

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Isleham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Malting Lane, Isleham, Ely, CB7 5RZ

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Ely

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Local authority

Cambridgeshire

Date of inspection

27 April 2017

Date of last inspection

January 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

VC Primary 110791

Headteacher

Sarah Skillern

Inspector's name and number

Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

Currently there are 199 pupils on roll in this rural village primary school. The school is predominately White British, with pupils coming from the local villages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is below average. Following the retirement of the headteacher at Easter 2016, acting leadership was secured by the two deputy headteachers. A substantive headteacher was appointed in September 2016. The religious education [RE] subject leader has been in post since September 2016.

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

- This is a welcoming Christian family community which meets the individual needs of the pupils and families it serves, within a safe, supportive Christian environment.
- The mutual and substantial partnership between church and school enriches the worshipping life of the community.
- Enthusiastic pupils take real joy and pride in their learning together and achieve well. This is because the dedicated team in this church school are committed to nurturing pupils' personal and academic development.

Areas to improve

- Extend the programme of visits and visitors to enable pupils to meet people of other faiths more frequently to nurture their spiritual and cultural development.
- Deepen pupils' age-appropriate understanding of The Holy Spirit to enrich their experience of worship in a church school and their knowledge of the beliefs of the worldwide Christian family of faith.

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

Isleham's strong Christian foundation ensures it is committed to its vision of 'learning together, achieving the best' in serving its local community. This is a very welcoming Christian family community where the needs of each individual are first and foremost met within a safe and supportive Christian environment. Faith is important and Christian values, such as compassion, generosity and service, underpin the life and work of the school. Relationships at all levels are excellent. For example, the pupil restorative justice team support any conflicts or disputes at breaktimes, but pupils say this is rarely needed as everyone gets on well together. Attendance is above the national average. There is great emphasis on the school's Christian character and the whole child. For example, partnerships have been strengthened with its transient families, such as those from HM Armed Forces, who say they feel welcomed and included. In addition, a mathematics specialist was employed to help develop mastery and reasoning skills through a class café. Experienced teachers understand pupils' additional needs and work hard to help and challenge pupils, for example, to focus on independence in writing. They meet challenging targets, to ensure pupils work at greater depth, given pupils' starting points. Pupils are encouraged to persevere to be the best they can be within a nurturing context. As a result, they have become more confident and achieve highly, with many pupils securing or exceeding age related expectations. Consequently, this is a very successful church school where worship, RE and values make a very good contribution to the school's Christian character. Pupils are looking forward to using their new Trinitarian outdoor quiet space for reflection, nurturing pupils' spiritual development. The partnership with Taonga School in Zambia has deepened, with pupils writing and sharing news through letters. For example, one pupil cited his pen pal, who is 'a lot older than me and has been on the streets. I have taken it all in'. Pupils recognise that, 'we can't go over to Zambia, but we could have a video chat with them in the future'. The school has identified this, and wishes to extend this global partnership further as it raises pupils' awareness of the Christian family worldwide as well as their understanding of global diversity. In addition, it enables pupils to respond in acts of service, which is strengthened by fundraising and other charitable work, such as the involvement each year in 'Operation Christmas Child'. Whilst pupils in Year 2 have American pen pals, their experience of different communities and cultures in this rural community can be limited. To this end, pupils say they would welcome meeting people of faiths other than Christian more frequently. The school recognises this in helping enrich pupils' spiritual and cultural development. RE excites and challenges pupils as they say they learn about different religions, such as Sikhism and Hinduism. One pupil said they found RE helpful as, 'RE helps me as it's a calming lesson'. Pupils have a very good knowledge of the Christian story of salvation and can go on to explain the significance of Ascension-tide and Pentecost in great detail. They delight in their work and speak joyfully and enthusiastically of the importance of Jesus' life. They tell of God sending his only Son as 'very exciting and amazing and because of him we all live'. They are proud of their work in RE, which includes exploring the creation story through poetry, as well as looking at art work to discover more about personal beliefs in Jesus. This supports the Christian character of the school very well. In addition, they ask questions and find out answers to increase their knowledge about Islam and Sikhism. In all these ways, pupils' spiritual development is nurtured very well.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship at Isleham ensures there is time to reflect on the teachings of the Bible as well as space for thinking, sharing, listening, reflecting and, importantly, prayer. The close partnership with St Andrew's Church enables pupils to understand the seasons of the church year. Consequently, they can explain their colour and significance very well. This is because key festivals, such as Harvest, Remembrance, Easter and Ascension-tide are celebrated. Parents say they have found value in attending church services. In addition, the clergy from St Andrew's Church are welcome and regular visitors to school, leading worship every week. They share Bible stories in meaningful and accessible ways for pupils, linking the Bible stories to the school's Christian values. For example, when pupils heard the story of doubting Thomas as part of their focus on the Christian value of trust, it had meaning for the pupils as 'he believed and never doubted again'. Dedicated prayer spaces, which include class reflection areas, with Bibles and symbols of faith, are

