

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St. Stephen's Church of England Primary School

Albyn Road, Deptford, London, SE8 4ED	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Southwark
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Lewisham
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	N/A
Date of inspection	14 March 2018
Date of last inspection	14 March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 100734
Headteacher	Frances Holland
Inspector's name and number	Jenny Earp 288

School context

St. Stephen's CE School is a one form entry school with 266 pupils on roll, ranging from nursery to Year 6, serving Deptford in the local authority of Lewisham. The largest ethnic groups are Black African and Black Caribbean. The proportion of pupils receiving special educational needs support and those with English as a second language is above the national average. A relatively large number of pupils come from disadvantaged backgrounds. School attendance is good and above the national average. The school was judged to be good at the most recent Ofsted inspection in March 2017. In September 2017, a new deputy head was appointed.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Stephen's Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Life at St. Stephen's is infused with an outstanding ethos of Christian family in which every child is valued and loved.
- The specific Christian values at the school underpin every aspect of its work and provide a secure anchor for pupils' lives.
- The strong partnership of the school and St. Stephen's church is a beacon of faith, hope and love in the local community.
- The headteacher, staff and governors all work together in Christian love in order to uphold the ambitious Christian vision for the school.
- Collective worship is inspirational and makes an outstanding contribution to the school's Christian ethos.

Areas to improve

- Develop links with global communities so that pupils deepen their understanding of Christianity as a worldwide faith.
- Increase the opportunities for pupils to visit places of worship in order to enhance their knowledge of other faiths and beliefs.

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

The explicitly Christian values of respect, honesty, self-control, kindness and perseverance are totally central to the life of the school and drive its every action. Because these values are understood by all, they very successfully support the school's Christian and multi-cultural identity. St. Stephen's is a happy and highly inclusive school in which those of all faiths and none are welcomed equally. This can be seen in the school's powerful mission statement, which outlines clearly the desire, through Christian values, to empower all its pupils to face life's challenges and reach their full potential. Pupils know they are loved and that each individual matters to all adults in the school. Consequently, they feel safe and happy and know they can talk to someone if they need to share a worry. Although many join the school with skills below the national expectations, they make good progress from their starting points and attain well, often above the national average. The Christian character contributes outstandingly well to the academic achievement, spiritual development and wellbeing of all pupils, regardless of ability or background. This is evidenced in the way special attention and care is given to pupils who are disadvantaged or vulnerable and to the way families who are experiencing difficulties are well supported. In particular, the inclusion manager provides valuable assistance to families and because of this attendance is high. Parents of all faiths acknowledge the impact of the school's Christian character and say they feel upheld by the school, who 'always deal with any issues straight away'. The distinctively Christian character shapes the relationships between all members of the school community and staff speak warmly of the Christian love which the headteacher shows to them. They cite, in particular, the deep impact on them all during training days at the beginning of the school year. A Bible verse is shared with all staff, who are then invited to walk together around the school, praying in every classroom for pupils, staff and for the new school year. This illustrates how well the school promotes personal spirituality, self-esteem, good work attitudes and mutual support based on distinctively Christian values. Staff often refer to values when dealing with situations during the day, allowing pupils to make their own choices based on self-reflection. This proves powerful in pupils changing their thinking about an issue. As a Year 5 boy commented, 'When you have self-control you control your feelings, you forgive, then carry on and don't retaliate.' Religious education (RE) plays an important role in affirming the school's Christian distinctiveness and has a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC). Pupils are motivated and challenged by RE, embracing and celebrating the school's rich diversity with alacrity and engage in experiences that develop a personal spirituality. For instance, events on other world faiths held at the school are exemplary and the school often shares their outstanding work across the diocese. As a result, pupils have a good understanding and respect for diversity, and express a sense of belonging to the school family. Although pupils have a good understanding of Christianity in this country, their understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith is less secure.

