

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Downham Church of England Voluntary controlled Primary school

Church Road, Ramsden Heath, Billericay, Essex, CM11 1NU

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chelmsford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Essex
Date of inspection	28 September 2017
Date of last inspection	20 September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 115119
Headteacher	Sue Grace and Leanne Gray
Inspector's name and number	Debbie Rogan 850

School context

The school is led by co-headteachers both of whom work part time. One took up post very recently filling a vacancy left when the previous co-headteacher left. The school is of average size. It has a lower than average percentage of pupils from backgrounds that are socially or economically deprived. The majority of pupils are White British and there are no pupils who speak English as an additional language. The percentage with special education needs and disabilities is around the national average. The leadership team is relatively newly formed although most have worked in other roles in the school previously.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Downham Voluntary Controlled Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The leaders of the school including governors hold Christian values at the heart of all that they do which impact positively on school ethos and outcomes for pupils. This leads to a highly effective approach to spirituality, based on the school's explicit Christian vision and values, which permeates the whole curriculum.
- As an expression of its Christian underpinning pupils needs and wellbeing, including those of the most vulnerable, are given a high priority which results in good attendance and effective support.
- The school prioritises the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils with the result that relationships and behaviour are exemplary.
- The teaching of religious education (RE) and the approaches employed to allow deep thinking are enabling powerful pupil discussions and reflection which impacts very positively on the development of pupils' SMSC.

Areas to improve

- Deepen pupils' understanding of key Christian theological concepts such as the Trinity so that pupils can develop their conversations about the big questions of life.

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

The school's Christian vision and core values are at its heart and impact very positively on the pupils' strong personal and academic development. Its vision is encapsulated in the 3 Cs - caring, consideration and courtesy and they flow through school life. This has resulted in a harmonious, happy place for all pupils to learn. Pupils can discuss the school's core values articulately and reflect on them when difficult decisions need to be made. One pupil referred to the values he learned at school as something he thinks about when he might be tempted to make the wrong choice. 'It stops me doing things wrong and hurting people'. As an expression of the school's Christian ethos attendance rates are good. This is because all pupils are well supported, valued and their well-being is prioritised. The senior leaders including the coordinator for Special educational needs know pupils well and as a result support for them and their families is swift and effective. There is a highly developed understanding of spirituality in the school. This has resulted in creative and wide ranging opportunities for reflection including the very popular prayer bus which is run by pupils, governors and volunteers from local churches. Here pupils can reflect on things that they regret, read inspirational and calming books and texts and reflect on their feelings. The curriculum also provides chances to think and discuss important matters. Pupils talk about doing things more creatively so that we, 'enjoy it more'. This includes reflective poetry, art and engaging assemblies and worship. As a result, pupils have highly developed reflective skills and can discuss powerful and important themes such as forgiveness, refugees and whether good intentions matter more than consequences. The focus on pupils' SMSC results in high standards of behaviour for pupils and enables supportive relationships throughout the school. This is exemplified in the school's mutually supportive relationship with local churches and the incumbent. The RE leader has developed her subject well, in line with the locally agreed syllabus, by supporting new and inexperienced staff in approaches that engage pupils. This includes an approach to biblical story telling called Godly Play and drawing on approaches to exploring 'big questions' linked to an approach called Philosophy for Children (P4C). These engage pupils in their learning very well and are effective in helping them to reflect on issues of religious, spiritual and moral concern. This consistency of approach and rigorous training and monitoring ensures all pupils enjoy RE and are learning about other religions, including Islam. This impacts positively on acceptance of others and supports a highly developed awareness of diversity and difference. As one pupil reflected, 'You don't have to have a religion to respect others' beliefs'. The work with other local schools and the sponsorship of a child in Uganda has enabled pupils to develop understanding of cultures beyond their resulting in a highly accepting and respectful school community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship, including reflection on spiritual and religious issues, is a strength of the school. Governors, parents, pupils and staff value it and engage closely with it. It is a cornerstone of the school's strong community. The experienced headteacher leads this aspect of school life and this results in consistently high quality experiences for pupils. Worship is planned well and pupils enjoy the variety of leaders who present it. The worship committee, which includes pupils, evaluate and drive forward improvements such as the prayer basket where prayer requests can be left for use in worship. Pupils are fully involved in planning, delivering and preparing worship. Pupils take these roles seriously not only when they are presenting but as supporters such as when preparing music and presentations. They don't want to let anyone down as they place great importance on worship and understand its significance to school life. This is because it is enjoyable, well planned, linked with the core values of the school and pupils understand the messages it brings for them as individuals. Pupils, staff, governors and parents look forward to the shared services throughout the year to celebrate traditional Christian festivals such as Christmas and in particular Easter. This service is held in the Cathedral and all members of the community value the joy and connection to each other and God that it brings. 'It brings everyone together,' reflected one pupil and, 'seeing everyone in one place is amazing,' said another. Worship is inspirational and inclusive. All pupils can offer prayers for selection. Hymns and key prayers include physical actions so that all pupils, including those with individual needs who have difficulty communicating can join in fully. One pupil was filled with pride that he could do this on his own with all of his friends joining in with him. Pupils can express themselves and their feelings in a variety of ways throughout worship. Pupils write their own prayers and poems both in school and at home. This is because they have been taught that prayer helps them to get through disappointment in, for example, 'not winning in sporting events, sadness when someone leaves us and anger when bad things happen in the world'. They regularly action the themes of worship and respond to world and national events such as attacks in Manchester and Paris. This is because they care and want to help. 'Compassion and care in all that we do', wrote one pupil in her reflective poem about peace. Worship takes place around the school, in the local churches, on the playground and in pupils' favourite place, the prayer bus. In this bus placed on the playground pupils can experience fizzy forgiveness, creative prayer, the sin bin and reflect with adults and prefects. Worship focuses on Jesus, his life and his messages. Pupils talk of his humility and not needing to demonstrate power in the usual ways through clothes, wealth and by dominating others. Instead he

