

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mark's C of E Primary School

Oxenholme Road, Natland, Kendal, Cumbria. LA9 7QH

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Carlisle
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Cumbria
Date of inspection	17 March 2017
Date of last inspection	05 October 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 112325
Headteacher	Peter Barfoot
Inspector's name and number	Jo Williams, 863

School context

St Mark's C of E School is a rural primary school serving the immediate villages as well as outskirts of the neighbouring town. There are currently 169 pupils on roll. Since the last inspection the school has undergone building work to accommodate a rise in pupil numbers due to new housing developments. The school has a small percentage of pupils with special educational needs and a less than average number of disadvantaged pupils. The school is an established member of the 'Kendal Collaborative Partnership', which provides school to school support across a range of activities.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mark's C of E School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The Christian character of the school is deeply embedded and permeates all aspects of school life. This has a direct and positive impact on pupils' wellbeing and on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The distinctively Christian values are lived out within the school and ensure exceptionally strong relationships across staff and pupils.
- The excellent Christian leadership of the school ensures that school improvement is highly effective and underpinned by Christian values.
- Collective worship plays a significant part in developing pupils' spirituality.

Areas to improve

- Building on existing good practice, embed more comprehensive procedures when evaluating worship to ensure continued improvement.
- Extend prayer and reflection opportunities beyond collective worship to enhance pupils' spiritual development.
- Develop pupils' higher level enquiry skills to deepen their understanding in RE.

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

The strong Christian character of the school was described by a governor as 'equipping children to live a Christian life'. Parents recognise the significant impact of the Christian character, with one mum commenting that it gave her children a sense of self and the strength to make a difference. The explicit Christian character is lived out in full through fifteen distinctively Christian values. They have a direct and positive impact on pupil wellbeing and personal development. For instance, pupils discuss these values at home in relation to world events that are in the news. Pupils' academic achievement also benefits from the school's Christian character. One child's academic success is attributed to their trust in the staff, knowing that she would always receive support, regardless of her background. The school's Christian character is highly effective in supporting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, pupils' awards and medals are placed on the worship table acknowledging that talents are God-given gifts. A parent remarked that the school's determination in living out Christian values had attracted families to the school from non-faith backgrounds. There are deeply embedded supportive relationships across staff and pupils, which impact on pupils' wellbeing. A new reception class pupil gained in confidence because of the loving care she had received from a midday supervisor. The school's Christian family ethos was reiterated by parents who feel supported by the texts of reassurance sent by the school business manager. The school's Christian values are key to pupils developing highly respectful attitudes. Likewise, effective RE lessons have a direct impact on pupils' excellent understanding of diverse communities. Pupils have meaningful experiences which enhance their understanding of Christianity as a worldwide multicultural faith. For example, a pupil shared the Christian blessing of their family home in India with the school. Religious education (RE) supports the Christian character of the school through strong biblical links where appropriate. In a lesson about Easter, the resurrection story was referenced back to John's gospel and Jesus' promise of 'I am the resurrection and the life'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is inspirational and core to the Christian life of the school. It involves the whole school community. The vicar observes the spiritual impact of worship saying that it gives pupils 'a deep sense of connection between what they hear and how they live their lives.' Pupils are excited by worship and enjoy its inclusive and interactive approach. Worship deepens pupils' spiritual understanding through meaningful experiences and challenges. One pupil recounted God providing food for Moses and the Israelites in the desert with pupils eating pitta bread to represent 'manna'. Since the worship the pupil had been reflecting on the fact that God had given them what they needed rather than what they had wanted. Worship is led in a way that has long lasting impact on pupils' spiritual development. An older child said that 'worship teaches us in a way that we'll remember it when we are older.' Likewise, worship is crucial in reinforcing the school's Christian values. As one pupil explained, 'Jesus being compassionate, serving people even though He was a king, helps us understand how to be like that.' A variety of prayer forms are used in worship including responsive and spontaneous prayers as well as traditional church prayers. This contributes to pupils' spiritual development and was described by a pupil, as a time to be 'honest with God, leaving something with Him'. Similarly, reflection time is built into worship enabling pupils to have personal quiet time to ponder key messages. At present pupils do not have consistent access to reflection time and prayer outside of collective worship. A variety of activities support pupils' understanding of Anglican traditions. These include visits to the local church, celebrating Christian festivals and the worship tablecloth reflecting the colours of the church year. Worship also promotes pupils' initial Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Planning of worship led by adults is thorough. Routines and expectations are clear from the worship leader to ensure the consistency of core Christian elements. One pupil described planning for their class worship as adding their 'own eccentric spin ... jerking ideas together to make one big script.' A recent Ash Wednesday worship was fully planned and led by pupils. Staff and pupils provide informal feedback which results in improvements in worship. For example, following a pupil suggestion to make award giving more special, they are now presented at the weekly celebration worship. The school's Christian character is also reinforced in that awards are placed on the worship table in recognition of our gifts being God-given talents. Although feedback facilitates a review of worship, as yet it is not fully embedded in daily practice. An example of the deeply spiritual nature of worship in school was a poignant worship about the Titanic. Music played as pupils held a long freeze frame of those left on the ship. Worshippers reflected on the tragic events to follow. The impact of these reflective experiences in worship are both moving and lasting. The headteacher described these occasions as 'something beyond words, a shared human experience'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils enjoy RE and lessons learnt in the classroom have a positive impact on pupils' daily lives. A teacher recalled how children related their learning about the prodigal son to a playtime fallout and the need for forgiveness to resolve the situation. Lessons are engaging and pupils use a variety of skills to gain a good knowledge and understanding of the key themes. As yet pupils' skills are not fully developed to support the highest levels of enquiry and interpretation leading to a deeper spiritual perspective. The quality of teaching of RE is at least good with examples of outstanding practice. Approaches to teaching are imaginative with one child describing a regular resource as 'a weird box filled with strange stuff which is a great way to learn things.' Another pupil commented that she enjoyed the challenge provided by RE. She liked being made to think deeply by being presented with different viewpoints and ideas. Effective and regular assessment of standards in RE ensure that they are good and in line with other curriculum areas. One pupil said that their work was better in RE than other subjects because they knew more about the Christian faith. Whilst the RE curriculum is predominantly Christian, good provision is made for the in-depth teaching of other faiths. One pupil commented that 'a better understanding helps you respect'. Equally good use is made of the church to enable pupils to have meaningful experiences of Christianity. A younger class had re-enacted a baptism of a doll with every child having a role from godparent to vicar. There is strong leadership of RE. This is demonstrated through the support a teacher new to a church school has received from colleagues to ensure they understand fully the expectations of the subject. Likewise as the school moves to a new syllabus, rigorous monitoring of tracking data and lessons is ensuring a smooth transition.

