

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Elm Church of England VC Primary School

Main Road, Elm, Cambs. PE14 0AG

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

Ely

Previous SIAS inspection grade

Good

Local authority

Cambridgeshire

Date of inspection

25 May 2017

Date of last inspection

10 June 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary 110800

Headteacher

Andy Howe

Inspector's name and number

Elizabeth Pitcher 448

School context

This is a smaller than average primary school with 210 pupils on roll set within a rural fenland context. Pupils at Elm come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds with a higher than average level of social need. The number of pupils with SEND is above national and 22% of pupils access pupil premium funding. There have been significant staff changes since the previous inspection. The current headteacher was appointed from September 2015, and the deputy headteacher was appointed from within the school and took post at the start of the previous term. Difficulties in raising achievement are being addressed by the new leadership team, and as result there is a consistently improving picture of achievement.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Elm as a Church of England school are good

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school as a church school and is well supported by a valued strong staff team who work well together within an ethos of mutual respect and support.
- The good relations between the school and the church serve to enrich the life of the school, by promoting a shared understanding of church school distinctiveness.
- The Christian ethos is reflected through an inclusive approach in the belief that each child is 'a gift' and that learning and spirituality can be developed together.
- The dedication of school leaders and relations with the church are valued and respected by parents.

Areas to improve

- Monitor and evaluate the outworking of the school's aims in relation to how clearly pupils link distinctly Christian values to their behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Increase training opportunities for foundation governors, in order to embed the effectiveness of their role as leaders in a church school.
- Monitor the impact of reflection and prayer areas on the extent of pupils' spiritual development.

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

The school's ethos 'everyone learning, everyone caring' in a 'can do Christian community' permeates all aspects of life at Elm. The emphasis on the Christian character of the school creates a purposeful learning environment where all pupils can reach their potential. This is because relationships at all levels are positive, enabling pupils to develop high self-esteem and make good progress, including those with special needs because they are nurtured well. Although the school is not expected to attain national standards this year, the upward trend demonstrates overall improvement. The positive and consistent reinforcement of the value placed on the individual has led to improved attendance.

Pupil voice is a strong feature of the school because views are valued and they make a difference to next steps and provision. The school council meets regularly and perception surveys show that pupils enjoy worship and understand the significance of the Anglican tradition. This leads to confident, articulate learners who talk enthusiastically about worship and their learning, whilst showing care and respect towards each other. Inviting Christian displays feature throughout the school. They are brought to life when pupils make the links between the school values and biblical teaching and how this combination influences their own behaviour and attitudes to learning. This is particularly notable in the way they understand the systems and expectations for good behaviour, when they say that they are proud of the certificates they receive for good behaviour as they have 'stayed on green' because they have shown kindness and forgiveness towards each other. The teaching of religious education (RE) is well led and supports the Christian character of the school through opportunities to reflect on such 'big questions' as 'was Jesus the Messiah?'. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is good because of the range of experiences planned within religious education (RE) and other areas of the curriculum, through which pupils develop understanding and respect for diverse communities and are given opportunities for discussion and reflection. Pupils are developing a deeper spiritual awareness through their sensitive thoughtfulness and compassionate responsibility for helping others when they support Water Aid and engage with the bishop's Lent challenge.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Across the school community, pupils and adults recognise the centrality and importance of collective worship, and speak about their enjoyment of worship in school and the impact that it has on them personally because they worship together 'as a family'. This stems from a well-established worship programme which supports the school's Christian foundation because it enables all members of the school to make links between biblical teaching and everyday lives, in relation to Christian values. The local vicar is a well-known figure as worship leader, through whom the Anglican tradition is emphasised and explored. This addresses a previous development point. Parents and pupils say they enjoy sharing worship together at the church, as they celebrate the main Christian festivals of the year. Pupils show a clear understanding of the main events in the life of Jesus. Pupils know that Christians believe that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and they can explain this concept at an age-appropriate level.

The worship observed on Ascension Day provided an opportunity for pupils to reflect and respond in an atmosphere of respect and reverence, with reference to 'Thy Kingdom Come', an Anglican initiative. Relevant links were made between the biblical teaching of the ascension of Jesus and the friendships in daily life. Pupils confidently interacted with the headteacher as worship leader, in response to reflective questions. As a result, pupils gained an increased understanding of the characteristics of friendship and the value of friendships between each other.

Anglican liturgy, Christian symbols, singing and prayers combined to impact well on pupils' engagement.

The development of the reflection areas fosters pupils' spiritual awareness and well-being through a deepening understanding of the different purposes for prayer. For example, giving thanks and prayers for the safety of family members. Pupils' personal prayers are valued and used to enhance worship. One pupil comments 'we can write a prayer and talk to God when we are worried.' and another says that the reflection space is 'a place to sit when we are sad and want to be peaceful.' However, evaluation of impact on pupils' spiritual development is still at an informal stage. A range of crosses provide the opportunity to talk about the significance of the empty cross 'where Jesus died for us' and quiet music creates an atmosphere of calm and peace. This addresses a previous development point. Class worship supports whole school themes which ensures consistency and activities and outcomes are well documented by teachers. The headteacher and governors undertake monitoring of worship and the views of pupils and parents contribute to whole school evaluation which impacts on future planning.

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

Since the appointment of new school leaders and managers strategic planning for improvement and self-evaluation has been a key focus for the work at Elm, which has improved the educational experiences for all learners in this inclusive school. The leadership team, governors and church representatives are working hard to integrate Christian values and to promote a deeper Christian ethos. Although this is at an early stage of embedding through the school's aims, staff and pupils nevertheless have a strong understanding of what it means to be a church school and the learning environment has been transformed to make the church school ethos vibrantly clear. The strong vision and leadership for taking the school forward, infused with its distinctively Christian character, stems from the belief that every child is of value and to be respected as 'a gift'. Consequently, self-esteem is raised and the barriers to learning are being lifted. Leaders and governors closely analyse the impact of strategic actions. For example, RE and collective worship policies have been reviewed for effectiveness, which is leading to the embedding of Christian values, and foundation governors monitor through learning walks and collective worship looking for church school distinctiveness.

School leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to Elm, as the village school which effectively serves the community because it provides clear and caring leadership through its Christian values. The values of trust and service are characterised by positive relationships between staff, governors and the church, who work well together as a cohesive team. This promotes a sense of purpose and well-being for pupils and their parents. Parents say they appreciate the inclusive and positive atmosphere of this school community, with its range of 'open door' approaches and its respectful and caring attention to meeting their children's needs.

Positive partnerships with the diocese and other church schools, alongside staff development, are recognised by school leaders as integral to the embedding of the school's Christian character. Leadership training from the diocese has been accessed by the headteacher and training for the new national materials, Understanding Christianity, has been undertaken by the RE leader. However, leadership training for governors of a church school is less well developed. Professional development lies at the heart of leaders' planning and actions, as they take Elm to the next stage of its development. Leaders have ensured that all the areas for development from the previous inspection have been fully met. The school meets the statutory requirements regarding RE and collective worship.

SIAMS report May 2017 Elm Church of England VC Primary School, Cambs. PE14 0AG