

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Benington Church of England Primary School

Walkern Road, Benington, SG2 7LP

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

St Albans

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Hertfordshire

Name of multi-academy trust / federation [delete as appropriate]

n/a

Date/s of inspection

01 February 2018

Date of last inspection

19 March 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

voluntary controlled primary | 17389

Headteacher

Barbara Swann

Inspector's name and number

Shirley Whales 830

School context

Benington Church of England Primary School is a smaller than average, voluntary controlled village school. Pupils are organised in mixed-age classes. 40% of its pupils come from the village, whilst most of the other pupils travel from nearby Stevenage. A privately-run nursery is located on the school site. Almost all pupils have a White British background. The number of pupils for whom the school is in receipt of pupil premium funding and/or have special educational needs/ disabilities is lower than the national average. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2017.

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

- The exemplary leadership of the new headteacher, supported by governors and staff, ensures the school's Christian vision and character inform and shape all policy and practice.
- The school provides an inclusive Christian fellowship that nurtures and supports pupils and their families, ensuring that all can flourish and achieve.
- The school's Christian values are understood and championed by all members of the school and local community resulting in a shared Christian vision, thriving partnerships and collaborative learning.
- The passion and commitment of the headteacher and her staff continue to provide an unwavering focus on developing understanding of and respect for diversity and difference.

Areas to improve

- Continue to deepen and embed pupils' understanding of Christian tradition and practices by using age-appropriate liturgical language and deeper questions in both collective worship and religious education (RE).
- Ensure that regular monitoring and evaluation by school leaders and governors is formalised so that it systematically updates school improvement planning.
- Deepen pupils' spiritual awareness by providing more opportunities for reflection and increased understanding of spontaneous and personal prayer.

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

The mission statement of the school, 'Inspiring pupils to reach their full potential in our Christian family, through trust, equality, respect and care for all', is being realised. The words of one parent encapsulate the strong inclusivity of the school, 'the atmosphere in this calm, warm school is where everyone is valued'. The Christian foundation and ethos of the school is made explicit in displays around the school and in school policies. The school's Christian ethos, rooted in core Christian values enables all pupils to develop as unique individuals and, as a result, standards of attainment are good and are rising with pupils making good progress from their starting points. The school meets the government's floor standards for reading, writing and mathematics.

The strength of this school is that the shared and evident Christian values are 'lived out' in all aspects of school life. They are based on the teachings of Jesus and have become tangible in the words and actions of all. Pupils speak naturally and confidently about how they impact on their decisions and their learning. They describe how the values impact on their moral and social interactions, guiding them to make the right choices; they 'help you to become a better person'. The Christian values are also important and real to parents and carers as they help to form the basis for positive relationships and excellent support not only within the school but also across the community.

The strong relationships in the school reflect the mission and vision which are lived out by all members of the school family. Governors and staff embody the values in their work with parents to promote good attendance. This is 'more than a school' one parent enthused. There have been very few exclusions since the last inspection because in this highly inclusive school, great effort is placed on pre-emptive strategies that ensure good behaviour.

The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and is firmly underpinned by the school's Christian character. A wide variety of curricular and extra-curricular activities develop pupils' social skills. RE strongly supports the Christian character of the school and provides an excellent understanding of Christianity and an awareness of the multi-cultural and multi-faith world. Broad and rich, cross-curricular, learning experiences, which deepen pupils' spiritual understanding across the curriculum are taught in highly creative and challenging ways. Pupils' art work, especially in Oak class, is impressive as it is a good example of how pupils communicate their own spiritual thoughts. Recently introduced books in classrooms display pupils' comments on Bible stories. The use of these is developing the pupils' ability to express their feelings and reflect spiritually on the meaning in the texts.

Pupils explain how the values are linked to Bible stories, such as how the value of trust can be seen in the story of Noah's Ark; 'God put his trust in Noah just as we should trust our friends.' Pupils are also beginning to use the values to make links with other faith traditions, such as was observed in a Key Stage 2 RE lesson about Guru Nanak, during which pupils discussed the value of trust in the Sikh religion and compared it with the Christian value of trust.

Pupils' cultural and global awareness is enhanced through learning about faiths and cultures not just in RE but also through a recent link with St Mary's School in Singla, India. Pupils across the school have written introduction letters and are anxiously awaiting replies. As part of their project on rainforests, pupils in Beech class decided to earn money by doing tasks around the home; this helped them to buy and protect a piece of rainforest. A plan of visits and visitors from different faith traditions is well-established and, as a result, pupils' understanding of difference and diversity is well developed.

