

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School	
Sawyers Hall Lane, Brentwood, Essex CM15 9BX.	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chelmsford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Essex
Date of inspection	8 November 2017
Date of last inspection	November 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Junior - 115179
Headteacher	Dean Moran
Inspector's name and number	Gillian Holmes 849

School context

This larger than average junior school serves the communities in the parishes of St Thomas of Canterbury and St George the Martyr in Brentwood. Currently there are 310 pupils in 10 classes. The pupils are mainly from White British backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities is below the national average. The recent Ofsted inspection graded the school as good. The school has strong links with the church and the community. It plays an active role with other local schools in the Brentwood Collaborative Partnership.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Thomas of Canterbury Junior as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The Christian vision and values are lived out and evident in all aspects of school life.
- The Christian ethos is palpable through the friendly, caring atmosphere and is reflected by the positive attitudes of all pupils and staff.
- The high quality of collective worship and religious education (RE) contributes significantly to the ongoing development of the school's Christian character.
- The very close relationship with the local church has had a considerable impact upon the spiritual journey of all members of the school community.

Areas to improve

- Develop an outside space for quiet reflection and prayer which can be used by the school community in order to enhance opportunities for spiritual development.
- Extend the teaching of religious education (RE) and spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development opportunities by providing opportunities for pupils to visit different places of worship. These should include those of other faiths and cultures.

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

There is a very positive Christian ethos that underpins the school's work and is effectively expressed through its core Christian values. The values of respect, responsibility, honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, caring and forgiveness are exemplified by the caring and supportive relationships between teachers, pupils, their families and the community. These values are linked expressly with biblical teaching and form the basis for the school's focus on the academic and personal development of its pupils. The school's policies and practice support its vision of 'realising the potential of every child within a caring Christian community'. Its core Christian values are both explicit and implicit and are referred to appropriately in activities throughout the day. They drive the excellent behaviour displayed throughout the school. Pupils are polite, well-mannered and very proud of their church school and what they can achieve. They are confident at expressing their ideas and opinions within a culture of mutual respect. There have been no exclusions and incidents of bullying are very rare but are dealt with swiftly and fairly in keeping with the school's Christian ethos. As an expression of its caring Christian ethos, pupils enjoy coming to school and so attendance is very good. Current pupil progress data shows that all pupils make good or better progress from their starting point in reading, writing, mathematics and RE. Disadvantaged pupils receive tailored support to enable them to access the whole curriculum. Attainment is mostly inline or above local and national expectations. Writing is not as strong as other subjects but this has been recognised and is being very well addressed. Teaching is at least good and often outstanding and teachers are supported by an experienced, well-trained and resourced team of teaching assistants. Together the staff ensure that the pupils receive excellent educational and pastoral support underpinned by Christian ethos. There is a rich learning environment that is inspiring and interactive which supports the development of pupils' reflection and deepening thinking skills. Displays frequently incorporate questions for pupils to consider and respond to. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their learning. They are excited and challenged by RE and collective worship. Both areas contribute effectively to whole-school ethos. They talk knowledgeably about how their growing Christian spiritual understanding affects how they behave and their attitudes to other people. The school curriculum has a clear focus upon developing pupils' SMSC understanding which is very good. This also contributes towards pupils having a fair degree of understanding and respect for diversity and difference including in religious belief and practice. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to explore places of worship from other faiths and cultures which limit greater understanding of diversity in worship. Pupils support for a school in Uganda through the Watoto organisation and other charitable fundraising events has significantly deepened their understanding of Christianity as a world faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Pupils have a positive attitude to worship which plays an important role in school life. Prayerful and meaningful worship takes place with a focus on Christian values and biblical teaching. This contributes significantly to the school's life, to pupils' very good spiritual and moral development and to enhancing the school's Christian distinctiveness. Through worship pupils have developed a confidence in explaining the events of Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. This indicates their good understanding of the Christian year and the importance of Jesus for Christians. They can also talk confidently about other key Christian beliefs and concepts such as that of God as Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Biblical material is used regularly in worship and pupils are encouraged to make the links with their school's Christian values. Opportunities are given for pupils to take an active role in daily worship through questioning and reflection and pupils regularly plan and lead worship. Positive links are made between RE and worship. An example of this is the introduction of concepts from the course 'Understanding Christianity'. This has helped pupils to talk confidently about the timeline of the Bible and how God has guided his people through the Old and New Testament and still does today. The school acknowledges the importance of prayer. Pupils have up to four opportunities to pray collectively throughout the day. They write their own prayers and these are collated so that each class has its own book of prayers. They also say the Lord's prayer regularly in worship. There has been a missed opportunity to develop an outside space for quiet reflection and prayer. The recently retired parish priest has left a legacy of a clear understanding of Anglican worship practices, through his visits to school, leading worship and working with the headteacher to plan the worship programme. The priest from another local church will be supporting the school until a new parish priest is appointed. A school Eucharist is held each half term for pupils and parents which contribute to pupils' Anglican experience. The close links with the church were illustrated by one pupil reflecting on how lucky they were that their school had its 'own' church. Half of the governing body are members of St Thomas' church and the school choir regularly support church events. Year 6 pupils are given the opportunity to attend confirmation classes in school led by the parish priest. At least twenty pupils each year complete the classes and are confirmed which deepens their commitment to the church community. The church is used 3 times a year to celebrate harvest, Easter and for the Year 6 leavers' service. All these are well attended by parents and members of the community. This successfully enhances the school's family

