

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Stapleford Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School and Nursery

Church Lane, Stapleford, Hertford, SG14 3NB

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust	N/A
Date of inspection	16 May 2017
Date of last inspection	01 May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided - 117455
Headteacher	James Shillito
Inspector's name and number	Lilian Weatherley 42

School context

Stapleford Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School and Nursery is a smaller than average school in the Diocese of St. Albans. There are 95 pupils on roll and four classes, each with two year groups. There is also a nursery which runs each morning for children from the age of two. The school is situated in the small village of Stapleford and serves the three villages of Stapleford, Bramfield and Waterford. Many of the pupils travel from out of catchment. The school also has links with the parishes of St Mary the Virgin, St Andrew's Bramfield and St Michael and all Angels Waterford. The headteacher has been in post since January 2015.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Stapleford Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School and Nursery are good

- The school's distinctive Christian character permeates the life of the school and creates a distinctively Christian family atmosphere where each child is valued. This has a significant impact on pupils' achievement and behaviour.
- Religious education (RE) and worship have a high profile in the school and strongly support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.
- Prayer and reflection play an important part in the daily routine of the school and its curriculum. This has a significant impact on pupils' spiritual development.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that the quality of teaching in RE is consistently good or better across all year groups in order to further raise standards in the subject.
- Ensure that the headteacher and governing body receive training and support from the diocese on the statutory differences between an aided church school and a community school.
- Develop staff understanding of and confidence in the Christian tradition in order that they can support the headteacher and lead worship.
- Develop more formal means of monitoring and evaluating the school's distinctive Christian character in order to show the impact of new initiatives on pupils and further support the school's strategic planning.

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

The Christian vision 'to learn within a school that promotes a Christian ethos while respecting diversity' underpins all aspects of school life. Underpinned by a clear set of Christian values and regular times for prayer, this is a school that is rapidly improving its distinctive Christian character. The worth of each pupil is paramount and all pupils are viewed as being special in the sight of God. Based on the key Christian values of hope, aspiration, dignity and respect, relationships are excellent and pupils achieve well. Results are above both local and national averages. Those pupils with special educational needs and those on pupil premium are well supported, make excellent progress and achieve well. The Christian character has a high profile and all connected with the school express nothing but praise for the direction in which the headteacher is moving the school. Parents and pupils who are new to the school feel welcomed and strongly supported within a 'Christian family atmosphere'. Pupils enjoy school and attendance is high. They feel safe and well cared for and thrive in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Pupil voice is strong and there is an active school council. Pupils are confident, well mannered and articulate. Older pupils demonstrate their understanding that everyone is special by their support the younger ones. There is a well-established and effective Year 6 'Buddy System' in place and pupils are able to benefit from wrap-around care and a wide variety of school clubs. Those interviewed said that bullying is rare and teachers are quick to resolve any differences of opinions.

Pupils are offered a wide range of experiences for SMSC development. They benefit from regular opportunities for prayer and reflection throughout the curriculum. Each class has a reflection table with candles and music, which are regularly used to create a calm, thoughtful and spiritual approach to learning. RE has taken a lead in this approach and is having a significant impact on pupils' spiritual development and their enjoyment of the subject. For example, 'the Big Questions' sessions in RE are very popular with the pupils who are eager to discuss philosophical ideas such as 'Has God always been present?' 'They make us think hard'.

The school celebrates the God-given talents of each child. Art and music play a key role in pupils' spiritual development. The vibrant displays create an inspirational learning environment and enhance pupils' learning. Music is a strength of the school and the talented school choir talk about the ways they have supported local, diocesan and national events. Respect and dignity for diverse communities begins in school with two members of staff from different religious traditions who regularly share their faith and enhance the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world. Charitable giving is high and pupils benefit from strong links with Enkereri school in the Massai Mara.

All pupils understand the importance of a clear set of Christian values; 'we learn to respect each other and not to judge the way other people think. We understand the importance of values such as respect, compassion, generosity and service in our lives'. Parents praise the impact that the school's Christian values have on their children within the home environment. The newly-introduced 'Random Acts of Kindness Award' is also having a significant impact on pupils' behaviour, which is generally excellent around the school and in class. In the words of the chair of governors, 'through collective worship, reflection and prayer, the children at Stapleford School develop a clear understanding of how Christian values can have a real and positive impact on their lives'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship has a high profile and underpins the life of the school, with times for prayer and reflection punctuating the school day. Pupils say the Grace before leaving their class for lunch; they all know the Lord's Prayer, key Christian greetings and say prayers before going home each day. There is also a school creed, which is recited daily in worship. Reflection is valued as a key part of learning. Pupils say how important these times of quiet and calm are in their everyday lives. 'We get lots of time to pray and think about things.'

Whole school worship is led by the headteacher and takes place daily. It has a significant impact on pupils' SMSC development. It is carefully planned with the support of the incumbent and is based on key Christian values from the Christian publication 'Roots and Fruits'. This contains a selection of Bible stories and Christian teaching.

Pupils enjoy worship and have an excellent understanding of the Anglican tradition and of Christianity as a worldwide faith. All worship begins with the lighting of three candles and the pupils interviewed from Years 1 to 6 were all able to explain the symbolism of the candles and, depending on their age, talk with confidence about the Trinity.

