

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Linton Church of England VA Infant School

Church Lane, Linton, Cambridgeshire, CB21 4JX	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Ely
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Date of inspection	26 September 2017
Date of last inspection	13 November 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VA Infant 110832
Headteacher	Kelly Harries
Inspector's name and number	Christopher J Allen 847

School context

Linton Church of England VA Infants School is an average sized infant school, situated in the village of Linton. It currently has 173 pupils on roll, the proportion of children eligible for pupil premium is below national average, the proportion of children with special educational needs is above the national average and the majority of children are from White British backgrounds. The school was inspected by Ofsted in April 2017 and judged to be good. The current head teacher has been in post for 12 months and has introduced a new senior leadership team; since the last SIAS inspection the majority of staff has changed in the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Linton CE VA Infant School as a Church of England school are good

- The school meets all learners' needs and those of the wider community it serves through a sensitive and Christian ethos, where it lives out its vision of making every pupil a happy, confident learner who flourishes as a child of God.
- Links to the local church, St Mary's, through a weekly 'Friday Church' as well as wider links to the community through Tots in Tow and the church youth worker secure the Anglican traditions and heritage of this school in the local community.
- The leadership of the head teacher, supported by effective governors and senior leaders, ensures the school roots all decisions in its Christian values and as a result does not shy away from the challenge of rapidly improving outcomes for children in all year groups after a period of poor performance.

Areas to improve

- To review the distinctly Christian values of the school to ensure the vision is deeply Christian in the aspirations it has for every pupil in the school.
- To build on the effective monitoring of collective worship by senior leaders and governors so it includes and acts on the voice and experiences of the children in the school.
- To further embed the hard work undertaken in implementing the Understanding Christianity project to enable rigorous monitoring of pupil outcomes in religious education (RE) and establish a stronger evidence base for assessment of RE undertaken in the school.

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

The school's Christian character consistently informs its approach to all aspects of school life and promotes the school's vision of making every child a happy, confident learner who flourishes in their potential as a child of God. One parent said 'this school is amazing; through its Christian distinctiveness my child is given a moral compass for life- just as I was when I went to school'. Learners behave well; they enthuse about their learning, are happy and have strong relationships with one another and the adults in their school. One pupil said 'we are one big family, we love our school and we know we are all special'. The distinctively Christian ethos of the school set by the head teacher is fully inclusive, attendance issues have as a result been dealt with sensitively and children who once were at risk of exclusion are supported, nurtured and flourish. Values such as forgiveness, trust and respect are taught carefully; they are explored and supported by the spiritual, moral, social and cultural experiences the pupils receive. The school since the appointment of the new head teacher who has driven this rapid change in ethos has not excluded a child and persistent absence has significantly fallen. Outcomes for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage have been strong over the past four years, Year 1 Phonics and Year 2 SATs had until 2016 seen a downward trend but the head teacher identified clear strategies for improvement that have impacted on improved outcomes over the last two years. Data provided by the school suggests that this year's outcomes for Year 2 are likely to be 4% above the national benchmark; this supports the school's vision of developing every child into a confident learner with a life-long love for learning. Pupils have a developing understanding of their own Christian faith and that of other faiths in the school, they also know it is okay to have no faith; one pupil said, 'it is okay to not believe in God as long as you understand and respect other people do believe in him'. Pupils with no faith are able to support the school's distinctly Christian values and access the rich spiritual provision of the school by recognising that they are shared values for life. The school uses resources within the local community and families of the school to help pupils to understand Christianity as a multicultural worldwide faith; the school aspires to develop this further through more planned visits to Ely Cathedral and further work with international charities has begun. It is clear, though, that pupils respect diversity and difference from the community the school serves and they are openly inquisitive as a result. This social element has brought cultural experiences into the school where children have been able to widen their understanding of personal faith. The children talk freely about parents from other faith backgrounds as well as the wide range of Anglican churches and groups they worship at in the surrounding area, which supports the Christian character of the school and places it centrally to the lives of the pupils.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The school community see the importance of daily worship in the life of the school and can talk about what it means to them; one pupil said 'In assembly we learn about God and the Bible and how we should be together'. The themes of worship spill out into the school day and are brought to a fulfilling end with each class undertaking a 'stilling' time before the children go home. Children and adults speak enthusiastically about this time of calm reflection, linked to a story based on the theme of the day's worship. This is also seen in the lunchtime meditation club run by a member of the local church congregation; here children are encouraged to meditate, learn the value of prayer and how to consider safe and happy places in their lives. Strategies are taught to draw on these places of sanctuary when they face difficult or troubled times. Staff often attend this club and are excellent role models, they talk to the children, help them to visualise and draw their places of sanctuary and encourage them to speak to God. Pupils love to sing in worship. They are enthusiastic and learn a great deal about the Bible and the teachings of Jesus through action songs. This is led by two experienced members of staff who encourage children to lead singing in front of the school. Songs chosen have clear Christian messages and are used in the Friday Church every week at St Mary's. Here worship is delivered to the whole school community and families and friends of the school. Pupils contribute Bible readings and act out Bible stories linked to the worship value for that half term. It is a very popular and accessible service that is greatly valued by the whole school community. One grandparent said, 'It is a great privilege to be part of the weekly school service in church; it is fantastic to see the children excited and so keen to take part'. Pupils have a developing understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, appropriate for their age. One pupil used the analogy of this being like a rope plaited with three threads, as they entwine they make one strong force. Pupils' spirituality is developed through them leading prayer at the end of each act of collective worship. This is then continued with prayers at lunchtime and prayer and reflection zones in central places around the school. Pupils value these quiet and calm spaces and recognise that they can use them whether they have a personal faith or not as a place to reflect. Pupils however do not yet contribute to the systematic monitoring that takes place of collective worship by senior leaders and governors.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils value RE and are developing a range of skills due to the impact of training and introduction within the school curriculum of the Understanding Christianity project. They apply skills such as enquiry and interpretation in creative

