

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ickleford Primary School

The Green, Ickleford, Hitchin, SG5 3YG

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

St Albans

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Local authority

Hertfordshire

Date of inspection

17 May 2018

Date of last inspection

17 June 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary Voluntary Controlled 117401

Headteacher

Sue Dury

Inspector's name and number

Judith Ruff 528

School context

Ickleford Voluntary Controlled Primary School currently has 210 pupils on roll, so smaller than average. The majority of pupils are from a White British heritage. The number of pupils who receive special educational needs support and those for whom the school receives additional funding are both below national averages. The school is oversubscribed. Pupil mobility is low. Pupils live mainly within Ickleford, although some travel from Hitchin and the nearby villages. The religious education (RE) leader has just left to take maternity leave. St Katharine's church is a short walk from the school, with a new incumbent starting in September 2017.

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

- The embedded and explicit Christian values make a strong contribution to both pupils' academic and personal growth and greatly enhance their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the ways in which they are actively encouraged to permeate throughout the life of the school community.
- Class collective worship is both inclusive and inspirational. It challenges every child, at an age appropriate level, to ponder on the chosen value and to develop strategies for how these can become an integral part of how they behave to others, modelling the teachings of Jesus.
- High quality leadership of both RE and collective worship by senior leaders has resulted in excellent practice which is shared with staff to develop and inspire them. The raised profile of each area is recognised and celebrated for the important and essential contributions that they make to this outstanding church school.
- Pupils' behaviour and the quality of relationships which they build are exemplary. Particularly amongst the older pupils, they demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility and Christian service to others.

Areas to improve

- Increase clarity in terms of a Christian vision statement for the school, which is theologically underpinned and takes account of both the Church of England and diocesan visions for education.
- Build pupils' knowledge of the diversity found within the Christian church so that they understand that, although practices and buildings may differ amongst denominations, they are all a valued part of the Christian heritage locally, nationally and internationally.
- Increase the capacity of all governors to contribute to the strategic development of the school as a church school by ensuring that visits relating to the Christian distinctiveness and worship are formally recorded and discussed fully at governing body meetings on a regular basis.

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

In this outstanding church school, distinctive Christian values are made explicit and deeply embedded within the daily life of the school. It is clear that pupils find them hugely supportive and encouraging as they develop and mature as well-rounded individuals, shaped by the Gospel values and inspired by the Bible stories that they have heard. Pupils sitting the Year 6 statutory tests at the time of the inspection, spoke of the importance of perseverance and having compassion and care for their fellow class mates who were not finding the stress and challenge of the tests easy to deal with. The Year 6 'buddy' system, whereby they befriend a Reception child entering school for the first time, has shown them the importance of kindness, thoughtfulness and reassurance. They apply these values to their own peer group, looking for ways in which they can offer support and comfort. Parents speak of their exemplary sportsman like behaviour at competitive events, where despite being goaded by opposing teams, they have remained true to their Christian values and focused on doing their best. Attendance overall is above national average. The one or two vulnerable pupils whose attendance slipped into the 'persistent absentee' category have improved their attendance through the school putting in place determined, challenging parental conversations and support. There have been no exclusions. Achievement within the school is high, particularly so in Year 6, where in 2017 the school attained well above the local authority and national averages and showed a three year rising trajectory. Progress for disadvantaged pupils is good. Spiritual development is excellent, promoted by thoughtful and regular opportunities for spontaneous prayer, moments of reflection and stillness, provided both internally and externally in the 'quiet area'. The use of 'values bunting' whereby pupils are nominated either by their peers or by adults for exemplifying particular values encourages reflection on the difference that treating others with compassion, respect and dignity makes. The recent 'Spirited Arts' work displayed in the school hall demonstrates the cross-curricular approach by which pupils were able to express themselves, through prayer, poetry, dance and art work. The outcomes are outstanding in terms of depth of thought and reflection. For example, a pupil wrote a poem on 'Peace and Prejudice' and described 'peace' as 'Her saintly doings are known to all the world. This divine spirit, this kind power is peace'. Parents interviewed spoke of their appreciation of their children being given 'a moral compass' through the values work. Behaviour and relationships are very good. Pupils readily take on a significant number of responsibilities, such as sports captains, music leaders, school councillors and collective worship team members. They do this with modesty and grace, understanding that through these responsibilities they are role models for both the school community, but also when representing the school in external competitions and meetings. Pupils understand that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith. They have studied the inspirational black Christian leaders – Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther-King. However, their understanding of how worship is influenced by culture and climate is less well developed. At present, understanding of the different Christian denominations is also limited. RE contributes hugely to both spiritual, moral, social and cultural education (SMSC) as well as shaping the Christian character of the school. Two clergy members are regularly involved in the RE curriculum, explaining Anglican practices and encouraging pupils to feel welcome and comfortable within the church building. Pupils are both excited and challenged by RE. They are fascinated by other world religions and articulate clearly the importance of mutual respect and understanding.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Since the previous inspection, the school has worked hard to 'increase the impact of collective worship' and this is now a strength of the school. Three acts of classroom based worship were observed during the inspection. These were all of high quality, inspirational, inclusive and age-appropriate for the pupils involved. The strong sense of spirituality was tangible, particularly in the Year 2 worship, where beautiful refrains invited the pupils to welcome God, as the Trinity, into the act of worship. Pupils were reflecting on the value of 'compassion', through learning about the parable of 'The Good Samaritan' and the rescue of Moses by pharaoh's daughter from the river. In Year 5 some real life scenarios were shared, where compassion was a necessary response, as well as thinking of strategies to improve the situation. Pupils and the adults present are clearly moved by the power of coming together to share 'time to think, time to pray'. It is described by staff as a time where 'you can see the whole school becoming calmer and reflecting on the values and how they offer the potential to shape lives and relationships with others'. Pupils increasingly listen to world news and are critical of leaders who do not demonstrate in their words and actions the values which they have become so familiar with. Music contributes significantly to worship, through the quality of pupils' singing and the school choir enhances this also. Pupils know a number of Anglican liturgical phrases which are incorporated into worship. The 'worship boxes' in each classroom enable pupils to collaboratively assemble the artefacts to place on the worship table. Music softly playing throughout the class worship adds to the feeling that this is a special, sacred time for pupils and staff to be together. Through the support from clergy members, pupils pray spontaneously about a range of issues, starting with a one word prompt and after each short prayer say the refrain, 'God in heaven, hear our prayers'. Recently, a group of pupils interested in forming a collective worship team visited a local outstanding church school to find out more about how pupil worship leaders there had developed pupil led worship. As a result of this visit, they were inspired to come back and lead their own act of

