

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant School			
Address	Sawyers Hall Lane, Brentwood, CM15 9BX		
Date of inspection	13 November 2019	Status of school	Voluntary aided infant
Diocese	Chelmsford	URN	115184

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Excellent
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Excellent
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Excellent

School context

St Thomas of Canterbury is an infant school with 222 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages, however, the proportion of pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) is above national averages. The school is within the parish of St Thomas of Canterbury along with the adjoining junior school and neighbouring secondary school.

The school's Christian vision

Jesus said 'You are the light of the World' (Matthew 5:14) so we let our little lights shine. It is our responsibility to help each other let our individual lights shine brightly in all that we do and say, always following in Jesus' footsteps to be a beacon of love to all.

Key findings

- Leaders effectively demonstrate how the impact of the school's vision holistically infuses and shapes the strategic and operational direction of the school. It champions inclusivity and celebrates diversity ensuring every child is allowed to let 'their little light shine'.
- Governors and leaders at all levels have well-constructed systems to monitor a curriculum that is specifically tailored to meet the needs of every pupil. This is exceptionally rigorous and effective. As a result parents totally trust the school and work in harmony for the best outcomes of their children. This is led by a compassionate and dedicated headteacher.
- Leaders ensure all pupils and adults' wellbeing is central to the vision the school holds. Everyone is treated with dignity and respect in a culture of care and encouragement. This gives everyone hope and makes the school a centre of reconciliation and aspiration in the community.
- Collective worship is central to the school day. It is inviting, inspiring and transformational. The local church actively helps to shape worship, bringing Anglican heritage and the natural rhythm of the Church's calendar to the school year.
- Pupils are inspired by religious education (RE). They are challenged in safe ways within their learning and they seek out answers. Teaching is consistently better than good and RE is given a high profile in the school by all leaders.

Areas for development

- Pupils to have more opportunities to advocate social change by challenging injustice and inequality at a global level, so they feel connected to current issues in the wider world that God has created.
- Pupils to extend their use of prayer within and across the school site in order to nourish their spiritual life on a daily basis.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

St Thomas of Canterbury Infants has deepened its existing vision of 'we let our little lights shine' by linking it with the biblical text 'you are the light of the world' (Matthew 5:14). In doing so every person connected to the school understands what drives it forward and shapes its daily life. The vision is underpinned by a strong Christian theological understanding of education. This leads to an ethos that is exceptionally well embedded meaning that school life naturally lives out the vision daily making the school a living Christian community. All decisions are deeply rooted in the vision. Leaders speak of how 'we readjust to meet the needs of our community'. They speak of how they 'care and accept all regardless of crisis'. As a result, everyone flourishes and this is celebrated. The head is highly thought of in the school and wider community and she leads the school with love and compassion. One parent described her as 'an angel on earth' because of the extra effort and work she does for anyone connected to the school.

The school's inclusive nature is seen in exceptionally constructive relationships at all levels. Pupils and families in need are supported sensitively and are warmly encouraged to be part of the school community. This is enhanced by a tailored curriculum that meets the needs of every child, including those with special educational needs. The school has patiently persevered to gain the right funding and support to enable these children to enjoy their learning and be rightly supported to grow as children of God. This continues outside of the school walls with carefully considered work with local and national organisations, such as the Health and Well-Being Project. Here the physical, mental, social and emotional aspects of every child is nurtured by the school and at home. As a result pupils and staff wellbeing is woven into the daily life of the school. Parents comment positively on the success of such partnerships and the positive impact that is evident on their children.

The local church and vicar of St Thomas of Canterbury have extremely strong links with the school. Many children and families worship regularly in the church. There is a presence of God in all of the work that is shared to bring greater love and fellowship in the community. Children speak warmly of the connections they have and of the regular Eucharistic worship they take part in each half term in school. The format, language, prayers and readings are familiar due to this strong relationship. They sow the seeds for a life-long lasting relationship with God as many move to the neighbouring Church of England junior school and undertake confirmation classes. The local vicar leads school worship regularly. He pastorally supports school staff and pupils through his weekly visits. This expresses how the school is deeply connected to the wider mission of the church and the community it serves. One parent described this as the school living out its vision and completing the circle that makes God real in the life of all connected to. The school also has sustained links with the diocese for training and support of its staff; effectively investing in staff to work in this flourishing church school.

Collective worship is a calm and special time of the day, when the whole community comes together to speak to God and listen to his teachings through Jesus's life. Pupils are invited to worship, they are inspired by relevant and appropriate themes of love, prayer and pilgrimage. These are connected to people and life in a way that all children access it. Pupils leave with a buzz of ideas to try out in their relationships and life, reflecting on how to be better. This exemplary practice is summed up in the words of one pupil who said, 'Worship helps us to understand how God and Jesus shines and how we can shine in what we do'. Similarly, it is supported by discussion, and a central worship display that is 'owned by the pupils'. Pupils actively lead class worship; they also evaluate and monitor worship with adults regularly. A worship team of ten pupils, from Year 2 along with the head teacher, co-ordinates all worship in school and Year 2 classes alternate planning and leading 6 Eucharist services a year with the local vicar. This strongly reflects how pupils are deeply and effectively fully involved in worship, which was an action from the previous inspection. Prayer forms a part of worship and is sometimes lead by pupils but always linked to the theme. However, opportunities for prayer to continue beyond worship are not fully taken.

The school works hard and effectively to open the pupils' eyes to the world around them, promoting dignity and respect for diversity and difference. Relationships clearly show how the school has embraced difference

and diversity in its community. Work with the local food bank and other charities are championed to bring about change in the local community. However, pupils exploring their impact on the wider world or on global issues of injustice, poverty and inequality are underdeveloped.

RE meets the recommendations of the Church of England's Statement of Entitlement for RE. It has a very high profile in the school. RE is led with deep commitment, it is well-resourced and the training undertaken has had tangible impact on the learning experiences the pupils receive. An excellent example is the use and impact of the Understanding Christianity Project, which is skilfully interwoven through the curriculum. It enhances the work the school undertakes on saints, the local church and some of the deeper concepts of salvation and incarnation. Leaders speak of 'not shying away from the realities of God's world' in RE, which are commendably addressed in a variety of ways. Pupils describe RE as fun. They get to ask lots of questions and find the answers out with their teachers. RE forms a high proportion of the learning environment of the school. The school uses parents to speak of a range of world faiths and views that the pupils study, such as a parent visiting a Reception class to talk about Hinduism. Pupils particularly enjoy this; one said 'It teaches us about life, love and God, we can then compare it to our own ideas'.



The effectiveness of RE is Excellent

Teaching is consistently better than good. It is regularly and effectively monitored by leaders in the school. Outcomes for pupils are above those compared to reading and writing, including for those children who have special educational needs or considered to be disadvantaged. Every child flourishes because of the positivity imbued in RE lessons. One pupil said, 'It is okay to make mistakes, God did, we all learn from them together'.

Headteacher

Caroline L'Estrange

Inspector's name and number

Christopher J Allen 847