

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Marsh Gibbon Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	
Castle Street Marsh Gibbon Bicester OX27 0HJ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Date of inspection	26 February 2018
Date of last inspection	27 February 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided Primary 110411
Headteacher	Julie Hickey
Inspector's name and number	The Revd Dr Jason Phillips 598

School context

Since the last inspection the school has expanded greatly from a first school to an all through primary of 171 pupils. It draws from a wide, mainly affluent catchment. About half of the pupils travel in from beyond the catchment area. Most pupils are White British, although a number have parents of dual nationality. The proportion of pupils with a special educational need or a disability is below the national average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Marsh Gibbon Primary School as a Church of England school are good

- The caring Christian leadership of the headteacher and her modelling of the school's Christian values are building upon past strengths of this church school, improving it still further.
- The Christian care of staff, pupils and parents towards one another results in a Christian community where all feel they are part of the family of God and this provides a secure base from which all can flourish.
- Positive attitudes towards religious education (RE) arising from good teaching, results in pupils that are confident to explore religious, philosophical and moral questions with respect and perseverance.
- Strong active links between church and school, the local community and other schools bring mutual benefit.

Areas to improve

- Work with the diocese in developing a theologically based understanding of the school's vision so that it is evident in all school documentation and clearly explained in ways appropriate to different stakeholders.

- Develop pupils' charitable endeavours into active service so that they have a good understanding of (global) social justice, environmental concerns and a deeper awareness of global communities.
- Apply the approach in the Understanding Christianity resource across all faith traditions studied to deepen RE learning and to ensure pupils have a strong religious literacy.
- Ensure pupils explore Christian biblical narratives in a variety of creative ways across their school experience so that they can explain multiple Christian understandings of the Eucharist and God as Trinity.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is good at meeting the needs of all learners. This is a happy church school where relationships and behaviours are positive. This arises from the school's Christian values which include love, community, respect and faith. The relentless modelling of these in the Christian leadership of the headteacher ensures impact. The school is not yet outstanding because it has not developed a theological basis for its vision statement or a shared understanding of it. Consequently, the vision does not coherently steer all the work of the school or demonstrate its application to a church school in the contemporary multicultural world. The quality relationships at the school make everyone feel part of this learning community and integral to the family of God. This means both pupils and staff feel safe here to explore and learn. They flourish as a consequence. Arising from this Christian learning environment, pupil attainment is above average and progress for most pupils is in line with national expectations. Attendance is often above the national average. Where there are issues, the school supports with care and challenge. Pupils extend the school's Christian ethos of care through charitable endeavors such as the Christian Aid jumper day. However, pupils' charity work does not extend beyond periodic examples of compassion missing opportunities for the school to be proactive in prospering social justice. The school's Christian values result in pupils taking responsibility for others such as in being playground leaders. Pupils are taught to consider their national responsibility for others in a democracy, for example, by the popular visits from John Bercow, Speaker of the House of Commons. Pupils develop well spiritually, morally, socially and culturally as a result of wide opportunities through the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. As a consequence, pupils grow in confidence and in understanding themselves as a loved child of God. The curriculum encourages pupils to be the best they can be. This is enhanced by growth mindset learning approaches that nurtures resilience and perseverance in the pupils. RE makes a good contribution to the Christian character of this church school because good teaching results in pupils that are confident to explore religious, philosophical and moral questions with respect and perseverance. Interesting studies, such as learning about Guru Nanak and the recent focus on the Judeo-Christian creation accounts across the school, results in positive attitudes towards RE. However, despite an awareness of world faiths and some creative learning such as Indian dancing, pupils' multicultural understanding of their world and of world faiths is underdeveloped because it is not sufficiently high profile. The children benefit from a delightful rural setting in their appreciation of the natural world and God as creator. Historically, the school had an eco-focus but this has lapsed in recent times resulting in less focus on environmental concerns.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship plays an important part in expressing and supporting the school's Christian foundation because it is valued by the school leadership and is well led. Planning for worship is taken seriously by all involved. As a result, the positive impact of collective worship is evident on children and adults alike. All

