benefit from shared ideas and messages. The youngest children begin with class worship and are gradually integrated into whole school worship. The scheme of work for worship is based on Diocesan plans but has been adapted to suit the young age of the pupils and to embed understanding of the school values. Worship is well-organised and includes a wide variety of approaches. Pupils of all faiths and of none attend. Pupils are keen to participate and readily volunteer to take part in activities. They sing with enthusiasm. These songs help them to remember spiritual ideas. For example, singing 'God the Father, three in one' helps them to learn about the Trinity. Biblical material is frequently included in worship. This takes the form of particular stories linked to the school values or passages that teach them about important ideas. Pupils can talk in detail about the stories that they have heard. Worship includes elements of Anglican tradition such as simple liturgy, lighting candles and seasonal colours. Christian festivals such as harvest, Christmas and Easter are celebrated every year. Pupils contribute prayers that they have written themselves and they can recite the Lord's prayer. Pupils increasingly reflect on the messages they hear and can describe ways that they apply them. They are increasingly aware of the need to support those less fortunate than themselves, for example through charitable fund raising to support the homeless. Many pupils take advantage of the opportunity to write prayers in the school reflection area. The children choose whether these can be read in school worship. Pupils are knowledgeable about events in the life of Jesus Christ. They have a developing understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One child likened the Trinity to the climbing frame – made up of ropes, ladders and hoops, but all one big thing. Pupils actively lead some aspects of worship such as supervised lighting of the candle, demonstrating song actions and saying prayers. They introduce worship with sentences such as, 'This is the day that the Lord has made'. Pupils have opportunities to write the script for special services. Worship is regularly led by members of the clergy, staff and visitors such as the Family Trust. The whole school goes to the parish church for a service once a year, the distance prohibiting more frequent visits. Parental and pupil questionnaires and monitoring of worship provide insight into the kind of experiences that engage pupils. This has helped in planning relevant opportunities and ensured that the school's values are now deeply embedded in school life.

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

School leaders actively promote the school's values and consistently and naturally draw them to pupils' attention. In response to a previous denominational inspection recommendation, the school has identified how the values are linked to biblical teaching. These are shared with parents when they visit the school and on the school website. Leaders speak with passion about securing a nurturing environment in which children thrive. The happy atmosphere is one of friendship and trust, whilst reaching for the highest standards. All leaders have a detailed understanding of school performance and are quick to identify and address any dip in performance. For example, the school is working to improve the number of pupils reaching high standards in writing. Consequently, it has changed its handwriting policy and identified the need to build up core physical strength in some pupils to improve handwriting. The school has appointed a strong leader for Christian distinctiveness who has assessed provision and successfully provided direction and support to secure improvement. This has included RE and collective worship. Both areas have been developed separately, whilst maintaining a coherent emphasis on the school's Christian values. It has also provided an excellent way to develop staff in leading a church school. A steering group of foundation governors, school leaders and local clergy bring wisdom and challenge. They ensure that the distinctive Christian nature of the school is given a very high priority. The school meets statutory requirements for RE and collective worship. Governors have a thorough understanding of the school through an established cycle of monitoring. They have noted a marked increase in the links which pupils make between school values and a wide range of subjects. There are strong links with the local church. For example, the church runs a popular after school club to explore Bible stories. Messy Church, an informal, activity-based form of worship is also run on school premises. There is excellent take-up of Diocesan training opportunities for leaders and governors. Information from courses is routinely shared with staff and governors so that all are kept up to date. One member of staff has completed a course in preparation for leading a church school. The headteacher chairs a collaboration of ten local schools who share training and moderation and offer mutual support. Parents provide support as volunteers in the classroom and by raising funds to enrich provision for all pupils. The school now has an enquiry-based approach to the teaching of RE. This has refreshed the style of teaching and learning, providing additional challenge and interest for all learners.

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