

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Helen's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Greenhill
Alveston
South Gloucestershire
BS35 2QX

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Bristol
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	South Gloucestershire
Date of inspection	13 March 2018
Date of last inspection	07 March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 109158
Headteacher	Andy Spens
Inspector's name and number	Patricia Morris 626

School context

St Helen's is a slightly smaller than average sized primary school with 208 children on roll. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average as is the number supported by Pupil Premium. The majority of children are of White British heritage. The headteacher has been in post since January 2014. Attendance is slightly above the national average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Helen's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The dedicated and inspirational leadership of the headteacher, supported by experienced and committed governors and staff, ensure an exceptionally clear vision is continually moving the school forward as a church school.
- Distinctively Christian values are made explicit and permeate every aspect of school life, successfully impacting on children's excellent behaviour, relationships and attitudes to learning.
- The inclusive Christian ethos, where every child feels nurtured and valued as an individual, encourages children to express their thoughts with confidence and to know that their opinions will be valued.
- A highly developed interpretation of spirituality, and cross-curricular opportunities to engage in high quality experiences, is enriching the curriculum and contributing to children's growing awareness of their own spirituality.
- The excellent partnership with local churches cultivates opportunities to engage and challenge children in new experiences.

Areas to improve

- Involve children in plans to develop the spiritual garden in order to further engage them in high quality opportunities for spiritual development.
- Embed the links with the school in Uganda to further develop children's appreciation of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith.

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

The Christian ethos and welcoming atmosphere is immediately apparent on entering the school. Distinctively Christian values are deeply embedded and permeate every part of school life. Twelve core Christian values are at the heart of the school and make a very positive impact on children's lives and achievements. All members of the school community articulate the values and children show an excellent understanding of what they represent and how to use them on a daily basis. Values strongly underpin the school vision of 'Excellence, enjoyment and achievement within a nurturing Christian community', which clearly shapes the daily running of the school. Children really understand this vision and articulate what it means to them. They are proud of the inspirational phrase 'Flying High. Soar on wings like eagles', which encapsulates the vision and forms the basis of the school's behaviour code. Children know this phrase is rooted in the Bible and confidently explain how they each made a bird mobile and hung them from the ceiling to symbolise that 'we fly together as one school but are all individual'. The Christian character of the school has a very high profile and is reflected in the many vibrant displays around the school. It consistently informs the school's approach to attendance and inclusion, generating excellent behaviour and ensuring children feel nurtured and valued. Everyone works together as a team ensuring extremely strong relationships contribute to children's positive attitudes to learning. The school have worked closely with the Diocese to develop a united understanding of spirituality across the school, which is reflected through a shared and consistent vocabulary. This has produced a highly developed awareness of personal spirituality with children confidently voicing what it means to them as individuals. Regular opportunities to engage in high quality experiences contribute to children's growing awareness of others and the world around them. This is particularly obvious from the excited way they speak of the development of an outdoor spiritual garden. They are enthusiastic about working with an artist to incorporate their ideas in the design saying, 'it is a place to be peaceful and calm' and 'we are planting a flower to represent each value'. Children communicate real ownership of the project, describing how their ideas are already coming to fruition and powerfully reflecting how it is making them think about caring for their world by incorporating innovative recycling ideas. They realise it is a long term project and acknowledge how they are 'growing with the garden'. Religious education (RE) makes a significant contribution in determining the Christian character of the school. Children are excited and challenged by RE. There is a high degree of understanding and respect for diversity and difference in other faith communities. This is further developed through visits to different places of worship and by innovative 'faith stations' positioned around the school so that children have opportunities to handle artefacts from other faiths and to ask questions. The introduction of the 'Understanding Christianity' resource is making a positive contribution in deepening children's thinking and ability to question. It makes an excellent contribution to children's understanding of the world and their own experiences within it. Children are fully aware that Christianity is a world faith. The school are further developing this aspect through corresponding with an international school located in a refugee camp in Northern Uganda.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship has a very high priority and plays an important role in the life of the school. Worship is strongly underpinned by Christian values and the impact is clearly seen throughout the school. Children are totally engaged and inspired to live out values. They show an excellent awareness of links to Bible stories and the teachings of Jesus as well as their relevance to life today. Planning is thorough, well organised and underpinned by the 'Flying High' vision, raising children's aspirations and encouraging them to be the best they can be. A range of leaders ensures rich experiences, with children particularly valuing the 'Open the Book' worship and confidently articulating its importance in school life. The introduction of a very enthusiastic children's ethos team is making a significant impact to their involvement in planning and leading their own worship. Reflection times are a natural part of worship and are well supported by the 'Windows, Mirrors, Doors' resources. A key reflection question linked to the weekly theme in worship, such as 'How can we defeat our fears?' is posed at the end of each week to encourage children to stop and consider their thoughts more deeply. Their ideas are then recorded, and shared for discussion, in class reflection books. Reflection and prayer strongly support children's personal spiritual journey. Children recognise the importance of prayer and have a very good understanding of why we pray as demonstrated when talking about a central prayer tree and how different colours represent a different type of prayer. They are particularly proud of the prayer flags on display saying, 'every child in the school designed their own and wrote what was most important to them on their flag'. The 'Open the Book' team enrich children's understanding of prayer through running termly 'prayer spaces', which enable children to explore life questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way. The impact is seen in children's confidence to voice opinions, knowing they are respected. This commitment from the team is one of many examples of the exceptionally strong partnership between the school and local churches. Children speak respectfully about going to church to support work in RE and for special celebrations throughout the church year. The vicar visits school on a regular basis to take worship and has spent some time supporting children in developing their understanding of the Trinity. Children speak naturally about three parts making up one God and one child confidently explained, 'Jesus is the incarnation of God'. Robust monitoring and

evaluation of worship have a clear purpose and are managed effectively. Feedback from a range of stakeholders provides insight into its importance and how worship influences the school community.

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

The headteacher is inspirational in providing exceptionally effective leadership. He is extremely well supported by a committed and experienced team of staff and governors. All leaders articulate and promote an impressive, united vision rooted in explicit Christian values that impact positively on children's lives. There is an excellent understanding of the school's distinctiveness with accurate self-evaluation by all leaders. Governors are fully informed and knowledgeable about the strengths and areas for development of the school. They understand that regular monitoring and evaluation is fundamental in ensuring that the school continues to develop its distinctive Christian character. Their firm commitment to continual and sustained improvement means that personal skills are used very effectively. The school actively develop future leaders of church schools and are currently involved in supporting other schools within the authority. Excellent leadership of RE leads to highly effective practice within a creative and engaging curriculum. Standards in RE are extremely high and at least in line with other core subjects. The invaluable partnerships with local churches and the community are further strengthened through joint activities such as a recent fundraising activity to raise money for a shelter in a refugee camp in Uganda that enables children to continue lessons in the very hot weather. This not only gives children an understanding of life in a contrasting location but also allows them to empathise with children who have lost their homes and had to move to another country. Children are inspired to help these children and the knowledgeable way they talk about the links that are being developed is both powerful and humbling. They are fully aware of others who are less fortunate and willingly raise funds to support more local charities. Questionnaires show that the majority of parents have an extremely positive view of the school. They say they 'feel privileged with the education that children are receiving' and that 'Christian values show through in everything the school does, nurturing and developing the whole child, successfully preparing them for the future'. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.

SIAMS report March 2018 St Helen's Church of England VC Primary School Alveston Bristol BS35 2QX