

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

<b>St John's Church of England Academy</b>	
Fenby Avenue, Darlington DL1 4UB	
<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Durham</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 May 2012
Name of multi-academy trust	St John's Church of England Academy
Date of inspection	21 June 2018
Date of last inspection	10 July 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Academy 138128
Headteacher	Christine Large
Inspector's name and number	Mary Cook 811

### School context

St John's CE Academy is an oversubscribed, average sized primary school in Darlington. The vast majority of pupils come from a white British background. The percentage of children who have special educational needs is above the national average as are the numbers eligible for free school meals. There are close links with the parish of St. John the Evangelist. The school has recently expanded to educate two year olds in the nursery.

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

- The school is led by a senior leadership team and governing body whose members are passionately committed to a deeply Christian vision and promote Christian values in all aspects of school life.
- The distinctive Christian character makes a significant contribution to the children's personal development, wellbeing and academic achievement.
- The pupils and staff show a determination to make a difference to their area in establishing campaigns to raise money for local charities.
- Pastoral care for families and the wider community is rooted in God's love and establishes a strong bond of trust between parents and the school.
- The well-established relationship with the parish church contributes significantly to the values and practice such as worship within the school.

### Areas to improve

- Explore the ways in which the pupils' and parents' spirituality can be further developed with spaces for reflection so that families can reflect together on the interconnectedness of life and faith.
- Continue to support and extend the involvement of worship group so that the pupils successfully lead worship and maintain the school's high standard of reflection and interaction in worship.
- Continue to implement the 'Understanding Christianity' units of work in religious education (RE) so that the pupils' theological understanding is developed even further.

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

The school lives up to the stated vision 'Guided by God, to be the best that we can be.' The culture is based on Colossians 3:23, 'work with all your heart as if working for the Lord.' The school's outstanding commitment to Christian value of justice is clearly evident. The expectation is that all will be given every opportunity to flourish in both personal and academic fields. Pupil attainment is below the national average on entry to reception however results at the end of Year 6 are often above average. Most pupils make outstanding progress in core subjects. The school attributes this to the Christian values of endurance, expressed as perseverance, as the pupils are committed to aiming high and succeeding in their studies. Attendance is good and this demonstrates high levels of pupil enjoyment and engagement with their learning. The spirit of forgiveness and a determination for tolerance is palpable. One child explains this well: 'I have learnt to accept that if someone says something I disagree with, they are entitled to hold a different opinion, it doesn't mean they are wrong. We have to get along together, so sometimes we have to forgive and move on.' The high quality discussions between staff and pupils, exploring the concept of forgiveness, prepares the older pupils to act as mediators to help solve any friendship worries the younger children have in school. As a result, there are very few instances of bullying and behaviour is often exemplary in class. Pupils are confident in articulating their own views about faith. 'I find it difficult to believe in God, as I can't see Him, I don't really know whether He is there,' is the view expressed by one pupil. However, another pupil states: 'Whenever I get stressed, I talk to God and it goes away. I do believe in God and I feel He is always there for me.' The teaching of RE has deepened the pupils' understanding of faith and why it is of great importance to some, and less so for others. The school promotes the understanding of diversity and different religions by visiting a wide range of places to worship. The pupils have a good knowledge of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith. The global education, built up over many years, enhances the pupils' world view and their understanding of the way in which actions in one country can impact of the lives of those living in another.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Worship makes an outstanding contribution to the school's ethos, to the expression of its values such as love, and to the development of learners and adults. The inclusion of movement, dance and live music leads to a dynamic experience. The pupils thoroughly enjoy acting out Bible stories and are able to re-tell many and relate to key characters as a result. The talents of the teachers and pupils are maximised to the fullest extent to ensure that worship touches the whole school community. As a result, there is a spiritual and tangible impact of worship. Parents and pupils speak of being moved to act differently such as promoting campaigns to reduce plastic waste, fundraise for charity or take part in random acts of kindness. The headteacher determines the theological basis to worship and communicates with all the people on the worship rota. There is a close working relationship with St John's Church and the Salvation Army. The different life experiences of those leading worship contributes to a rich tapestry of provision, drawing on their knowledge of living in developing countries and closer to home. This fosters a greater understanding and empathy between the pupils and those living in a completely different culture. Stories shared about children growing up in rural Uganda have had a profound effect in generating both thankfulness and generosity towards others. Feedback from the participants is valued and acted upon, for example pupils asked if they could plan and lead worship and now this happens on a regular basis. The pupils confidently talk about the Christian view of the Holy Trinity, explaining how the strands on the clay models they have, interlink made to represent God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The combination of introducing a theological concept in worship and then planning activities in the curriculum to explore the concept further, helps the children develop deeper thinking. They ask thought provoking questions of each other such as, 'If Jesus is God in human form, would God feel Jesus' pain on the cross?' The whole school celebrates key Christian festivals in church, the most memorable of which is the Christingle service. This moving occasion provokes a deep personal response from parents as they enjoy the ritual and reflect on the message of Christmas. This is a school where prayer is important, the pupils look forward to sharing their own prayers with their class, and this happens on a regular basis. The reflection areas within classes are well used however, the school is now keen to develop prayer spaces so that pupils and family members can explore different ways to reflect on life and interact with God.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