The worship observed was based on the value of 'service'. Pupils entered in a calm and respectful manner and the singing by the choir and pupils was of a high standard. Although the worship contained most of the elements to make it 'outstanding', the quantity of electronic equipment on the table/altar made it difficult for pupils to see the candles and cross clearly. They were therefore unable to appreciate fully the symbolism and use them as a meaningful focus for prayer.

The detailed planning shows that daily acts of worship provide many opportunities for pupil participation and discussion. There is evidence that prayers written by the pupils are used on a regular basis and pupils say how much they enjoy leading worship each half term. There is, however, little evidence of pupils evaluating their worship.

Links with the parish church are strong. The incumbent and members of her team are regular visitors to the school and lead worship each Wednesday. Pupils enjoy these sessions, which add to their theological understanding. The headteacher has also increased the number of visits to the parish church for festivals. The school now uses the church for most major times in the church year, for example the recent 'ashing' service in the church. Pupils and parents find this very special. Eucharistic worship does not currently take place but plans are in place to develop it.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

Standards and progress in RE are generally good and pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the Christian tradition and key Bible stories, as well as the other faiths studied. Some of the knowledge and understanding of Christianity is, however, strongly enhanced by the school's worship programme.

The quality of teaching in RE is inconsistent. Where teaching is good, teachers use a variety of methods to engage pupils and differentiate between the year groups. Teachers ask thought-provoking questions and set tasks that challenge pupils individually. Where teaching is less secure, a lack of skills to engage and motivate young pupils results in activities that do not meet the needs of individual pupils. Pupils become restless and unsettled. With two age groups in each class, this is having a detrimental impact on pupil progress. A work scrutiny also revealed the use of inappropriate worksheets which do not allow pupils to show fully what they know, understand and can do.

All staff have recently attended the 'Understanding Christianity' training and the pupils have created an excellent display of the concept chart. The relatively new subject leader, who is well informed and enthusiastic, has followed this up with a detailed action plan to implement the programme in depth after half term in order that pupils benefit from in-built continuity and progression across the year groups. She has put in place a regular programme of classroom monitoring and work scrutiny to support accurately the assessment and the evaluation of the subject now that the levels have been removed. The school currently follows the Hertfordshire syllabus but is in the process of planning to ensure that when implementing 'Understanding Christianity' they adequately cover the other world faiths studied.

The introduction of lighting a candle and using music for a moment of reflection at the start of RE has had a significant impact on the way in which the pupils view the subject and on their spiritual development. They all enjoy RE, they love exploring the 'Big Questions' and they see it as an important subject in the world in which we live. When asked what they might like to improve in the school several pupils commented that they would like more RE.

Each year the school holds a faith week and last year's visit to the Hindu Bhaktivedanta Manor was a great success with the pupils, who were eager to share their experiences. The fact that the RE subject leader is from the Sikh tradition and another member of staff is a Hindu further supports the pupils' knowledge and understanding of these faiths. Pupils benefit from teachers who help them compare aspects of these faiths with the Christian tradition.

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

Since the appointment of the new headteacher in 2015, the school's distinctive Christian character has gone from strength to strength. All those interviewed spoke passionately about the headteacher's 'outstanding' leadership. They praised the ways in which he has moved the school forward. All the issues from the previous inspection have been addressed and the school's character now has a high profile. There is an active governing body which has a clear strategic plan in place based on the SIAMS self-evaluation and the school's Christian vision to do everything they can for each child. RE is viewed as part of the core curriculum alongside English and maths, which gives it a high profile in the school. It also forms a key part of the school development plan, with a regular programme of monitoring in place to bring about improvements. The monitoring of worship is less secure and there is no evidence of formal monitoring. Staff and pupils constantly discuss issues related to the distinctive Christian character of the school, but this is implicit and taken for granted, especially with pupils achieving so well. Much is taking place to make Stapleford an outstanding church school but the school lacks a clear evidence bank to support its judgements. For example, the SIAMS self-evaluation is detailed but is mainly about provision and lacks sufficient evidence of the impact of actions on the pupils. Additional activities such as the school council reporting regularly to the governing body do not appear.

Links with parents are strong. Parents contribute fully to school life and to the links with the parish church.

Questionnaires reveal a high percentage of satisfaction for the ways in which the leadership is taking the school forward. Relationships with the parish clergy and the diocese are strong but the headteacher and the governing body have relied heavily on the regular visits from the local authority for support, and there has not been a diocesan health check. The result is that several aspects of the school's statutory paperwork are more relevant to a community school. For example, the collective worship policy is inaccurate for an aided school. Recent staffing issues have put extreme pressure on the headteacher and time constraints have meant that he has been unable to access the relevant diocesan training to support and guide him in his role.

Stapleford is a delightful church school. All stakeholders interviewed are fully able to articulate the school's Christian vision and values and speak highly of the way in which these have impacted the standards, behaviour and attitudes of the pupils. One parent commented, 'the school helps each child develop individually due to its strong Christian ethos while ensuring that they respect all others equally, no matter of differences or beliefs'.