members of the school appreciate acts of worship as a time of coming together to reflect upon God's presence. Pupils have opportunities to lead collective worship and are generally most engaged when they do. This represents good progress since the last inspection. Through worship, pupils have a growing understanding of the importance of Jesus for Christians but their understanding of God-as-Trinity remains limited as it only has a minimal focus. Bible stories, such as the accounts of Samuel, are often used during worship and developed by techniques such as Godly-play and the God's Storyteller approach. This helps children to appreciate the Bible's importance as the 'Word of God' for Christians. The worship programme reinforces the school's Christian values well. This is a strength of collective worship. It results in pupils who are able to relate some biblical material to the values. For example, older pupils were able to translate the parable of the unforgiving servant into a modern context. In collective worship, pupils value the times to consider national issues before God. This helps them to come-to-terms with events. School practice mirrors some Anglican religious forms in symbol and word. Pupils benefit from the effective input of local clergy. The utilisation of the prayer, 'God be in my head and in my understanding,' as regular concluding words also aids a sense of the rhythm of Anglican worship. Furthermore, the school utilises the Christian liturgical calendar which develops pupils' understanding of key Christian festivals such as Christmas and Pentecost. The church year is reflected further in the liturgical colours of the hall worship table, for example. All of this deepens the school's understanding of itself as an Anglican community. Through the worship programme, with appropriate links to RE, pupils have a developing understanding of the Lord's Prayer and the importance of prayer generally. They have opportunity for personal prayer across the school day, helping prayer be integral to daily life. Prayer spaces are rightly a much valued part of school life. Along with the periodic prayer space tent, enabled by local Christians, prayer spaces really emphasise for pupils the significance of prayer to the Christian tradition. Collective worship is appropriately monitored ensuring it meets statutory requirements and has a positive impact upon the whole school community.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The effectiveness of RE is good because it has a high profile and clearly impacts pupils' positive attitudes towards faith. It contributes well to the school's inclusive nature and challenges any prejudices. Teaching and learning are good overall. They result in pupils that can respectfully and confidently discuss religious, theological, philosophical and moral issues with understanding and thoughtfulness. Most pupils progress well so that their religious knowledge, understanding and skills are in line with expected standards. Whilst not as deep as it might be, pupils' learning about Christianity and other world religions is sufficient to give them confidence to talk about many interesting religious concepts such as forgiveness the feminine nature of God and the 'fall.' However, pupils' knowledge of the Anglican tradition within worldwide Christianity is limited as is their understanding of the Eucharist. The Bible is increasingly used in lessons, such as in comparing gospel accounts of the incarnation. This is helping pupils gain a growing sense of the complete Christian narrative but this is at an early stage. Pupils enjoy learning where they can apply studies to their own context as it makes RE relevant. An example of this is exploring whether Saint Edward the Confessor is a good role model for today. Insufficient educational visits in RE hinders experiential learning and results in missed opportunities for pupils to deepen their learning and multicultural awareness. Arising from the careful and enthusiastic leadership of the subject leader, the school has in place developments to extend learning in RE. An example is the recent implementation of the 'Developing Christianity' resource to deepen understanding of and to

improve pupils' religious vocabulary and literacy, which is a relative weakness. The RE subject leader works well with staff to prosper an understanding of standards in RE based upon recent training, for example, training in use of the Developing Christianity resource. Assessment is at an early phase but sufficient to aid planning. RE is yet to utilise the assessment ladders of other subject areas and which is identified as a development area by school leaders. RE has some impact on developing the school's Christian values and the ideas of its vision statement. However, this is implicit in the learning which limits the impact to some extent. In part this is because the vision statement is yet to be underpinned theologically. This means the vision does not shape RE to the extent that it could or help pupils understand the school's Christian narrative. Nevertheless, through monitoring and evaluation, governors and staff bring about positive change. They enable the subject to be responsive to new methodologies and resources to raise standards further.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good. Leadership and management are good because the headteacher is successful in leading the whole school community in creating a Christian ethos where all belong. The headteacher's commitment and care is commendable and results in positive relations at all levels. This care extends to seeking the opinions of the children and acting upon them. The headteacher secures the wellbeing of all staff and children which stems from her Christian example. Parents also report how well the school supports them showing strong connections between home and school. The Christian ethos that is prospered is the foundation for the children's achievements both academically and in their personal development. Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because the school's mission statement is not underpinned theologically and communicated to all stakeholders. This means that the place of the school's Christian values is not fully understood as part of the overall vision and explicit in policies. As a result, they do not impact on decision making and the working of the school as significantly as they could. Governors are competent and conscientious. They sensitively make bold decisions for the long-term good of the school. Governors hold the school to account through link governors working with school leaders and monitoring provision and outcomes. They are aware of the church school improvement framework (SIAMS) but are still to use this fully to nuance evaluations and decision making. This sometimes limits governors' impact in promoting the school's vision and values in a focussed approach to school improvement. By utilising diocesan support, leaders have made appropriate progress against the developments points from the last inspection, for example, in improving pupil engagement in leading collective worship. The school supports the leader of collective worship and RE effectively demonstrating their significance in school life. They ensure statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are met. The school is pro-active in developing staff professionally, for example, in working with other small church schools. These opportunities enhance staff skills and aid succession planning. The productive links with St. Mary's Church are mutually supportive. School and church work in partnership and together have a significant impact upon community cohesion. Parents justifiably speak well of the school resulting in part from effective communications with them. As one parent rightly said, 'there is a lot of love from and for this church school.'