

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Guilden Morden Church of England Academy

Pound Green, Guilden Morden, Royston, Hertfordshire, SG8 0JZ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Diocese	Ely
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	01 November 2016
Name of multi-academy trust	Diocese of Ely Multi- Academy Trust (DEMAT)
Date of inspection	21 February 2017
Date of last inspection	12 January 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary Academy 8732042
Headteacher	Alan Wright
Inspector's name and number	Judith Ruff 528

School context

The school converted in November 2016 to become part of the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT). It is considerably smaller than the average primary school, with 44 pupils on roll. The percentage of pupils in receipt of free school meals is above the national average, with those receiving special educational needs (SEN) support below the national average. Pupils are predominantly from a White British heritage. The headteacher took up his post in November 2016 on a year's contract. There have been significant changes in staffing since the previous inspection, including five changes of headteacher. The church of St Mary's is within walking distance of the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Guilden Morden as a Church of England school are satisfactory

- The school's caring and nurturing ethos ensures that each child is both known and valued as a precious child of God, made in his image.
- External faith visitors enliven and enthuse pupils' understanding of Christianity as a diverse living faith, which shapes the lives and actions of followers.
- Collective worship offers both pupils and staff a daily opportunity to experience a deep sense of peace, stillness and a sense of continuity in a school community which has experienced significant changes.

Areas to improve

- Agree a Christian vision for the school and ensure that explicitly Christian values are embedded within the life of the school, clearly linked to Christ's teaching and communicated effectively and regularly to parents. In this way both existing and prospective parents can be well-informed about how the school develops and celebrates its Christian foundation and distinctiveness.
- Develop the skills and awareness of the local governing body members to be able to fully engage with the monitoring and evaluation of the school as a church school and to increase the impact on improving provision through these activities.
- Increase pupils' opportunities for spiritual development by developing the use of reflection across the curriculum, including a focus on both the writing and spontaneous use of prayers as part of collective worship. In this way pupils are supported to express their thoughts, feelings and beliefs through exploration and discussion.

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

'Despite coming through turbulent times, the ethos of the school has remained constant. It is a kind, caring school for our children', said a parent. Christian values are present within the school, although these have, until recently, been implicit rather than explicit. Parents interviewed had a limited knowledge and understanding of the existing chosen values and these are presently not communicated effectively to either prospective or existing parents. Pupils are beginning to link the values to their personal development. For example, the recently produced 'code of conduct' has been written by pupils, together with the strapline, 'Together we work to succeed'. Respect for others and pride in the school have been recent areas of foci. These are worked out through the way in which all members of the school community care for each individual, ensuring that everyone is equally valued as a precious child of God and made in his image. Achievement levels within the school have varied, with Key Stage 2 pupils not meeting national averages in 2016, particularly in writing, but Early Years and Key Stage 1 being above national outcomes. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs are now making expected progress overall and in some cases this is good, but the gap in attainment between these and their peers is still significant. Attendance is in line with national averages and there have been no exclusions. Pupils are responding well to the newly introduced behaviour policy and demonstrate a commitment to their learning in classes. 'We are lucky to have an education and that our teachers are always trying to help us. We want everyone in the world to be happy and to have a good education'. The school council members are making decisions on raising money for causes such as 'Children in Need' and the poppy appeal. They show a genuine concern for those less fortunate and understand that Christians are called to try to make a difference where there is injustice and inequality. Spirituality is developed through collective worship and within RE through appropriate times for prayer and reflection. However, other opportunities within curriculum studies are under-utilised and pupils' experiences are at early stages of development. Pupils understand at a very basic level that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith, but they have not been taught through any recent study units details of what practice might look like in countries across the globe. Pupils' understanding of diversity within the local Christian denominations has been successfully delivered through visits to the local Congregational church and through a Methodist minister who leads collective worship in school. Pupils' views on religious education (RE) are mixed. Some said that they do not enjoy it as a subject but they appreciate that learning about other world religions helps them to understand others' faith and beliefs, supporting the building of knowledge and understanding leading to respect. The school has made a concerted effort over recent weeks to raise the profile of church school distinctiveness and there are high quality RE displays across the school, including a stunning stained glass mural on the theme of the seasons in the main entrance lobby.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Collective worship is recognised as an important time of the day, providing a focus for the whole school community to come together. As one staff member said, 'It reminds the children that they are part of something strong, immense and powerful. It gives opportunities for peace, stillness and continuity, away from what, at times, is a frantically changing situation'. Staff spoken to appreciate this daily worship session, 'It keeps me calm and gives me a foundation for what I do in the classroom'. Pupils enjoy the interactivity provided by external groups such as 'Open the Book', 'GenR8' and the clergy led worship. They enjoy opportunities to engage in role play activities and to do readings and prayers. Bible stories are included as part of worship and increasingly linked to chosen values. At present pupils' abilities to link these values confidently to the Bible and particularly to gospel stories is limited. Although there are opportunities for prayer and reflection within worship, these are not sufficiently well-developed to make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Pupils have written prayers for special church services, such as harvest, and a central school prayer book is being established, along with class areas, which include prayer boxes and prayer dice, to support pupils' ideas and reasons for writing prayers. These initiatives are still at an early stage of development. However, there is evidence, particularly amongst the younger pupils, that they are developing the ability to pray spontaneously and with growing levels of confidence. Understanding of the Trinity is at an age appropriate level amongst the upper Key Stage 2 pupils, who use the analogy of an egg to describe the three persons of God. A recently established 'Faith Team' is beginning to take on responsibilities such as organising for the setting up of the school hall and carrying out some evaluations of collective worship. These have resulted in changes being made to the way in which pupils are seated for worship. The 'horse-shoe' shape, now adopted, enables pupils to have a clearer view of the worship table, candle and the worship leader. The use of the church of St Mary's is clearly important to many of the pupils. As one said, 'The church has an aura. You have to respect it. You know that it is God's house'. Pupils understand that worship involves praising God through singing hymns and songs and they enjoy these opportunities. They particularly enjoy listening to modern day versions of Bible stories which help them to more easily understand the message that Christ was giving to his followers. Pupils behave well and listen with respect to the worship leader. Worship planning is now more thorough, using both the liturgical calendar and the chosen half term value. Class collective worship is also more rigorously planned for since the autumn term. This is supporting teachers to a far greater extent and raising confidence levels, as well as offering increased opportunities