showed caring and compassion. He is, 'king of the world,' reflected one pupil after an act of worship. This means that pupils have a good understanding of the significance of Jesus and of the Bible for Christians. Governors attend worship and monitor its effectiveness and propose next steps. The prayer bus was a result of needing more and varied spaces to reflect around the school. Governors have been proactive in leading and supporting this. Pupils are aware of the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as different aspects of the same 'person'. However, their understanding of other key theological vocabulary such as salvation is less well developed. Pupils and staff celebrate and understand the pattern of the Anglican Church year because these are built into worship themes and shared with the local Christian community. This builds strength and collaboration which helps the school and community grow stronger and shares the school ethos beyond the school building.

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

Leaders, including Governors, are ambitious for pupils and at the core of their ambition is the drive to continually improve the school as a distinctively Christian place to learn. The Headteacher and Governors supported well by a highly effective leadership team ensure that the core values are at the heart of the school. The school's Christian vision and values drive forward its distinctiveness as a church school. This is because all leaders, with the skilled and aspirational long standing headteacher at the helm, are driven to improve the personal and academic development of all the pupils. They rightly recognise that a consistent focused on SMSC development opportunities is a key element of this provision. School leaders, including the governors, are clear about the impact that they want to have on their pupils and design appropriate improvement plans based on accurate and detailed self-evaluation to achieve this. They also monitor progress towards these aims so that development is swift and purpose is not lost. Pupils are involved in this process so that everyone is clear what the objectives are. Leaders at every level are committed to the Christian vision and complementary skills and experience allow developments to move forward quickly. This results in richer experiences for pupils and more opportunities for reflection, learning and thinking. The area for development identified in the previous denominational report was based on involving pupils more effectively in planning and leading worship. This has been thoroughly addressed by the school because all leaders since then have ensured on going developments. Pupils gain from the improvements to the teaching of RE brought about through good monitoring and evaluation and effective leadership of the subject area. Staff and governors are now well trained and there is a clear emphasis on consistency in teaching approaches with appropriate materials to help less experienced colleagues. This gives all pupils equally good opportunities and teaching in RE. Staff are well supported for working in the church school sector. As such there is a strong, confident and effective team working collaboratively together. Leaders have developed a hub approach to leadership of the curriculum which means that groups of people lead areas of importance. This is ensuring that the strong practice will be sustainable should key staff move on and giving depth and skill to a wider range of staff and leaders. The wide-ranging local community involvement and links with other local schools brings significant benefits to the school. This includes working on pupils' global awareness and their approaches to Fair Trade as well as their ability to address and discern issues raised through contemporary affairs. For example, a pupil reflected, 'Not all Muslims are terrorists. Hurting people is not part of Islam. You can't be in a state of peace if you do bad things'.

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