

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Stephen's CE School

Dorset Road London SW8 1EJ

Current SIAMS inspection grade

GOOD

Diocese

SOUTHWARK

Previous SIAS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Lambeth

Dates of inspection

7 and 8 December 2016

Date of last inspection

24 November 2011

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary 100621

Headteacher

Linda Campbell

Inspector's name and number

Andrew Redman 789

School context

St Stephen's is a small primary school with a Nursery and Children's Centre attached. Many pupils come from areas of high deprivation and the percentages eligible for Free School Meals and from minority ethnic groups are in the top 20% nationally. The majority of parents worship at local churches of many denominations. The headteacher was appointed to the substantive position in 2014 and a new senior leadership team implemented in 2015. Four newly qualified teachers and two additional new members of staff were appointed at the start of the current academic year. An extension to the school was completed in 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Stephen's as a Church of England school are good

- Clearly distinctive and shared Christian values are lived out by all members of the school community so that relationships between adults and pupils are nurturing and highly supportive.
- Collective worship is highly valued by staff, pupils and parents and enriches their spiritual lives.
- Partnerships with the local church and Children's Centre enable the Christian values to permeate through the lives of the whole community.
- Religious Education (RE) has a high profile at the school and contributes well to its Christian values.

Areas to improve

- Formalise systems to enable senior leaders and governors to evaluate the impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- Ensure rigour in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of worship so that it becomes progressive and developmental. As a result, over time, pupils will gain a deeper understanding of Christian teaching which is then reflected in their daily lives.

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

The school's mission and vision statement involved the whole community and recognises that 'everybody is made in the image of God' and there is a commitment to 'working collaboratively with families and the community.' Parents are effusive in their praise for St Stephen's as a church school and all members of the school community not only articulate the shared Christian values, but live them out in their daily lives. Parents speak of it being their responsibility to welcome new families and members of staff to the Christian family of the school, pupils reflect on what Jesus would do in their own personal challenges and staff ensure that values permeate through the whole curriculum. One parent noted that the school is 'spiritually fantastic' and others agreed that this, for them, is what makes the real difference. The distinctive Christian character of the school shines through and has been a key factor in the successful induction of a number of newly appointed teachers. One colleague explained that 'we don't feel left alone' and that she values the 'calmer, peaceful' ethos in which 'there is a higher meaning to things.' Over time, pupil attainment has been above the national average and leaders clearly articulate how Christian values guide the support for individual pupils and their families. Case studies clearly show how families in need have been helped to ensure that pupils are regularly in school; consequently, attendance has traditionally been above the national average and progress, even for the most vulnerable groups, is at least good. Biblical stories and parables in RE and collective worship encourage pupils to think deeply about their behaviour and relationships and their impact is seen in the high standards of behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are able to draw strong links between the lessons learned from biblical teaching and their school values; consequently, all pupils, regardless of their denomination, faith or belief, flourish in a climate of trust and interdependence. RE is very well led and is making a significant contribution to the distinctive Christian character of the school and promotes a real understanding and respect towards those of other faiths and cultures. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well-supported in RE and links are made across all areas of learning; pupils respond well to this provision but the analysis of impact is not formalised and consistent across the school. Good progress has been made since the last inspection to enhance further the extent to which the school's environment reflects its distinctive Christian character; the outdoor prayer area, dedicated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, being much valued by pupils, staff and parents alike.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is distinctly Christian and central to the life of the school; this is also the case when pupils are on a residential school journey. All members of the school community clearly articulate the importance they place on this special part of the day; they find it 'personally encouraging' and explain how it helps them to face and make sense of the individual challenges they face. This sentiment is echoed by staff and pupils of other faiths. Through worship, the school's Christian values are reinforced and illustrated and, as a result, parents believe that pupil's daily attitudes and behaviours build on these lessons learned. Worship is clearly rooted in Biblical material and pupils are extremely knowledgeable about the stories Jesus told and the implications for their daily lives. On a Friday, parents join staff and pupils in worship led by the incumbent which is an opportunity for 'hearing the truth and building on it.' This is, quite clearly, a highlight of the week where pupils and their families experience and develop their understanding of Anglican practice and the rhythm of the Church's year. As a result of this teaching, pupils of different ages are able to explain, at an age appropriate level, their understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Prayer is central to the life of the school and collective worship strongly supports spiritual development across the school community. Formal prayers, for both adults and pupils, are shared at key moments through the day. Pupils value the opportunities for reflection and contemplation and many make use of the class reflection areas, prayer trees and the prayer space in the school grounds. Parents value monthly formal prayer meetings and join informally at the start of the day on the playground to hold the school community in prayer before God. Prayers for and from the school are shared in church on a Sunday.