feel and links with its community. The church's generosity in providing all Year 6 pupils with a Bible is another example of the close links between school and church. Acknowledging the importance of worship in the school all governors attend and monitor worship as part of their termly curriculum visits. Monitoring is also carried out weekly by pupils. The monitoring informs the planning and as a consequence pupils' enjoyment increases and worship is enhanced.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

There is an accurate and focused action plan to drive continued progress. The RE subject leader has attended training opportunities provided by the Diocese which have enabled her to develop a high level of skill. She has been very effective in raising the expertise of the staff through school in-service training. Staff follow the diocesan syllabus and lessons are very well planned. As a consequence teaching of RE is at least good and often outstanding. Teachers' marking ensures that pupils know how to improve. Pupils progress in RE is inline and often above national expectations. She has introduced a new system to more effectively assess pupils' progress in RE across the school. Teachers are now more able to make accurate assessments of pupils' progress. The subject leader regularly monitors both the teaching and learning. Governors also regularly monitor RE and acknowledge its key importance within the school and its contribution to developing the ethos. Lessons are exciting and challenging with pupils being given opportunities to investigate, interpret and question. Pupils have a good understanding of Christianity and key aspects of the Bible. They speak confidently about how RE, the school's Christian values and the Bible stories they know all influence their lives and affect their attitudes and behaviour. Pupils are encouraged to ask deep meaningful questions and are given opportunities to analyse and interpret what they learn. This has enabled the development of pupils' understanding of the similarities and differences between Christianity and other faiths. There are appropriate links made between the Christian values, RE, worship and the curriculum. Pupils talk enthusiastically about RE because staff plan creative and enjoyable lessons appropriate to the age and ability of the pupils.

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

The headteacher, his staff and governors have worked effectively to demonstrate the school's vision and Christian values to pupils, parents and the local community. As a consequence the school is a welcoming, caring, inclusive and celebratory place. Rigorous self-evaluation is carried out by staff and governors which results in clear action plans. The school has successfully addressed the areas for improvement from the previous denominational inspection. For example governors and pupils are actively involved in the monitoring and evaluating of worship. The experienced and competent subject leader of RE and the experienced headteacher who leads collective worship ensure that these areas have a high priority and that staff are given appropriate training and resources to deliver excellent practice. The RE subject leader has also been sharing her subject expertise with neighbouring church schools. Arrangements for RE and worship meet statutory requirements. The whole curriculum is underpinned by a Christian vision for education agreed by all the staff. Governors fulfil their role of strategic partners in supporting both the ongoing academic progress for all pupils and furthering pupils' Christian understanding. The school is well supported by the Diocese. Staff and pupils also benefit strongly from being part of the Brentwood Collaborative Partnership, a group of local schools who meet together regularly. This provides valuable continual professional development for staff and opportunities to share expertise across the curriculum. It also allows staff to check their judgements of pupils' standards and progress by moderating pupils' work. Pupils have the opportunity to join with pupils from the other schools to take part in a range of activities. Staff are well supported for working in a church school and in-service training has a high priority. This includes succession planning to prepare staff for leadership within a church school. Parents are actively involved in the school's life and its Christian foundation through regular invitations to events and the informative website. Parents praise the school for its 'open door' policy and the excellent relationships between staff and parents. The very active parent association raises money for the school and supports its links with the church and the community. The school justly prides itself in teaching the pupils to actively be members of the local and the worldwide community. For example the choir regularly performs at church and at community events around the neighbourhood. Pupils actively raise funds for local and overseas charities.

SIAMS report November 2017 St Thomas of Canterbury CEVA Junior School, Brentwood, Essex, CM15 9BX.