

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Quarry Bank Road, Keele, Newcastle, Staffordshire ST5 5AF

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Lichfield
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Staffordshire
Date of inspection	1 May 2018
Date of last inspection	March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled Primary 124254
Headteacher	Liz McAvan
Inspector's name and number	Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

St John's School currently has 195 pupils on roll who are mainly of White British background and from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. A number of parents work or study at the university which is nearby. 18 different languages are spoken in this small church school. Many pupils travel from out of the catchment area. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is below average. Religious education (RE) is led by the headteacher.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's as a Church of England school are good

- This is a welcoming and inclusive Christian community which embraces difference and diversity and nurtures the spiritual journeys of all.
- Confident and articulate pupils make good progress and achieve well, both academically and personally. This takes place in an environment where the Christian values of hope, love, joy, peace and friendship are lived out by the whole community.
- The partnership between the churches and the school enriches the worshipping lives of everyone in this community.

Areas to improve

- Extend the regular monitoring of RE and collective worship by the governors and embed the gathering of pupil perceptions in evaluating collective worship as key aspects of Christian distinctiveness.
- Enrich St John's outward looking global dimension of life by enabling pupils to grow in their understanding of Christianity as a worldwide faith. This supports their spiritual and cultural development.
- Ensure pupils and adults grow in their understanding of the Christian belief of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and their knowledge of St John the Baptist, after whom their parish church

and school are dedicated, to nurture their spiritual journeys.

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

St John's school's vision, 'to be the best we can be in our Christian family' helps inspire all to love, care and respect one another, celebrating different cultures and beliefs. Many overseas families enhance this Christian school through the rich cultures they bring and share. Christian values, such as joy, peace, hope, forgiveness and love enable pupils to learn, grow and flourish. Attendance is good and relationships and behaviour are very good. This is because the school's Christian ethos raises the importance of the way in which the Christian values are lived out and upheld by the whole community. For example, as one member of staff affirmed, 'This is a kind, caring and inclusive school where everyone feels respected, valued and safe.' St John's knows its families well and extends compassion when families need to return to their countries of origin for funerals or celebrations, such as for a Bar Mitzvah. All achievement is valued, and all groups of pupils supported in their learning. For example, in this dyslexia friendly school, there are constant reminders of positive role models from all walks of life. These include HRH Prince Henry of Wales, former prima ballerina, Darcey Bussell and musicians, such as John Lennon. Such high profile figures inspire pupils to persevere and succeed. Pupils are creative, reflective learners and embrace teamwork. This results in pupils, including those who are vulnerable, making good progress and achieving well. More able pupils are challenged and attend booster classes at local secondary schools. Musical and sporting achievements are also encouraged. For example, pupils play the guitar in collective worship. Older pupils have the opportunity to learn German. All this takes place within a spirit of perseverance and not giving up, drawing on inspiration from Bible stories. Since the last inspection, there are now verses from the Bible proudly displayed around school, such as, 'May the joy of the Lord fill our hearts' This results in pupils making links between the Bible, core values, such as joy, and daily life.

Worship and RE make good contributions to pupils' spiritual and personal development and to the Christian character of this school. For example, pupils and adults speak of the inner peace found in worship. Pupils go on to articulate how, 'happiness is with you for a certain amount of time, but joy is always with you' and much more deep seated. Their confidence in explaining the detail of the Christian story of salvation is very good. For example, they refer to Mary as a virgin and recall well the events of Pentecost. They also enjoy sharing the prayers they have written on peace and hope. Pupils say they find RE exciting and like learning new things they didn't know before. For example, they like asking deep questions, such as, 'Did Jesus know he was really going to be crucified?' and 'How did you feel when Judas betrayed you?'

