

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ellel St John the Evangelist Church of England Primary School

Chapel Street Galgate Lancaster LA2 0JS

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Blackburn

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Lancashire

Date/s of inspection

19 April 2018

Date of last inspection

March 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided Primary 119527

Headteacher

Cathy Thomas

Inspector's name and number

Gillian Simm 881

School context

Ellel St John the Evangelist School is an average sized primary school in a small village on the outskirts of Lancaster. This year the school has increased its reception intake to two classes due to considerable housing development in the area. Although the percentage of pupils whose first language is not English is well below the national average, the school's close proximity to Lancaster University brings many pupils with diverse backgrounds. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The school is the only school in the village and so serves the whole community.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ellel St John the Evangelist Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Christian leadership is excellent with staff and governors constantly reviewing and developing the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- The school's mission statement 'Living, loving, learning in the light of Christ' is woven through every aspect of school life and results in the school community feeling that they are all valued and part of a family.
- Pupils' development of spirituality is strong because of the many experiences that have been built into collective worship, religious education (RE) and aspects of the wider curriculum that encourage pupils to reflect and discuss in this Christian community.
- Christian values, such as hope, trust and forgiveness, are understood and 'lived out' by the whole school community and have an excellent impact on behaviour and relationships within school.

Areas to improve

- Continue the work of the spirituality committee on reformulating the school's vision statement so that it is well matched to the context of the school and can guide and shape the future.
- Support staff in continuing to develop their expertise in delivering the new RE syllabus so that teaching has the potential to be consistently outstanding.

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

Leaders can clearly articulate an ambitious and inspiring vision for the school, which is based on inclusion and meeting the needs of every child within their diverse community. The distinctively Christian values of service, trust, forgiveness, honesty, compassion, hope, justice and friendship are woven throughout the curriculum and life of the school impacting positively on pupils' achievement and exemplary behaviour. The values are understood by pupils and they are inspired to put them into practice every day. For example, they are keen to serve on school groups, such as the eco committee, and to take action against injustice by becoming fairtrade ambassadors or to show compassion by supporting 'Reach Out to Refugees' day. The values are relevant to all the school community and parents say they also influence their children's behaviour at home. One child was inspired by the school's work on compassion to sort through his toy cupboard so he could find toys to donate to children who didn't have any. Pupils are well supported academically and standards are significantly above average. Pupils make good progress at every stage of their education. The school's learning mentor makes a substantial contribution to the wellbeing and achievement of vulnerable pupils. A breakfast club, run by the school, is also used to provide support for families 'in need' at the beginning of the day. The school feels 'privileged' to have such a diverse population that 'adds richness to the school' and helps the pupils to value difference and diversity. The religious education curriculum helps to develop children's understanding of other faiths, as well as the way in which Christians in other countries celebrate and worship. Pupils' understanding of Christianity as a world faith is impressive. For example, pupils research and talk knowledgeably about the similarities and differences of churches around the world. Parents of other faiths are invited into school to share their experiences with the children. In 2017 the school's 'Friends of Ellel Association' organised an event bringing together community members to share stories and food from their own cultures. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is very strong. Spirituality is developed through collective worship, RE and the wider curriculum. For example, the school has developed a forest school area within its grounds. It uses this to help pupils develop awe, wonder and respect of the world around them. Relationships, based primarily on trust and wanting the best for every child, lie at the heart of all that the school provides. These relationships are modelled by all members of staff. One child said that, 'When you do something wrong the teachers often give you a second chance and that's forgiveness.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Inspirational collective worship, led by the headteacher, is given a high priority within the school. A conscious decision has been taken by school leaders that collective worship should take place at different times of the day and in different places. This reinforces that it is an integral part of every day. The lighting of a candle signifies the beginning of worship and the children greet each other saying 'Good morning friends'. It ends with everyone saying The Grace, to which the pupils have learnt actions so that even the youngest can join in. The plan for collective worship is designed around the Christian values and the church year. Through collective worship, pupils are introduced to key beliefs and traditions of the Christian faith and worship. In response to the school's introduction of 'Understanding Christianity', the vicar now leads a regular session on the 'Big Story'. The worship takes a variety of forms and involves different media and different leaders. This ensures it is engaging and inclusive for pupils and adults, including parents. The festivals of other major religions are included in the yearly plan. Singing is a key part of the worship. Children enter and leave the place of worship whilst singing with enthusiasm. Whenever possible the children bring in musical instruments to accompany the music alongside other adults from the school community. Pupils say this is one of their favourite parts of worship and helps develop their understanding. As one child explained, 'Singing helps you to connect with the story and get the message across.' Responding to one of the areas for development at the last inspection, a wider programme of worship experiences has been introduced which allows for all children to be active contributors. A worship committee has been established to help review and evaluate the worship programme. Pupils have been so keen to be part of this worship group that a rota has had to be introduced. Following feedback from the committee that the same stories were often told every year, the members of the committee were challenged to address this. They responded by successfully leading the Easter Service and telling the Easter story from different perspectives, such as King Herod and Judas Iscariot. The school are also working closely with a master's degree student from the university. He is working with the children as part of his dissertation on the impact of collective worship on children in primary schools. His findings so far suggest that 'the faith of many of the children has been enhanced or sown by these acts of worship, regardless of their religion or denomination'. Prayer and reflection are an everyday part of school life. Pupils read prayers and write their own. There are dedicated areas for prayer and reflection in all classrooms and around the school building. Themed days form part of the curriculum to allow pupils to deepen their understanding. For example, in the summer term a spirituality day was organised to allow pupils to reflect on 'how we can see God at work in all we do'. As part of this, Year 6 pupils each wrote prayers for the Year 5 pupils showing that they know how to reflect personally and can offer prayers for the world around them. The pupils are developing an excellent

understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pupils seek to explain the mystery through practical examples in RE and are able to make perceptive links to The Grace that they say every day as part of collective worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

St John's School has recently introduced the revised Blackburn Diocese RE Syllabus which draws heavily on the 'Understanding Christianity' resource. Whilst the headteacher is the RE subject leader, all teachers teach RE and have been able to develop their expertise and understanding of theology through training with diocesan advisers. The headteacher's leadership of RE is outstanding. She carries out regular monitoring through lesson observations, work scrutinies and planning scrutinies giving regular feedback to staff in order to improve practice. She also meets with other schools to moderate standards within the subject. The headteacher is working hard to effectively meet the challenge of ensuring all teaching is consistently outstanding. RE teaching is good because it enables pupils 'to extend their own sense of values and promotes spiritual growth and development'. Lessons are delivered creatively using an enquiry based approach and pupils are encouraged to respond in a variety of ways. This ensures that all children, whatever their ability or learning style, can deepen their understanding. Consequently, RE lessons excite and challenge pupils. For example, in one lesson the pupils really enjoyed watching a presentation posing the question 'How can God be visible and invisible?' When it had finished, one child responded spontaneously with, 'That was really good. Did you create that yourself?' By the end of the lesson pupils were able to produce their own responses using drama, dance, art work, a music composition and an app. The quality of work produced by the pupils is consistently high and is recorded in individual exercise books and also in class 'floor books' where discussion and reflections are recorded. Progress is good compared to other core subjects, and on-going assessment shows that most pupils are working at, or above, the expected level for their age. The school uses members of the school, worship and wider community to enhance the curriculum by providing examples from their own lives. For example, parents have come in to RE lessons to talk about The Qur'an. RE teaching supports and develops the lessons from collective worship enabling children to develop a very deep understanding of faith and spirituality. For example, after some pupils had discussed what many places of worship have in common, another child said he knew a story from the Easter Service. He articulated how Jesus stormed the temple because it wasn't being used for the right purpose. The lessons also make an important and very positive contribution to the pupils' SMSC development. For example, the Reception class pupils reflect on what makes their own friends special after learning about 'What a friend we have in Jesus'.

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

The headteacher provides strong and dedicated Christian leadership. The school's deeply Christian ethos that 'each child is valued as a child of God, encouraged to achieve and flourish' drives leaders to strive for the best for every child both personally and academically. For example, the leadership of the school responded swiftly to disappointing Key Stage 2 results in 2016 and were able to celebrate excellent results in 2017 when standards were significantly above the national average. A learning mentor has been appointed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils and their families and the school's breakfast club is run by the school themselves so that they can use it to provide support for families at times of need. In September 2017 the school agreed to accept an additional reception class so that young pupils would not have to travel outside the village for their education. The school has addressed the development points from the last inspection, including setting up a worship committee to allow more pupil involvement in collective worship. A spirituality committee has been set up by the governing board to consider how the school's Christian distinctiveness can be developed. As a result of this, governors are in the process of revisiting the school's vision statement. Through wide-ranging and inclusive conversations the school is formulating a clearly articulated and inspiring vision statement that can guide and shape the future. Governors know the school well, through focused learning walks and regular reports from the headteacher. The RE link governor visits school regularly and carries out joint evaluations with the head. Statutory requirements for worship and RE are met and both are given a high priority in school life, leading to highly effective practice in both areas. Teachers are very well supported in developing their leadership skills. For example, the deputy head is undertaking the Church of England Professional Qualification for Headship. A special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has been appointed from within the current staff. The head has a deep passion for the partnership between school, church and community. As a result, she has developed good mutually beneficial relationships with the local worshipping community. The vicar maintains a high profile and is much respected by pupils, staff and parents. The school is seen as a place of worship by the local community. The vicar has instigated regular sessions of 'Messy Church' and the school is also used by the church for family services. Parents value the impact the school has on the wider community. For example, when the village was affected by severe flooding the school was a centre of support and relief for families. One parent commented that it was, 'the one place where everyone felt settled and safe'.