

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Dorchester, St Birinus Church of England Primary School

Queen Street Dorchester-on Thames Oxon OX10 7HR	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Oxford
Date/s of inspection	9 March 2017
Date of last inspection	26 January 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 123129
Headteacher	Russell Leigh
Inspector's name and number	Robin Sharples 398

School context

The school serves the village of Dorchester and nearby villages. The pupils come from wide-ranging socio-economic backgrounds. Most pupils are White British with an average number of pupils with special needs and lower than average eligible for free school meals. Attainment on entry is broadly average with some annual variation. There are currently 85 pupils on roll.

The school is part of the Southern Cluster of small schools in the Abingdon Partnership made up of six church schools and one community school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Birinus as a Church of England school are good

- The work of the staff team ensures that the distinctive character of the school is modelled effectively in both learning and behaviour, this is reflected by pupils in their relationships and attitudes to learning.
- The leaders have created a distinctive set of values which have an excellent impact on the pupils' understanding of Christian approaches to issues and relationships.
- Work on prayer has led to some very good outcomes in written prayers which demonstrate developing understanding among the pupils.
- The strong mutual relationship between the school and the local church creates a tangible Christian context and strong links with the community.

Areas to improve

- Governors should conduct a deep self-evaluation of the school as a church school to fully understand its strengths and thus provide a sound base for strategic developments and inclusion in the School Development Plan.
- Develop pupil leadership of worship to enhance their skills in planning, leadership and evaluation; and to help broaden their experience of school worship.

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

The pupils at St Birinus are consistent in their view that that their school meets their needs. The school has worked hard to create a meaningful set of values and these form a strong core to the school's character. There are also complementary 'Worship Values' through which pupils recognise the distinctively Christian character of the core values. Pupils have a good understanding of these values and can make connections with biblical sources; for example, identifying the story of Zacchaeus with forgiveness. The values are consistently shared with the community through school newsletters and worship which parents and other members of the community attend. Pupils speak warmly of the teachers and are keen to emphasise the importance of their learning. They make good progress in their learning. Vulnerable groups are well supported and challenges to learning are dealt with effectively; this is as noted by Ofsted in 2015. Teaching staff take care to ensure that all pupils have access to the full curriculum and the other opportunities for learning offered by the school. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good; they have a wide range of learning skills and work together well in collaborative tasks. Teaching reflects the school's values through the way that adults model appropriate behaviour and respect for all the pupils. Attendance is good; the school's excellent community and church relations are used effectively to encourage the best attendance possible.

The development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) learning is good. Cultural awareness poses some challenges given the school's location but substantial efforts are being made to provide engagement with other cultures across the curriculum and especially in Religious Education (RE). The school has also taken steps to give pupils a stronger grasp of other cultures through the Nasio Trust and work with a lead-teacher from the Global Learning Programme. Pupils have a strong grasp of moral and social issues, for example they identify 'charity' as responding to need in the context of compassion. Their behaviour toward each other in social situations, such as in the playground, is very good. Spiritual development is increasingly well supported with creative opportunities in RE being used including, for example, artistic expression in exploring the temptations of Christ. Pupils speak with great enthusiasm of work in RE, they enjoy debate and the key questions approach. Each classroom has a reflective area which serves to reinforce the spiritual aspects of RE, creates links to Collective Worship and provides a place where prayers can be shared. This sharing of ideas and expression links in with other developments in school such as the introduction of Philosophy for Children.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is enjoyed by the pupils and forms a very significant part of school life. They appreciate the opportunity to gather as a community and recognise the Christian context of that gathering. Worship includes a range of attributes including prayer, song, reflection, story and liturgical elements such as lighting a candle. Pupils speak of worship as an important time for reflection both on relationships in school and wider issues from current news stories.

Worship is planned around the themes drawn from the worship values. These are placed in a biblical context which pupils recognise and discuss with some understanding. Planning involves the creative use of material from 'Values for Life', SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) and biblical sources. These values are also linked to the church seasons and the school's 'Worship Values'. Parents remarked that their pupils are very aware of the value of the term. This approach has led to pupils' solid understanding of the seasons, for example they are able to discuss Lent in some depth and make links to Advent as the other fast in the calendar. Individual acts of worship in classes have been developed into more intimate spiritual experiences which promote reflection and personal spirituality. Prayer is a strength of the school. Pupils create their own prayers regularly and understand that prayer has a variety of forms and purposes, in discussion they mentioned asking, forgiving, thanking and helping amongst others. These prayers are included in acts of worship throughout the year. Worship is regularly led by members of the clergy team who are all warmly appreciated by the pupils. This adds a stronger Anglican flavour to worship by, for example, including blessings in church and supporting reflection on more challenging aspects of Christianity such as the Lord's Prayer. Pupils have a good understanding of the Trinity and can discuss the work of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in various Bible stories such as creation and the miracles of Jesus.

Pupils lead some elements of worship such as readings, particularly in church services but opportunities for pupils to lead or create worship in school for themselves are limited at present.

Worship is monitored by governors and members of staff but this monitoring does not lead to consistent improvement as it is not linked to structured self-evaluation either in the school development plan or the SIAMS toolkit.

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

In recent years, the school has made significant progress. The leaders have led strategic improvement which has enabled the school to achieve good at Ofsted just over a year ago. The Governors have taken a lead in developing the school's values. However, the self-evaluation for SIAMS has been largely dependent on the Headteacher with only limited governor involvement. This means that the impact of the SIAMS self-evaluation is not as strong as the governors' work for Ofsted where governors' understanding of data and their monitoring of the work of the school is very effective. The areas for development from the last (SIAS) inspection have been addressed effectively the school leaders are aware that some further progress is needed, particularly with regard to global awareness but a great deal has been achieved so far. Governors work hard to ensure good relationships with the village community and other stakeholders.

A significant contribution to the development of the school's Christian distinctiveness has been requiring all teaching staff to show an understanding of working in a church school on appointment. Professional development in recent terms has tended to focus on improving teaching and raising standards in reading, writing and maths. Since the success at Ofsted more opportunities for professional development in RE and worship are being sought.

There are strong and mutually beneficial links with the local church, the clergy team acts as a link between the school and the communities it serves, particularly those beyond the village of Dorchester. Pupils are familiar with the clergy and recognise the importance of the school's relationship with the church. Pupils and families attend the local church for school services and special festivals.

Parents speak very highly of the school and, in particular, note significant improvements in recent years. These improvements include the much greater accessibility of members of staff and the Headteacher. Parents are confident in the school to provide a happy place in which pupils can learn and where they are safe and cared for.