

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Stoke Minster Church of England Primary School	
Boothem Old Road, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire ST4 4EE	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Lichfield
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Stoke on Trent
Date of inspection	9 November 2017
Date of last inspection	27 September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 132200
Headteacher	Lynne Willis
Inspector's name and number	Angela Daniel 757

School context

Stoke Minster is a larger than average primary school (400 pupils) serving a community with high levels of deprivation. The proportions of pupils with English as an additional language or who are supported through additional funding are well above the national average. A significant number of pupils join or leave the school other than at the usual times. The headteacher has been in post since 2008 and has temporarily been an executive headteacher whilst supporting another school. Staffing is settled after a period of instability. In the last five years the school has established strong links with the Minster church.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Stoke Minster Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- A strong team of faithful, passionate and mutually supportive Christian school leaders, clergy and governors enable the whole community to live with hope and dignity by putting Christian values at its heart.
- The school has developed strategies which have created an inspirational learning environment in which all children feel valued, safe and ready to learn so that they can live life in all its fullness.
- Creative links are made between religious education (RE), Christian values and collective worship which have a profound impact on the children's behaviour and their spiritual, moral and social understanding.
- The local church and school work imaginatively and effectively together to ensure that times of worship are inspirational and lead to acts of service and kindness within the local community.

Areas to improve

- Make provision for children to visit a variety of Christian places of worship and welcome visitors from different Christian denominations to lead worship so that they can develop a deeper understanding of the diversity within the Christian faith.

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

The school's motto 'With Faith in our Hearts we will succeed' encapsulates the optimism and hope that prevail in this school despite the many challenges that it faces. The school highlights six core Christian values that permeate all that is done in this place: love, peace, compassion, forgiveness, service and faith. The school has developed a display for each core value that embeds it in stories and teaching from the Bible. Inspirational ideas allow the children to reflect deeply on each value considering its impact for their own lives and for a wider world. For example the children transformed pictures of weapons into images of peace based on a project in Mozambique. Throughout the school these values are evident in words and actions which encourage and build others up. Children new to the school are warmly welcomed and a buddy system allows Christian values to be modelled and shared. Everyone is valued as a child of God and it is understood that everyone needs to be loved and forgiven especially someone whose behaviour may have been inappropriate. All children are included and feel accepted without exception. They enjoy school, consequently attendance is in line with national expectations. RE lessons are appreciated by the children who share their beliefs, thoughts and feelings knowing that they will be valued. These lessons are highly stimulating and contribute profoundly to the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A special Heritage Week allows all children to celebrate their cultures and beliefs. The school has responded to the challenges of an increasingly high percentage of transient school families and pupils with English as an additional language by being resolute in raising standards. A co-operative learning approach has been embedded which ensures that all pupils are engaged in their learning. Emphasis has also been placed on self-belief, perseverance, ambition, risk taking, knowledge, let's communicate and empathy. This 'SPARKLE' programme has been developed by school leaders and woven with the school's Christian values programme to build emotional security and well-being. As a result children have developed positive learning attitudes, are making secure progress and moving confidently to higher standards of attainment. Faith in God, belief in every child's God-given potential and strategic teaching and learning approaches are having a powerful impact on academic standards. School governors, leaders and teachers recognise that the school's Christian values based on the teaching of Jesus give everyone a sense of purpose and stability. Thoughtful and courteous behaviour promotes positive relationships which result in a wonderfully peaceful and purposeful loving and learning environment.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is central to the life of the school. It is inspirational and empowers the school community to grow together in faith and 'sparkle'. A sense of reverence is evoked which enables all the children to appreciate how special worship is for people of all faiths. The children typically speak of feeling peaceful and of 'feeling lots of things' in worship. The school's co-operative learning approach is used to great effect even in whole school worship as every child is engaged, for example sharing their thoughts and questions with the person next to them. Because worship is planned by leaders who have excellent theological understanding, the children are exposed to language and tenets of faith such as 'reconciliation' and 'salvation'. The children are enabled to understand, for example about the freedom of forgiveness by the leader guiding them to imagine doing something wrong, opening a door and feeling forgiven. The depth of experience and vocabulary encouraged in collective worship impacts on the children's ability to think deeply about many issues of faith and consider their own behaviour. Symbolism helps pupils to comprehend complex ideas and beliefs such as the trinity; every whole-school worship time begins with a pupil worship group bringing in a Bible, a cross and a candle. Such skills are transferable across the curriculum and are having an impact on standards of learning. Children across the school have learned to understand and appreciate what the Eucharist means to Christians. Every term the Year 6 pupils share in a Eucharist service held at the Minster church. This is immersing them in the story and liturgy as well as bringing them into fellowship with church members, strengthening the partnership between school and church. Members of the clergy team are well known and loved by the children and their families. Inspirational worship in church for Harvest, Christmas and Easter are treasured times within the local community. The children are immersed in Anglican worship but are less aware of worship in other traditions of the Christian church. Worship is planned collaboratively by senior school leaders including the RE lead teacher and clergy from the Minster church. Themes and Christian values are therefore linked creatively with RE lessons, Christian festivals and worship. Consequently the children know about Jesus and other Bible stories extremely well because they are reinforced by worship. The children make their own profound connections between what they hear in worship and RE. Class worship provides the children with the time and security to explore and reflect further enabling them to apply what they have learned to their own spiritual journey. The pupil worship teams enjoy the responsibility and learn from planning and leading worship for the whole school at least once each term. Governors, staff, parents and children have the opportunity to express what worship means for them and contribute ideas to make it even better. The inspiration of collective worship does not end as everyone leaves the hall; there are prayer and reflection areas in all the classrooms, in shared areas such as the

