

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Blakesley Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

The Green, Blakesley, Towcester NN12 8RD

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Peterborough

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Local authority

Northamptonshire

Name of multi-academy trust / federation

N/A

Date of inspection

4 May 2017

Date of last inspection

June 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Controlled 121959

Headteacher

Lucy Burman

Inspector's name and number

Janet Northing 792

School context

The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school with 91 pupils currently on roll. The majority of pupils are White British, with a lower-than-average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. No pupils have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with a special educational need and/ or disability is broadly in line with the national average. The number of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is in line with other schools nationally. The headteacher joined the school in January 2013. There has been an interregnum in place at St. Mary's Church since September 2016.

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

- Leaders at all levels promote a deeply Christian ethos that lies at the heart of the school benefitting both the school and local community.
- The 'Fruits of the Spirit' (Galatians 5:22-23) inform all aspects of school life fostering an aspirational outlook founded on biblical principles.
- Collective worship is given a high priority and is instrumental in developing a personal and corporate spirituality displayed in the daily life of the school.
- Teaching and learning in religious education (RE) links well with the school's Christian virtues and supports spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development substantially benefitting learners.

Areas to improve

- Explore meaningful ways to develop pupils' experience of Christianity as a worldwide faith and their understanding of diversity and difference within the worldwide Christian church.

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

The school's vision statement: 'We create the spark that lights the fire' is explicitly linked to the Christian character of the school and its commitment to support all pupils in realising their potential. Christian virtues linked to the 'Fruits of the Spirit' (Galatians 5: 22-23) underpin the daily life of the school. Their impact is clearly articulated by a parent in recounting that her child had told her, 'They're everywhere, and they're even in the playground!' Key Stage 1 pupils readily express their understanding of ways in which the school's Christian virtues are exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. Linking their thoughts to the parable of the lost sheep they describe how as a good shepherd Jesus displays kindness in his care for us. The impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness on academic achievement is evident in the creation of an aspirational ethos founded on biblical principles. Using the example of the parable of the lamp under a bushel, staff and pupils are encouraged to use their God-given talents for the benefit of all. As a consequence, progress and attainment for all pupils over the last three years is outstanding. Likewise, the impact of the school's Christian virtues on personal development and wellbeing is evident in the way learners thrive as individuals. A broad and balanced creative curriculum and a range of extra-curricular activities underpinned by the school's Christian ethos, gives quality and depth to pupils' SMSC development. For example, in a whole school topic focusing on the Holy Land pupils explored the importance of pilgrimage for a range of cultural and faith traditions. Also, on a Year 3/4 residential pupils spent a morning on church based learning. The Christian virtues are also foundational to expectations about behaviour and relationships across the school. A Year 5 pupil exemplified this in saying that, 'When I feel angry they help me to calm down. I try to show all of them because they make me a better person'. Pupils are happy at school and understand the appropriate action to take should others not display the school's Christian virtues. As a consequence, attendance is currently in line with the national average. Parents are appreciative of the positive impact of the school's Christian virtues on their children's lives. They describe the school community as a welcoming family and value the underpinning Christian ethos lying at the very heart of the school's life. RE supports the Christian character of the school and learners' SMSC development. This is achieved through secure and explicit links between the subject and the school's Christian virtues, prayer and reflection and themes explored in collective worship. Creative RE teaching, visits to places of worship and visitors from different faith communities make learning meaningful and interesting. Pupils understand the importance of learning about world religions in order to be able to live alongside others in harmony when they are older. However, learners have only a basic awareness that Christianity is a multicultural religion, which currently limits their appreciation of diversity and difference in the Christian church worldwide.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The whole school community recognises the important contribution that collective worship makes to its spiritual life. A conscious decision to start each day with an act of collective worship attended by staff and pupils demonstrates its precedence in the life of the school. Staff value this time to reflect on the day ahead and articulate their appreciation of the way worship creates spiritual space and special memories. Learners are aware of the positive impact that worship has on their behaviour and attitudes throughout the school day. Following an act of worship focusing on the parable of the lost sheep and the virtue of gentleness, pupils were encouraged to display gentleness throughout the school day. In an RE lesson that followed, the teacher gave the pupils time to reflect on the words of the hymn sung in worship prior to starting the lesson. Worship commences with a beautiful liturgy that creates a sense of the sacred. The peace of Christ is shared. Two candles, a cross and Bible are brought into the hall by pupils. They are placed on a table at the front, the candles are lit and responsorial prayers are said. This is inspiring and engaging for all learners, gives the Bible a prominent place in worship and reflects Anglican tradition and practice. Collective worship is planned by the headteacher. Themes focus on exploring the 'Fruits of the Spirit' through a range of Bible stories, the celebration of Christian festivals and local and world events. Pupils are able to express their charitable fundraising and support for others as a practical way of demonstrating the virtues of kindness, love and goodness. A range of leaders provides learners with a rich experience of worship that further supports their engagement and enjoyment. These include teaching staff, a local Roman Catholic priest, Lighthouse Trust, and in the absence of an incumbent, the bishop's vicar for church schools. A focus for development from the last inspection requiring that pupils are regularly involved in leading acts of worship has been well addressed. Pupils have frequent experiences of leading worship both in school and at St. Mary's Church. This supports their spiritual development and understanding of the purpose of Christian worship. Monitoring and evaluation involves a range of stakeholders and continues to be effective in identifying aspects for on-going improvement. This is seen in the very effective liturgy and the creation of areas for prayer and reflection outside of worship. A thanksgiving tree stimulates pupils' spiritual awareness of the many positive aspects of their lives. Similarly, pupils write prayers for a prayer and reflection board in the hall. A Year 5 pupil wrote, 'Dear God, thank you for creating us and caring for us, thank you for our wonderful lives.' The use of these and other areas around the school contributes significantly to the spiritual development of the whole school community. Learners have an age appropriate understanding of