and meaningful ways; this is clearly seen in planning and lessons observed. Children in the EYFS class were busy exploring the big question - does God as the creator make everything good? This was explored through their experiences of jellyfish and whether a sting was good, they discussed how everything was created for a purpose and listened to the creation story that had been told in the weekly Friday Church service. Year 2 children were busy making freeze frames of scenes from Jonah and the Whale and discussing how Jonah had not made the right choice in his life, this was then related to how they made the right choice in school and what helped them to do so. The curriculum uses the locally agreed syllabus in conjunction with Understanding Christianity to provide a wide and varied learning experience. It has been thoroughly reviewed and is beginning to become embedded in practice. Lessons are taught frequently as blocks of learning to rapidly build on skills and knowledge as well as special RE days to delve deeper into aspects of learning such as the nativity and faith through art. Visits and visitors bring RE alive for pupils but these opportunities are relatively infrequent. Clear links are evident between RE and the Christian values of the school. This has recently included a practising Sikh visiting the school and the pupils exploring the similarities of belief and faith to that of their own Christian faith. One pupil said 'I like RE because we learn about Christianity and how it is similar and different to other religions. We are allowed to share our ideas about our God and other people's gods. We also know it is okay to not believe in anything as long as we are respectful.' Standards in RE are in line with other subjects in the school and children make good progress. The school has developed a new assessment system for RE to match the same approach as other subjects; staff have begun to use this with enthusiasm but at this early stage of its implementation the evidence base of work and records of experiences to support the evaluations being made about pupils is narrow. RE is regularly monitored in the school by the RE co-ordinators and governors. They are clear on their next priorities and honest in steps for improvement, such as further developing Godly Play in the school and embedding the building block statements of Understanding Christianity to form more accurate assessment data. RE in the school meets the National Society Statement of Entitlement (June 2016).

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

The head teacher, senior leadership team and governors articulate the vision of the school effectively and this is based on distinctively Christian values. The number of these values is extensive and the school is now developing a strategy with stakeholders to review each value, reduce the number and make sure they are explicitly linked to the vision of the school. One staff member describes the head teacher as a 'compassionate leader', governors referred to the head teacher as 'visionary' based on the positive impact and rapid improvement she had brought about in the school over the last twelve months since her appointment.

Governors know the school well; they are a regular presence in the school. Governors are strategically planning how to develop the theological literacy of the children through building on the use of Godly play in EYFS and using the building block of learning in the Understanding Christianity Project as a focus for monitoring. They offer support as well as challenge in equal measure and balance formal monitoring with informal visits, including having link governor well-being meetings with all staff in the school. Governors recognise they are part of the vision of the school and put the distinctively Christian values into action in their work; one said 'we celebrate the creativity of every child and relish their individual contributions'.

All leaders have a good understanding of where the school is at in terms of strengths and areas to develop, they pragmatically prioritise improvement based on a sound self-evaluation process. Part of this process involves the growing of future church school leaders and training of staff, for example some teaching staff have recently completed the National Professional Qualification for School Leadership and others take an active role as Specialist Leaders in Education for the teaching school alliance the school is part of. One support staff member spoke of her recent application to undertake school based initial teacher training that will benefit her and the school, another teacher spoke of the masters degree she was undertaking to develop school specialism of language and communication difficulties. All of which clearly support the staff view of 'we are all valued and trained to do our jobs well'. RE has a high profile in the school, it is well led by joint co-ordinators and makes a good contribution to the vision of the school, although there are plans to revisit this and use the resource of Fruits of the Spirit to make it more relevant to the pupils in school.

Parents speak highly of the school and recognise the value of the distinctively Christian ethos it provides. One parent said, 'it is great that my child is learning about the teachings of Jesus, the school allows the children to develop their understanding and allows them then to make a choice about their belief as they get older in life.' This is enhanced by the close relationship of St Mary's and the local incumbent. This is valued and has been a continuous strength of the school; since the recent appointment of the current head this has flourished with many members of the congregation and ministry team working in school each week – significantly contributing and shaping the Christian ethos and work of the school in its journey to becoming outstanding.