Pupils' global awareness is enhanced by the many diverse cultures welcomed into the family of St John's and by their active fundraising. This nurtures well their experience of Christianity as a worldwide faith. Whilst this is outward looking, and the partnership between the parish church and Keele Chapel is very good; the school is mindful of the need to extend the programme of visits and visitors to enrich pupils' spiritual and cultural development.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is an important part of school life at St John's and engages adults and pupils alike. It is varied in its approach and has an emphasis on Christian values, key festivals in the church year and biblical teaching. This ensures that Jesus is central to the worship which takes place. There are close links with nearby St John's Church as well as the chapel at Keele University. The pattern of worship includes church services on All Saints' Day and Ash Wednesday. As such, this makes a strong contribution to enriching the importance of Anglican traditions in the worshipping lives of pupils and adults, including parents. Pupils pray and reflect, using The Lord's Prayer, and prayers at the start and end of each day. Pupils comment that, 'it helps you feel close to God when you pray'. One pupil noted that praying helped them to be a better person.

After the last inspection, a worship club was set up, but this did not reach out to many pupils.

Consequently, the school took a fresh approach to focus on class worship, for pupils to write prayers and use role play. This was quite successful in involving the pupils. As a result, pupils enjoy being part of the worship council, with one pupil commenting, 'I'm on worship council at the moment, it's cool!' Pupils now help to plan and lead the Harvest, Christmas and Easter services held in church. They are also involved in daily school worship, confidently reading from the Bible and taking part in drama and role plays. Pupils comment that they would like to plan and lead worship more frequently, even if they find such a leadership role 'a bit scary at times'. Next steps include involving pupils in a special service to be held at Keele Chapel in November to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the ending of the First World War.

Pupils are growing in their understanding of the Christian belief of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They speak of 'God created the world. You can't see Him, but He's always with you.' They are well versed in the events of Ascension-tide and can explain the sadness of the disciples who found joy in looking towards Jesus going upwards to join His Father in heaven. They explain joy as 'a deep feeling within you.'

The school acknowledges that helping pupils and adults better understand the importance of the key Christian belief in the Trinity is an area for development. In addition, they are keen to help pupils and adults understand more about John the Baptist, to whom their parish church and school are dedicated to enrich their spiritual journeys.

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

There is a renewed emphasis and impetus for the school's leaders and governors to refresh their thinking about their vision and values. Over the last year, they have looked at the vision and collective worship has been held in St John's Church three times a year. For example, Candlemas and Ash Wednesday were included in the celebration of the church year. Areas from the previous inspection have been addressed and self-evaluation is accurate, with key priorities for the school going forward. Leaders and governors are committed to the wellbeing of staff and pupils alike and welcome and support training and professional development from the diocese and other partners. Staff value the network and partnerships with other schools which is available to them and supports them in their work. For example, training on creative RE has been welcomed and used. Governors have not 'sat on their laurels' but are 'restless' and keen to move forward in their roles and responsibilities. For example, whilst they carry out learning walks in all subjects and conduct book scrutinies, lessons are not always observed. The school's leaders and governors are mindful of this and acknowledge the need to extend the monitoring of RE and collective worship. Whilst these two key aspects of Christian distinctiveness meet statutory requirements, a more robust and regular monitoring cycle ensures they have a high profile within school. The headteacher leads RE and provides training and support for staff. Pupils and staff have welcomed new and creative approaches to teaching RE. An area for ongoing development is progression and attainment for all, across all subjects, with a significant number of pupils making good progress.

Pupils' leadership roles are well established, such as serving on the school council. The parents' forum, however, has been recently set up. St John's recognises the importance of the support they receive from the diocese in terms of the benefits of training.

Community links are very good, notably through the churches and the support of the local foodbank. In addition, the school choir and orchestra play at local events, which is much appreciated by parents. They value the open door policy of the school and the fact that, 'the headteacher and the deputy headteacher are always there for you'. They affirm the school listens to them and supports them. They go on to say their children encourage them to be the best they can be at home too, and to live out the school's vision, to be the best we can be in our Christian family'.