

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Castle Camps Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Church Lane, Castle Camps, CB21 4TH

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Ely

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Satisfactory

Local authority

Cambridgeshire

Date of inspection

24 February 2017

Date of last inspection

12 March 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

VC Primary 110784

Headteacher

Alexandra O'Connor

Inspector's name and number

Graham Lancaster 713

School context

This is a smaller than average sized primary school, with mixed age classes for most of the 123 pupils. Pupils are drawn from the local area and from the nearby town of Haverhill. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average, as is the proportion of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language. The headteacher was not in post for the previous denominational inspection but was at the time of the Section 5 OFSTED inspection (July 2014) when the judgement for overall effectiveness improved from requires improvement to good.

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

- Outstanding leadership has led to significant improvements in the overall effectiveness of the school, founded on the explicit Christian vision and values. There has been a marked improvement in the achievement of all pupils since the previous inspection, thereby increasing their educational and life chances.
- The school's Christian character permeates every aspect of school life and has a very strong and positive influence on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all its pupils.
- Highly effective and imaginative religious education (RE) elicits enthusiastic responses from pupils and empowers them to explore Christian values in a broad context.

Areas to improve

- Extend opportunities for pupils to lead and contribute to the planning and evaluation of collective worship by bringing plans for a 'pupil faith group' to fruition.

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

The school's vision statement 'Learning together with faith, hope and love' is prominent on the school's website. It was forged collaboratively and is frequently referred to by staff, parents and pupils. It is underpinned by Christian values which are reinforced systematically through the school's thematic approach to collective worship, through RE and prayer spaces in each class. However, it is most clearly manifest in the improved outcomes of pupils of all levels of ability over the past three years and in the Christian ethos which has been progressively strengthened by the school's leadership. All parents are provided with a 'values leaflet' which sets out the school's aims and explains each Christian value. The monthly newsletter to parents is headed with a Bible verse from which the Christian value of the month is drawn. Pupil achievement has risen significantly, with outcomes not only exceeding national averages in all measures, but also featuring amongst the highest in the county. School leaders actively demonstrate Christian values in action as they strive for the highest quality provision for vulnerable pupils and those with additional needs, including some who have been excluded from other schools. Pupils directly attribute the excellent relationships and high standards of behaviour to the values they learn about in worship and discuss in their classes. In keeping with its caring and compassionate approach, the school works effectively with those few pupils who fall short of the high standards of behaviour expected or whose attendance is low. This has resulted in attendance being above the national average and no pupils being excluded from the school.

The learning environment is stimulating and supports pupil progress in core subjects, in RE and in their spiritual development. As a direct consequence of the school's Christian character and values, pupils' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is promoted at the highest level. The prayer spaces in each class form part of worship each week. Each include a Bible as well as age-appropriate prompts and strategies to support pupil in prayer or those who wish to have a time of quiet reflection. In one classroom pupils had attached post-its expressing their small, medium and large hopes and dreams, for themselves and others. These sacred spaces significantly promote the school's Christian character. Here pupils can also privately nominate one of their peers who has demonstrated the current Christian value in practice. A successful nomination results in a surprise special reward in Friday's worship, recognition which is highly prized by the pupils and by parents. This has the impact of deepening pupils' understanding of Christian values and encourages them to put the values into practice. Through class discussions pupils actively contribute to determining the choice of a wide range of local, national and international charities the school supports. Through this they put the values of compassion, generosity and sharing into action.