The effectiveness of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is at the heart of the school day and pupils say unanimously how much they enjoy it, regardless of their own faith or belief. This is because the worship programme is rich, varied, thoughtfully planned and delivered with strategic vision by the school's Faith Team. The whole school community engages well with collective worship and say it makes a real difference to their lives. The school's vision and Christian values are embedded in the content of worship, which is relevant and inclusive, so that all who take part are affirmed and their personal spiritual awareness heightened. The enthusiastic worship leaders work together closely to deliver outstanding worship based on biblical teaching. They all participate fully in the review of worship, which enables them to keep governors very well informed. The school has procedures in place for all stakeholders to lead, monitor and evaluate the impact of worship regularly, resulting in continuous improvement. Because the school benefits from a very close relationship with St. Stephen's church and the vicar leads worship regularly, pupils experience a wealth of Anglican traditions and a real sense of church-based worship. They sing the creed at the start of worship and repeat the words of the Trinity as the worship candle is being lit. As a result of this strong focus on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, pupils talk about it with an impressive degree of understanding. The school's Worship Team, pupils' uplifting singing and the school's own orchestra all contribute significantly to the quality and joyous atmosphere in worship. One child performed a song about Jesus she wrote herself to the delight of all present on the day of the inspection. A wide variety of speakers from different denominations lead worship and because of this, pupils are offered a rich experience, which is always fresh and interesting. One pupil stated, 'I get excited when the headteacher introduces a new visitor because you never know what is going to happen, but it's always fun'. Prayer and reflection are integral parts of school life, enabling pupils to reflect on deep questions and world concerns. Pupils say that during reflection and prayer time, when talking to God, they are given time to think about decisions they make. This respect for prayer builds pupils' personal spirituality and nurtures their personal faith. There are numerous prayer and reflection areas around the school and pupils say they help them to 'be calm, cool down and think about how to behave' if they are feeling unhappy or angry. Pupils acquire outstandingly mature knowledge and understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the meaning of the Holy Spirit and the key features of the Anglican tradition, thus fulfilling successfully the development areas from the previous inspection.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The achievement of pupils in RE is frequently higher than other subjects in the core curriculum. This is because the outstanding quality of teaching and learning ensures that pupils are engaged in their learning and enjoy the subject. Pupils progress rapidly, developing an understanding of Christianity and other faiths and beliefs. RE is regarded as a core subject and its high priority is evident from displays around the school, the scope of work and the standards of presentation. Pupils are inspired by and respond positively to RE, respecting others and valuing opportunities to think about complex questions and listening to different opinions. A Year 6 pupil stated that RE is 'a chance for the whole class to ask questions and have deep thinking'. Families at the school have a diverse range of beliefs and faiths and parents visit the school regularly to share their expertise with pupils. This has a positive impact on pupils' knowledge of other religions and as a consequence, pupils understand and make links between the beliefs, practices and value systems of a broad spectrum of faiths studied. However, there have been fewer opportunities for pupils to visit different places of worship in recent years. The RE curriculum is rich and varied, enabling pupils to acquire knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith through many varied learning opportunities. For instance, Key Stage 2 pupils learn about Passiontide through working at a series of highly effective RE stations, each providing probing questions and opportunities for practical learning. In this way, pupils are able to use creativity to apply their knowledge and skills in RE to their own personal reflections on questions of deep meaning and purpose. In Key Stage 1, pupils undertake practical activities, such as undertaking water activities to demonstrate its symbolism of forgiveness. Even the youngest children in the nursery are able to respond to questions succinctly about the parable of the wise and foolish man, with one saying, 'Build your life on Jesus'. The current RE leader, although new to the school, has had previous experience in leading the subject and monitors RE across the school very well. She ensures that the new diocesan RE scheme is being used effectively and that transition to the new content and pedagogy is impacting positively. Highly effective use is made of rigorous assessment to improve teaching and learning in RE. Monitoring confirms that links with the Christian values of the school and SMSC development are central to the RE curriculum and consequently have a positive and significant impact on pupils.

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

Standards are high in all aspects of the work of the school and expressed clearly by all leaders who articulate the Christian value of perseverance. The headteacher provides strong and dedicated leadership, based on her passion to provide high quality church school education and care for all, strengthened by Christian values. As a result, leaders and governors know their school well and provide a rich and balanced curriculum that reflects the diverse cultural experiences of the pupils. The school has a well-defined vision in terms of the direction, ethos and Christian nurture of the children. As a clear expression of the school's deeply rooted Christian ethos and values, senior leaders and governors ensure that structures are in place, which focus directly on pupils' attainment, progress and wellbeing. This means that leaders have an in-depth understanding of the school's performance and distinctiveness based on effective, systematic self-evaluation. This is highly evident in the school's improvement plan and Faith Team minutes. Governors recognise the importance of developing all staff as future school leaders, who are very well supported for working at the school. Recruitment procedures and ongoing training support professional development well. In particular, the headteacher gives careful and valuable induction to new members of staff who quickly feel welcome and part of the family of St. Stephen's. Parents and staff speak very highly of the headteacher and the significant impact she has on the wellbeing and progress of all pupils and comment on the strong Christian ethos running through the heart of the school. Staff feel privileged to work in the school because it is such a supportive community with a family atmosphere and where 'Christian values are lived out daily and underpin our beliefs.' As a result, staff are committed to the school and work hard to achieve the best outcomes for their pupils. Many governors are active in both the church and the school and see their roles as serving one and the same community. All stakeholders appreciate this, and this mutually beneficial relationship is key to enabling the school to flourish as an outstanding church school. The strong leadership of RE is well supported through an effective partnership with the diocese and the school exceeds its statutory requirements for RE and collective worship. The links with the local church have developed considerably since the last inspection and the incumbent now has a high level of involvement in the school. The relationship between the school and St Stephen's church is a significant strength that unifies and serves both communities excellently. The impact of this is that pupils now have a deeper understanding of Anglican practice and the seasons of the church's year and Christian festivals. In the words of a Year 6 pupil, 'St. Stephen's is a perfect school for any child'.