

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Holly Hill Methodist & Church of England Infant & Nursery School

New Street, Rubery, Rednal, Birmingham B45 0EU

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese / Methodist District	Birmingham / Birmingham
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Birmingham
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	N/A
Date/s of inspection	17 November
Date of last inspection	November 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary aided 103479
Headteacher	Charlotte Taylor
Inspector's name and number	Lyn Field 151

School context

The majority of pupils are White British with a growing number from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils receiving extra support through pupil premium funding is twice the national average. The proportion with special education needs, including those with complex needs and autism, is also higher than schools nationally. The Frankley Plus Children's Centre shares the site and is managed by the school. In April 2015 Ofsted judged the school to require improvement. The headteacher and deputy headteacher took up their posts in September 2015.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Holly Hill as a Methodist & Church of England school are outstanding

- The combined work of the Church of England and Methodist churches has an exceptional and powerful impact on transforming the lives of families in this community.
- The dynamic leadership of the headteacher and deputy ensure the Christian vision is lived out in every aspect of the daily life of the school.
- Governors have a deep understanding of the school's Christian purpose and are uncompromising in their efforts to achieve this.
- Christian values work effectively in this school because they motivate all members of the school community and they provide clear direction to adults and children in how decisions and personal choices should be made.
- The quality of care that all members of staff show towards families and for each other strengthens resilience in the face of difficulties and reflects the love of God.

Areas to improve

- Expand the provision for spiritual development with the renewal of the chapel so pupils have a variety of spaces to access for their own prayer and reflection.
- Continue to develop pupils' skills in RE by embedding the new curriculum for RE and the programme of regular monitoring to identify where amendments may be required.

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

The Christian vision for helping pupils experience ‘Life in all its Fullness’ (John 10:10) is central to the academic and pastoral work of the school. School leaders have faced a big task in raising academic standards but they have remained fully committed to a holistic approach to children’s development. It draws heavily on the school’s Christian character and is very successful in building pupils’ self-confidence. RE and collective worship have both improved pupils’ religious and emotional literacy because of the constant references to Christian values and the time and space given to prayer in every classroom. Pupils have developed a wider vocabulary to help them manage difficult situations and the difference can be seen in their relationships and excellent attitudes to learning. The impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Pupils are very proud of their Christian values. They know the values are rooted in Bible stories and, because they have such an extensive knowledge of these stories, they have no hesitation in illustrating any of the school’s values. They point to the story of the Lost Sheep to show that, ‘if you really respect someone, you must do everything you can to make sure they are not left out, just like the shepherd did.’ An important result of the focus on Christian values is that pupils are completely accepting of differences between people. They appreciate the difficulties that autistic pupils face and are very patient when they play and work together. Pupils have a natural curiosity about different religions so they openly discuss their different faiths and learn from each other.

Academic standards in the school are rapidly improving. Pupils are making significant progress from very low starting points and many are reaching national expectations. Pupils often join the school during the year but, among those who stay long term, disadvantaged pupils do particularly well. Teaching has improved and Year 2 pupils are already ahead of how Year 2 performed in the previous year. Leaders have ensured that assessment is now scrupulous and provides accurate information to shape the individual support for pupils. This is a direct result of putting the Christian values of honesty and trust into practice. The quality of pastoral care for pupils and their families is exceptional. Every possible effort is made to ensure pupils in difficult circumstances attend school and absence levels are reducing.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, spoke of his heart being ‘strangely warmed’ and this is exactly what children and adults experience in worship and they cherish this time. The number of parents and grandparents coming to the weekly praise assembly is increasing. Everyone is beginning to appreciate that they get something from it at a personal level as well as enjoying seeing their children nominate and receive awards for living out Christian values. The Christian basis of the values is extremely well taught because the pattern of worship throughout the week means the values are constantly revisited. Pupils quickly grasped, that forgiveness is about far more than saying ‘sorry’ and requires one person to actually say they forgive the other. The praise assembly later in the week indicated that this was happening across the school and pupils described how it had helped to mend relationships. The messages of worship filter through to relationships at home and there are telling examples of how pupils showed greater understanding of their autistic siblings, and challenged their parents about where forgiveness fits with discipline. The high profile given to Christianity is valued by Muslim families. A parent spoke of how the strong emphasis on faith benefits her child and ‘makes the spirituality inside her grow’.