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

The leadership is explicit in pronouncing the distinctively Christian vision. This vision is reiterated by the whole community and strongly influences the school's Christian character. It uses the biblical symbol of the gold winged lion of St Mark from the book of Revelation to challenge pupils to 'find strength in God and soar on wings like eagles'. The weekly Christian value awards also use this image to promote the vision. Any member of the school community can nominate a pupil for the award, including other pupils. This aspirational biblical vision also impacts on academic achievement. Due to the school's highly inclusive approach, very good progress is made by all groups of pupils. The vision is underpinned by Christian values such as justice and humility and the acceptance that gifts are God given. This impacts positively on pupil performance in that there is a culture of learning from mistakes and a 'steps to success' approach. RE is very well led, resourced and managed and collective worship is flourishing. As a result both have a high profile in the school and meet statutory requirements. The leadership is firmly committed to growing future leaders for church schools at all levels. A teaching assistant explained that the nurture she had received as a member of staff has enabled her to train as a teacher. Three members of staff have undertaken school Christian leadership training which provided the current deputy with the tools and confidence to move into the role. Leaders know their school well and Christian values underpin all decision making. For instance, as part of staff appraisal, a personalised statement is included evaluating teacher performance using Christian values. As a result school improvement is highly efficient in responding to areas for development and implementing effective action plans. The school has cultivated numerous excellent partnerships that are mutually beneficial. Work with the nearby special school has enabled pupils from both schools to work together on different projects. The headteacher of the special school attributed St Mark's School Christian welcome as the reason for some of his pupils returning to main stream schooling. Likewise very positive links have been made with Age UK where pupils enjoy learning from the older generation as they serve special lunches in school. In describing the Christian essence of St Mark's School the vicar commented, 'there is a deep sense of being a church school, more than just a name. The school is bold about being a church school.'

SIAMS report March 2017 St Mark's C of E School, Natland, Kendal LA9 7QH