well used. For example, creative prayer ideas, to help pupils focus on forgiveness and develop personal spirituality are very popular. For many pupils, prayer is the most important part of worship for them as 'we get to think about God for a couple of minutes and reflect on what we've done and be quiet'. They enjoy writing and sharing their own prayers. Pupils are growing in their confidence to plan and lead worship in class worship and in leading church services. This is especially true of the collective worship crew from Year 5. They also evaluate worship regularly, which is making a difference, informs future development and contributes to their growing leadership roles in collective worship. Governors too evaluate worship regularly as part of their monitoring role. Worship themes encourage pupils to take responsibility and action, such as through their Christian giving to charity. Pupils are growing in their Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Whilst pupils are confident in their knowledge of God as Father and Son, they are less secure in their knowledge of The Holy Spirit. They know that the 'Holy Spirit reminds you of Pentecost'. One pupil said, 'I know that The Holy Spirit, Jesus the Light of the world and God the creator are included in The Holy Trinity. They are all special to me as they light up the right path for everyone to follow.' However, pupils say they would welcome help with deepening their knowledge of the work of The Holy Spirit, especially in the season of the church year, which celebrates Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity. The school and clergy acknowledge this enriches pupils' experience of worship in a church school and their understanding of key Christian beliefs worldwide, deepening their spiritual lives.

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

Whilst the headteacher and the RE subject leader are relatively new to their posts, strong leadership and governance is a hallmark of Isleham School. This is because everyone working together is central to the school's vision and values with its high aspirations for all. Governors are now formalising their evaluation of the church school ethos more regularly and rigorously, which they say has been 'a huge development'. They have addressed all areas from the previous inspection and the partnership between church and school has been deepened and strengthened. This is notably through the headteacher and clergy working closely together. Clergy are active in leading worship, with the rector on the governing body and vice chair of Ely Diocesan Board of Education. Clergy offer a 'Talking about God' group for pupils every week in school. Pupils help lead worship in St Andrew's Church, celebrating key times in the church year with the local community. Governors both challenge and support the importance of the school's Christian values underpinning the school's academic standards as well as personal development. They are committed to the wellbeing of all, which includes professional development for those working in leadership roles in church schools. There is a good relationship with the diocese, with staff and governors, including those new to post, benefitting from support and training by the diocese. Whilst the RE subject leader is new to her role, RE is very well led, managed and resourced. She monitors RE lessons annually with the headteacher and carries out learning walks and book scrutinies termly with the governors. She works closely with the diocesan RE adviser. Consequently, RE and worship both meet statutory requirements. In addition, there is good support from The Three Rivers Group of parishes as well as other church groups represented in Isleham. Community links are important in this rural area. For example, the house captains are involved in the annual poppy wreath laying at the village Remembrance Day service. The school also support the annual Christmas tree festival in the village and the choir sing for the elderly residents. The school features regularly in the village magazine, the 'Isleham Informer', celebrating and sharing news. Parents too feel involved and welcomed as part of this family, which successfully integrates everyone, whatever their individual needs. Parents are informed through weekly newsletters. They say their children come home and confidently share the Bible stories and Christian value of the week with them, relating the Bible stories to everyday life. One parent said their child felt really affirmed as they were praised for being 'apparently fantastic in RE!' Above all, they testify to the school being an extension of 'my family'. They praise the headteacher and speak highly of all the dedicated teachers, valuing the school's biblical principles. Staff say their experience of working here is 'amazing' and they have found 'friends for life'. In all these ways, Isleham School is an exemplar of working together to achieve the best for its community.