RE is a well-taught core subject, which makes an outstanding contribution to the school's Christian character. It helps pupils to explore the Christian interpretation of the school's values and to understand Christian belief and practice. They are beginning to appreciate Christianity as a global faith and value diversity in society. Pupils say that it helps them 'respect people who have other opinions'. Recent developments in RE using the Understanding Christianity resources have reinvigorated teachers, giving them a refreshing insight into teaching Christianity. The subject leader recognises the need to deepen and embed the liturgical language that accompanies the units.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development through the opportunities it provides for them to reflect on the Christian values. Pupils are developing their leadership skills through organising class worship. Pupil groups regularly write prayers and lead whole-school worship. Worship engages pupils through an assortment of media, enabling them to reflect on 'what we can do to help our friends' and "how we could do better'. In the act of worship seen at the time of inspection, pupils interacted by singing and answering questions. The lay reader referred to the Christian value of trust, when speaking about whether the disciples trusted Jesus. The act of worship engaged pupils of all ages and at the same time it demonstrated how through high levels of spiritual and moral reflection, they can relate biblical material and Christian teaching to events that happen in their own lives.

Pupils can explain the main Christian festivals and they contribute to the special services in church that are always well-attended by parents and community friends. Pupils are familiar with Anglican traditions but their understanding of the significance of these traditions is under developed. Worship themes are linked to the Christian values and Bible stories are used to exemplify. Pupils are asked to consider the connections and how they might impact on their own lives. Pupils can describe God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and they recognise the links between the lighting of the three candles at the start of worship. They also represent it pictorially as an apple both in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2. Pupils' understanding focuses on the significance of the apple as a symbol for the Trinity.

Parents are invited to participate in Friday celebration assemblies, where their children are rewarded for being Benington Bees, which is for demonstrating the Christian values. References are made to the Christian values and parents appreciate the connexion through updates in newsletters and the information given to them by their children.

A time for reflection and prayer is integral to worship as well as daily life. Prayer books, in designated class reflection areas, are used for quiet thought and contemplation. Whilst pupils are encouraged to use these class areas for still or calm moments, there are limited opportunities for interactive personal reflection and prayer.

Recent evaluations of worship by staff and governors have been a welcome introduction to the monitoring schedule. However, school leaders recognise the need to increase formal monitoring which can then be used to inform future planning and ensure that provision is improved.

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

The new headteacher is giving outstanding Christian leadership by modelling the Christian vision and values at the heart of this 'family' school. Her passion ensures that the school's leaders and managers remain focused on the pupils' needs both in terms of their learning and their well-being. Because of this vision, all members of staff work effectively as a cohesive team and demonstrate respect and care for each other and feel valued whatever their role. She is committed to the ongoing impact of these values. Good communication is applauded by parents who feel informed and engaged with their children's learning and achievements. The extent of their appreciation and love for their school is evident, 'We would like them to build a secondary school just like this one in the village. We want a secondary school that cares just as much about our children's learning and welfare as this one.'

Supportive governors make a good contribution and informally monitor the distinctiveness of the school. To gain a clearer understanding of the school's effectiveness as a church school, they understand the need to embed a self-evaluation programme that involves all stakeholders in securing the impact of the Christian ethos on personal development, academic achievement and well-being. The headteacher has a good understanding of the strategic direction of the school based on an insightful analysis of school and pupil performance. As a result, areas to improve as identified in the previous inspection have been met. The headteacher ensures that the school's Christian values are at the forefront of any decision-making procedures and new initiatives. She elicits the views of other members of the school community through effective collaboration and open and honest avenues of communication. Professional development is a high priority for the staff team and work within the local cluster of schools and the diocese is effective. It enables good practice to be shared and access to a wealth of support and expertise. This is having an impact on the quality of support given to the subject leader for RE and collective worship. School leaders ensure that the statutory requirements for both RE and collective worship are met.

Links with the church are enhanced through a monthly Saturday Club, which is attended by pupils from the school and beyond. The Club is run by an ardent team of local parishioners who liaise with the school to ensure that provision is purposeful and of mutual benefit. They choose topics such as 'Fruits of the Spirit' and 'Friendship' and use the topics as an opportunity to explore what Jesus taught. One of the church leaders, who is also a governor, explained that Saturday Club was like being part of an 'extended Christian family'.

The partnership with local support networks such as the Saturday Club and Beane Valley Children's Centre is much valued. It enhances the links within the local community and helps to develop the pupils' understanding of the role that they play in the local and wider community. Pupils and parents help in a practical way by donating gifts, which are sent to a local family in crisis. One parent described this as the 'bigger picture in a small environment.'