to share outcomes as a staff group. Although there has been some evaluation of worship by pupils and the headteacher, governors have not yet monitored worship formally and no discussion has taken place at governor meetings as to the quality and impact of collective worship in its present forms, both within the school and the local church.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced two years of significant instability of both leadership and staffing. As a result the school roll has fallen by half and it is now a very different school to the one that was inspected in 2012. The frequent changes of leadership have resulted in the two foci for development from the last SIAS inspection not receiving the level of attention that is required to bring about significant changes and improvements. The newly appointed interim headteacher has, since November 2016, formed an effective working partnership with the RE subject leader and together they have begun to address these. The headteacher has identified the need to re-visit the school's vision and values statement and has begun the process of consultation with staff, parents and pupils about what this might look like, including their views and suggestions for including present strengths that have served the school well through challenging times. He is committed to 'keeping Christ's teaching at the heart of everything that is done for the school community'. When the school converted to academy status in November 2016, a new local governing body (LGB) was set up to replace an interim executive board in place previously. This, at present, includes the regular support and guidance from a representative of DEMAT. The two governors spoken to during the inspection demonstrated a commitment to the school's Christian foundation, had already been involved in learning walks, which included looking at areas around Christian distinctiveness and were keen to be actively involved in the strategic direction of the school as a church school. For example, the school development plan includes strands on improving both collective worship and RE, although there is no recorded evidence of governor discussions taking place on this. They had discussed the school's SIAMS self-evaluation form and had a good understanding of where further improvements needed to be made. Training for the LGB had been identified as a necessary action to effectively support their ability to hold the school to account for its work and mission as a church school. Care, concern and a desire to give every pupil the very best opportunity to succeed was a common theme emerging from the governor discussions with the inspector. Although the RE subject leader has only held this responsibility since September 2016, she is already making a significant impact on provision for this subject across the school. One teacher, also in place since September, spoke of the impact that the subject leader had on reviving her passion for teaching RE through the clear guidance and support received. Worship, under the headteacher's leadership, is taking on a good structure and increasing prominence with the growth of pupil involvement through the development of the 'Faith Team' leaders. Support and leadership from the local church community has been a strong and stabilising influence throughout the upheavals experienced by the school community. Parents are welcomed to church services and this is something that parents appreciate being part of. Clergy members are involved in leading school based worship on a regular basis each term and pupils speak very positively about their efforts in making the stories interesting and their success in getting key messages across. Diocesan support has been mainly through becoming part of DEMAT, although there was a recent SIAMS 'health check' carried out and the older pupils visit Ely Cathedral as part of the RE curriculum. Under present leadership, the school is beginning to increase its impact as a church school. However, many of the initiatives introduced have not had sufficient time to develop fully and they are not yet embedded within the life of the school. Succession planning arrangements for the substantive school leadership are yet to be agreed.

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