tepee outside and many children talk about the importance of prayer in their own lives. Prayers are shared together in class and in collective worship such as The Lord's Prayer and the School Prayer which is based on the school's Christian values. Collective worship inspires the children to respond by being channels of God's peace and love in the world; often expressed by supporting local, national and global charities.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Teaching in RE makes powerful links between learning about religions and the children's own experiences and ideas. The school's co-operative learning approach works really well in RE as the children share their thoughts and feelings in pairs or small groups so that they are fully involved and feel that their opinions matter. In a lesson where the children were considering, 'What is the Soul?' the discussions were so personal, diverse and profound that learning was of the highest quality. The children were able to learn from each other about various faith perspectives as well as appreciating the viewpoints of those who hold their own non-religious beliefs and understandings. The embedded Christian values ensure that every opinion is respected and valued. Secure in that knowledge, the children and staff share their personal experiences on a very emotional and moving level; they are secure enough to be vulnerable. The RE lead teacher is passionate about the subject and gives staff the confidence to teach the subject well. She selects excellent subject planning material from the New Stoke locally agreed syllabus and the 'Understanding Christianity' resource which include inspirational and engaging activities. She supports staff with theological knowledge and understanding. Staff are skilled in making powerful connections between ideas from worship and the core Christian values. A lesson on 'Special Journeys' began by reminding the children of a member of the clergy's talk about journeying with the bread and wine to those who are home-bound. Connections are made easily to all faith traditions and all vocabulary used is of the highest quality. The children demonstrate a good understanding of world faiths but they are less sure of the diversity in the Christian faith for example in relation to worship and practices such as baptism. Therefore RE lessons ensure that there is quality learning in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills. RE also enables pupils to develop spiritually as they discuss together and are often given opportunities to express their learning creatively through the arts. Assessment is linked to each unit of study and gives a clear guide to individual progress and attainment. The co-operative learning approach gives every child the opportunity to attain highly and attainment is at least in line with national expectations. RE is monitored by the school's leadership team and link governor.

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

The school's leaders, governors and teachers have a deep dedication to giving the children in their care the very best 'chances' in life. This compels them to ensure that the children are emotionally secure and safe by making the school's Christian character real and tangible. School leaders speak about their faith and Christian values being the 'glue' which sustains them through challenging times. In recent years, difficulties have been dealt with compassionately and restoratively by school governors. Governors and school leaders have enabled their staff to succeed for the children by building them up and empowering them to deliver an exciting curriculum that wants only the very best for every child in every way. Clergy from the Minster church play their part in supporting school leaders and staff pastorally so that they are spiritually and emotionally able to serve the children in their care. Governors and school leaders appreciate the training and inspiration offered by the diocese. A review group of foundation governors contribute to the quality of the school's Christian distinctiveness and values, RE and worship. Their insightful learning walks encourage school leaders and contribute to creative new ways forward. The school is blessed with a totally committed headteacher who is driven to creating a culture in which all people are valued. She recognises the importance of a supportive and whole-hearted school team who work together, 'hand in hand, side by side and in prayer'. The headteacher has discerned an educational approach for the school which is impacting on standards for all children, especially the many vulnerable children. Leaders have invested in making changes that will lead to sustainable school improvement such as the SPARKLE programme and the co-operative learning approach. Together with the deputy headteacher, this vision is communicated clearly. There is a rigorous consistency of approach where there has to be, yet staff are also free as trusted professionals to share their numerous talents for the benefit of the children. The RE lead teacher is enthusiastic, inspired by diocesan training and eager to ensure that teaching and learning is of a high quality across the school. Everyone is motivated and excited about what is being achieved across the curriculum. The school's Christian values impact powerfully on the local community offering consistency and love to families, especially those for whom life is buffeted and battered by inconsistency. The staff and children rejoice in their diversity and the school is a beacon for trust and respect within the local community. This school and community equip children with the values and understanding to be bridge builders of the future in a wider world. It is the faith in the hearts of school leaders that is enabling this school to succeed in every way as children learn to love and love to learn.