Pupils recognise the similarities and differences between Christianity and other major world religions through the RE lessons. This enriches their understanding of, and respect for, people from cultures and faiths other than their own. When completing a recent questionnaire one parent wrote, 'I am delighted to see an RE class providing excellent points of view and acceptance of everyone'. Pupils' understanding of Christianity as a world faith is reinforced by a partnership with a Church school in Boston, USA. Pupils also learn about how various times of the Christian year, including Advent, are celebrated in Anglican churches. This reinforces strongly the school's Anglican foundation as well as pupils' knowledge and understanding of the central role of Jesus for Christians. RE contributes at a consistently high level to the Christian character of the school, supporting and developing pupils' spiritual awareness. Planning centred on 'big questions' and marking which encourages further response from pupils ensures that pupils are learning from RE as well as about world faiths. One parent, whose relocation had necessitated moving her child somewhat reluctantly from a non-faith school said, 'we would have missed out on so much had we not come to Castle Camps – as a church school.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The school has actively drawn on the support of the diocese, local church schools and the expertise and imagination of staff to improve and enhance collective worship since the previous denominational inspection. Significant steps forward have been taken in realising the stated aim of leaders that 'worship intentionally impacts on the whole school community'. Worship is focussed on gospel values, on biblical

teaching and contributes significantly to the Christian ethos of the school. A comprehensive plan provides both structure and support for those who lead worship, which includes all staff and representatives from local churches.

There is a sense of expectation as pupils and staff enter the hall for worship. A Christian affirmation is used which reflects the distinctive Anglican tradition. The Anglican liturgical colours cover the focal point for worship and a candle is lit for prayer, which pupils recognise as being symbolic of Jesus, the light of the world. During worship, the school's core values are continually reinforced. Frequent mention is made of the person of Jesus and of The Trinity. Adults as well as pupils sing with infectious joy, with reverence and a sense of the presence of God. Pupils are keen to participate, through Bible readings, prayers or spontaneously volunteering to assist. Within the school's action plan leaders have identified their plans to create a 'faith group' consisting of pupils who can both contribute to the evaluation of worship and develop their own worship leadership skills. Training and support for members of this group is planned. Each week class teachers provide a specific opportunity for response to worship in their class worship, utilising the prayer spaces in their rooms. They have received training and support in making the most of these spaces. Worship also takes place in the parish church and in the more local United Reformed Church. The relationship with the latter is described as 'immensely supportive' through the period prior to the recent appointment of a team vicar. The vicar has already become one of the foundation governors who regularly attend worship and provide evaluative feedback for consideration by school leaders. In response to a recent questionnaire one parent wrote, 'collective worship gives pupils a good grounding of the Christian religion and promotes positive behaviour'. One pupil wrote, 'I've learned to be a better person'.

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

Through her outstanding leadership the headteacher has built a highly effective team of staff who share her clear vision and aspirations for the school. They share her commitment to providing a challenging and engaging learning experience for every pupil within a distinctively Christian context. Together they have raised standards and brought to the forefront the Christian ethos of the school. This has been accomplished despite significant staffing challenges. Leaders manifestly live out the school's Christian values. Staff and pupils respond positively to the expectation that these values are for everyone within the school community and beyond. Opportunities for investing in the training and development of future church school leaders within the school staff have increased the scope for delegation. The RE subject leader has excellent subject knowledge and evaluative skills. She has drawn on advice and training provided by the diocese as well as attending national conferences. The deputy headteacher has undertaken this role during her maternity leave but they are working closely together on ambitious plans to develop teaching and learning in RE still further. The areas for development identified in the previous denominational inspection have been successfully addressed as has been feedback from visits by diocesan advisors. The school works in close partnership with the two local church schools. There is a detailed and explicit plan for further improvements, based on rigorous and accurate self-evaluation. This has been drawn up following consultation with both staff and governors. Opportunities for deepening the partnership with the local parish church have begun, following the recent appointment of the team vicar. On his first visit to the school he described the way in which he was 'struck by the Christian distinctiveness of the school'. Prior to his arrival several representatives of other local churches have been actively involved in the school, leading worship, taking part in class discussions and 'Godly Play' sessions.

Since the previous denominational inspection there have been considerable changes in school governance. Governors recognise their role in providing challenge as well as support. They are actively involved in monitoring and evaluating the progress being made. They are universally positive and proud of all that has been achieved by the headteacher and her staff, and excited and confident in what can and will be achieved by the pupils of their school.