RE has core subject status in the school and as such makes an outstanding contribution to the distinctive ethos as the children have an excellent understanding of Christianity through studying Bible stories, Christian traditions, artefacts and lifestyle. The school has in recent years insisted that class teachers deliver RE rather

than cover supervisors, this means lesson themes are revisited throughout the week. Training and guidance from the RE subject leader has ensured the subject remains an area of strength. Teachers work collaboratively in year group teams to discuss planning and implementation of the 'Understanding Christianity' units of work. This results in increased teacher confidence which is shown in lessons and pupil achievement. Pupils progress well in their learning and achieve high standards by the end of Key Stage 2. The quality of teaching is outstanding. Pupils value and enjoy RE lessons and in the best lessons they are challenged by precision questioning to think more deeply, make connections and to articulate their thoughts clearly. Lessons are very varied from the inclusion of drama and art to the use of investigation and mystery to engage the children. They are invited to respond in a creative manner that they find stimulating and enjoyable. This helps their understanding and recall of their learning about Christianity. Year 6 pupils can explain difficult concepts such as the Holy Trinity drawing from the New Testament, literature and artwork. The curriculum covers the practices and beliefs of the six major faiths. The pupils benefit from the excellent connections with the Sikh community in the area, as visitors from Gurduwara Sahib explain their faith and the way they live their lives. Educational visits are undertaken to a wide range of places of worship. The pupils are very enquiring and, as a result, very knowledgeable about the different religions. Assessment procedures are firmly embedded and the teaching staff provide regular updates on pupil outcomes for the subject leader. In addition, the staff explore any barriers to learning and devise strategies to help the children in their studies including the targeted use of teaching assistant time. The subject leader uses book scrutinies and lesson observations as a basis for her judgements when reporting to the governors about developments and standards in the subject. This level of accountability helps to drive and maintain the high standards of achievement.

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

The Christian values of love and trust are at the heart of this school. Leaders live out these values with earnest intent, ensuring robust self-evaluation and continual improvement. This extends to improving governance and strengthening the knowledge and understanding of individual governors through training. There is a deep understanding of the Church of England's vision for education this underpins all that happens in school. The headteacher is adamant that love is shown in practical terms by giving the pupils an outstanding education and preparing them well for the next phase of their schooling. Parents are very appreciative of the work undertaken to ensure the academic and spiritual development of their children. Parents are also supportive of and involved in school life. They speak very positively of the care and support given to their children and value the Christian aspects of the school. There is a clear understanding of the need to develop future church school leaders. The headteacher feels it is her responsibility to nurture and mentor leaders and has encouraged leadership at all levels including the children in leading worship. Middle and senior leaders have the confidence and wisdom to complete thorough and accurate evaluations, and determine next steps. The governors are well-informed through monitoring visits, looking at pupils' work and formal feedback from leaders at all levels including the RE subject leader. As a result, strategic planning is robust and relevant to the specific needs of the school. The links between school and the local parish church are of the highest quality, with strong relationships leading to a flourishing partnership. The school fully meets the statutory requirements for both collective worship and RE. The decision taken to include teaching about the six major world faiths in the curriculum has helped the children develop a wider world view. They are well prepared for life in a multi-faith society. Since the last inspection there has been considerable progress in addressing all development points, particularly in underpinning the written school policies with the clearly articulated Christian vision.

SIAMS report June 2018, St John's CE Academy, Fenby Avenue, Darlington DLI 4UB