This area is not yet outstanding as planning, monitoring and evaluation of worship is not rigorous enough, although a pupil faith group has recently been elected to support the worship leader and incumbent in this process. There are strong links with the local church and the RE governor leads fortnightly Spinnaker worship. Regular visits are made to Southwark Cathedral and older pupils have performed at the Bishop's Lent Call and Leaver's Services. Although pupils enjoy contributing within worship, they have limited opportunities to plan and lead. Their understanding of different Anglican traditions and practice is also restricted.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE has a prominent profile in the school and contributes well to its Christian values and the spiritual development of pupils. Christ's teaching is central to school life and Year 1 pupils explained that 'Jesus guides us, He is the light of the world.' RE is an integral part of the whole curriculum as themes, developed in acts of worship, are woven through all subject areas; consequently, pupils value RE and clearly understand its relevance in their daily lives. In 2015, as part of their Spanish curriculum, Year 5 pupils visited Spain and stayed in a monastery as well as attending a local school. The RE curriculum reflects the requirements of the diocesan scheme of work and the predominantly Christian programme features another faith taught each year. Pupils value their own diverse community and particularly enjoy lessons when staff members from other faiths are able to bring the teaching and learning alive. Pupils are developing a range of skills and teachers use a range of creative ways to promote a genuine sense of interested enquiry. Marking and feedback processes are consistent across the whole school and are clearly encouraging children to become reflective learners.

Standards in RE are broadly in line with national expectations and progress for all groups is generally good. The highly effective and determined subject leader has a clear grasp of the strengths and weaknesses for teaching and learning across the school. The majority of teaching is good and teachers are supported on an individual basis with clearly defined next steps for progress; whole staff training is provided to address identified general development areas. Rigorous monitoring ensures that the impact of advice given is seen in the outcomes for pupils. This is evident in the RE books which clearly show rapidly improving pupil progress. A focused action plan ensures the on-going monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. The analysis of the progress of individuals and groups effectively informs planning and teaching and this is leading to sustained improvement. There is, quite rightly, a current focus on effective provision for the more able pupils. The RE link governor is actively involved in the monitoring programme but the lack of a faith team means that this responsibility is not more widely shared.

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

Following a period of significant change in leadership and staffing, it is to the school's great credit that this time of potential instability has been managed so successfully. Senior leaders and governors share a vision that celebrates the love of God and ensures that Christ's teaching is at the heart of everything that they do. There is a wide-ranging commitment to implementing and living by the school's Christian vision and values and this supports the well-being of the school community. The headteacher has been well supported by the incumbent and clearly understands her role, as a leader, in modelling this vision. Parents confirm that the distinctive Christian character remains central to the life of the school. Effective induction processes for new staff and the realignment of the senior leadership team are ensuring consistency in expectation and, as a result, pupils achieve well and continue to make good progress.

The RE governor and incumbent are highly influential in the life of the school and their regular and significant contributions directly impact on the spiritual development of staff and pupils alike. Through their involvement, governors are aware of the development of St Stephen's as a church school but this is not a formal or strategic process. Governors are working with senior leaders to develop St Stephen's as an outward facing school and, to effectively prepare colleagues for their developing Christian leadership role, they are actively encouraging further links with the Diocese.

There is a very strong community ethos in the school and local charitable organisations benefit from this sense of mission. Pupils also understand their responsibility to the wider world and, during a term in which they focused on the Christian value of compassion, they recently donated resources to a grateful primary school in Ghana. St Stephen's benefits from very strong links with the local church and children's centre and this positive and powerful partnership further extends the distinctive Christian character of the school. Christian values permeate through this shared mission to the community as families are not only supported themselves but also encouraged to support others in need.

This area is not yet outstanding because rigorous systems are not yet in place for senior leaders and governors to evaluate the impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness. Although RE and collective worship are core strands in the school's distinctive Christian and spiritually reflective character, the leadership of collective worship is not as fully developed as that of RE.

Statutory requirements for collective worship and religious education are met and areas for improvement given in the previous denominational report have been appropriately addressed.