worship. The video of this shows confident, well-organised pupils, who have clearly learnt a great deal about the structure and nature of worship from adult as well as pupil leaders. They spoke about the importance of getting their message across clearly and concisely, linking songs and prayers to the chosen theme. Values such as 'thoughtfulness' and 'compassion' have led to pupils responding through charitable giving to a wide range of causes, including one called 'William's Wishes' in memory of a child from a school family. All staff lead worship along with two clergy members who alternate on a weekly basis. The school has collective worship issues as a standing item on staff meeting agendas. This has resulted in high levels of support and discussion, particularly beneficial to two new teaching staff members in this academic year. At present, no leaders are from denominations other than Anglican. As a result of the variety of settings used, pupils understand that worship can take place anywhere. Pupils say that they find this inspiring and interesting. An 'Armistice Day' service was held last November in the school grounds and the church is used for festivals and the annual 'leavers' service'. Monitoring and evaluation of worship is undertaken regularly by senior leaders and support is readily available to assist less experienced staff. Governors also attend collective worship and feedback to members of the governing body. At present this is too informal and minutes of meetings are too light on recording the quality of discussion and debate which followed presentations. This impedes governors' ability to clearly describe the impact that such monitoring and evaluation has had, either on raising awareness of the strengths, or the areas for development in worship.

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

Leaders consistently articulate and live out a vision based on a distinctively Christian vision. The current strapline, 'Shared Values – Shared Aspirations – Shared Achievements' was agreed collaboratively by stakeholders. It underlines the sense of being together as a school family, which is evident from the way in which people work together for common aims. The vision statement is currently lengthy and, although it encapsulates the promotion of Christian values, its length is such that it would be difficult to recall. At present it does not take into account the visions of the Church of England or diocesan visions for education. The impact of the taught values are appreciated and recognised by all stakeholders, particularly parents, who feel that their children use these values both with decision making and in their daily lives to guide their relationships. Both leaders and governors have a clear and accurate picture of the school's performance, including that of disadvantaged pupils, and know where further improvements are needed. Self- evaluation is accurate and areas for development from the previous inspection have been comprehensively and successfully addressed. The school development plan has a strand focusing on the embedding of the new locally agreed syllabus for RE in Hertfordshire and another on developing the 'values page' on the school website, so that visitors to the site are informed about this aspect of the school's work. The development of pupils' spirituality is taken very seriously by school leaders. Clergy members have had an important role to play in enabling pupils to put their thoughts and fears into prayers that encapsulate their hopes and dreams for a better world. The partnership with the local St Katharine's church is a strength, both in terms of the openness of welcome and the way in which clergy members take time to get to know the children and to share their wisdom and experiences, particularly around prayer with them. As a result of this close partnership, staff, parents and pupils are fiercely proud of the deep and special links with the church, enabling both clergy and congregation members to reach out and minister to all members of the school community who need their support. Parents are hugely supportive of the school, but have not yet been surveyed on aspects of the school's church school distinctiveness. Partnership with the diocese is strong. Training opportunities are taken up and cascaded into school. A bi-annual visit to St Alban's Cathedral, to be part of the harvest festival celebrations, is very much looked forward to. As yet, newly appointed governors have not received diocesan training to raise awareness of being church school governors. Future church school leaders are identified and nurtured according to their readiness to take on more leadership responsibilities, using both diocesan and nationally recognised leadership development programmes. The RE leader, who left just before the inspection took place, had worked creatively and effectively to raise standards and provision in RE, culminating in the award of the RE Quality Mark Silver Award. The present deputy headteacher has seamlessly taken over RE. She is ensuring that the same high quality is maintained as previously and leads collective worship in a truly inspiring and committed way. A scrutiny of governor minutes showed that discussions around SIAMS related issues were too infrequent, although the deputy headteacher gave a SIAMS presentation at the April meeting.

SIAMS report May 2018 Ickleford Primary School, Ickleford, Hitchin, SG5 3YG