God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In describing the Trinitarian nature of God a pupil in Year 2 stated that, 'It is like having three jobs but still being one person'.

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

The headteacher and governors of the school consistently express a deeply Christian vision. It is like a creative and sustaining thread running through all aspects of school life holding them together. This deeply Christian vision is the inspiration behind the school's outstanding progress as a church school since the time of the last inspection. The school's Christian ethos fosters an aspirational outlook for pupils and staff alike underpinned by biblical principles. Quoting the parable of the lamp under a bushel, the headteacher encourages staff and pupils to use their God-given talents for the good of all. As a consequence, academic standards have risen over the last three years. All learners make good progress and attain standards that are in line with or slightly above the national average in all areas of the curriculum. Leaders ensure the wellbeing of the school community through regular self-evaluation involving all stakeholders focusing specifically on the impact of the Christian ethos. Through regular consultation, leaders enable all stakeholders to contribute to the effectiveness of the distinctive Christian vision. For example, in a recent parental survey all those who responded indicated that the school effectively promoted respect for others. Meetings of the full governing body commence with prayer and strategic decisions are guided by the school's Christian vision. The headteacher's report to governors includes an evaluative section on the school's progress as a church school in relation to SIAMS ensuring that governors are well informed. Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the school's distinctive Christian character regularly directs the on-going strategic development of the school as a church school. This demonstrates good progress since the last inspection. Staff are supported in their professional development and encouraged to be aspirational about their leadership potential. In this way the school is preparing for future leadership across church schools. The leadership of RE and collective worship is effectively carried out by the headteacher. During the interregnum she continues to be well supported by teaching staff and the involvement of the bishop's vicar for church schools in leading collective worship in school. Both RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. The school occupies a central position in the life of the local community and links with St Mary's Church are mutually beneficial. In addition, the foundation governor is also the churchwarden at St. Mary's which has further strengthened the meaningful links between church and school. This is demonstrated in the school's support for the monthly family service and the hosting of Messy Church in school on a regular basis. In response to a focus for development from the last inspection, the foundation governor reports on church school matters to St. Mary's Parochial Church Council and to the Benefice Coordination Group. He recognises that the school is one of two centres of worship in the village and as such is a God-given gift to St. Mary's Church.

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