Expanding the leadership of worship is being taken very seriously and is producing a very rich experience for the whole community. The vicar and Methodist minister play a key role in making this happen. Between them they achieve an excellent balance in keeping a liturgical pattern to worship whilst introducing creative activities for pupils to explore their spirituality in depth. Members of several Christian churches regularly contribute to worship. The ‘Open the Book’ team do not just deliver dramatic presentations of Bible stories but have taken responsibility for making sure the themes fit with the broader curriculum. This helps pupils develop a religious language to explain the key messages of the stories at an impressively deep level for their age. They know the key events of Jesus’ life and can begin to explain how Christians understand God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A team of pupil prayer wardens is another example of how well leadership is developing across the school community. Pupils are quite clear about the qualities they are looking for when they elect pupils into this role saying, ‘You have to be talented, you have to know about God and you have to be an active sort of person who can help others to pray.’ They understand different forms of prayer including ‘You have to remember to tell God he is special.’ It is often easy to forget that this is coming from children who are just six years old.

Adults are very respectful of pupils’ spiritual capacity. The views of the pupils’ spiritual council are taken very seriously and a governor regularly meets with this group as part of the monitoring process. It is clear that pupils benefit from the increasing variety of places in which to pray and worship independently so governors are now considering a re-fit of the existing chapel. Remembrance day was marked in the new prayer garden and pupils talked movingly of how ‘the silence outside was really special’. Prayer spaces are very popular in classrooms because they are designed in a way that guides pupils in using them.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The school has just embarked on using a new RE syllabus. The decision to make this change shows that the subject leader has a clear vision for both the academic and spiritual impact of the subject that is specific to the needs of pupils in this school. She made an astute analysis of teaching and learning and identified that the syllabus was the weak link in the chain because it lacked a sense of journey for pupils in developing their skills. The Church of England diocesan RE adviser has been instrumental in guiding the choice of new materials. The staff are very confident in using the new resources and it is already possible to see the impact on pupils' engagement in lessons. This is because equal attention has been given to teaching methods as well as the content of lessons. Pupils use photographs and videos to revisit what they have learned earlier and to decide whether their opinions have changed. Although pupils have an excellent knowledge of Christianity for their age, the school has decided to adopt a new and challenging resource called Understanding Christianity. This is planned in conjunction with diocesan training and shows the high level of aspiration that exists for RE.

It is too early to see the full impact of the new syllabus but there are definite signs that it is proving successful. RE is treated as a core subject and this contributes to its success because it is allocated a regular place in the half-termly monitoring of senior leaders. The outcomes of assessment are also included in the termly pupil progress meetings. Pupils who are more able in RE are identified precisely because of their higher level of skills in RE and not because of their literacy work. As a result, teachers organise pupil groupings and their tasks on this basis and progress is accelerating. Pupils are enthusiastic and curious about thought-provoking questions such as 'Why did God choose Noah?' Teaching support assistants know what pupils have to learn so the questions and prompts they offer to individual pupils maintain the pace of learning for everyone. This starts from Nursery where the teaching of Christian values is carefully mapped out and the use of highly imaginative prayer corners helps pupils to begin to express their spiritual thoughts and feelings.

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

The school has a transformational impact on the lives of pupils and families in this community. The school is now oversubscribed and many choose the school for its church foundation. This recognises the 'something extra the school offers while on the front line of serving the community'.

Governance is outstanding and, with the appointment of the headteacher and deputy, the vision was refreshed to give an explicitly Christian motivation to transforming the lives of pupils and families in this community. This provided a common goal to 'use our gifts in accordance with the grace God has given us'. There is no church building in the immediate area so the mission of local Christian churches in serving the community is lived out through the school and the children's centre. A number of different denominations contribute to this but the Church of England and the Methodist church take a central role through the appointment of foundation governors and a high level of training and support from national and local advisers. This works seamlessly and is exceptionally successful because there is a relentless focus on 'the work of God in this place'. All governors articulate the essential link between pupils' wellbeing, their academic achievement and biblical teaching. Four particular values, hope, care, love and transformation, have been identified to define leadership in the school. These can all be seen in development planning and in the manner in which governors hold leaders to account. Collective worship and RE fully meet statutory requirements. They have rapidly grown in effectiveness because senior leaders give both areas the highest profile in terms of timetabling and training and RE is genuinely treated as a core subject.

The leadership of the headteacher and deputy is remarkable because of the passion and insight with which they pursue their common goal. They still retain the major responsibility for the improvement agenda. However, there are systems in place to grow leaders from within the school. The headteacher manages a coaching programme to nurture the development of staff and this recognises the importance of the spiritual wellbeing of staff as well the need for the headteacher herself to access support. Within the whole staff team there is a deep level of trust and care for each other that fully reflects John Wesley's principle 'watching over one another in love'. Parents feel equally well supported, especially those who have autistic children. They consistently report that the school provides limitless support and care for them even after pupils have been carefully found placements elsewhere that are better suited to meeting their needs. These steps can be hard but senior staff and governors do not shy away from taking brave decisions and these are always made with much prayer and with the wellbeing of children given prime importance.

The close partnership with the Frankley Children's Centre enables the school to implement its vision for the work of the church at the heart of the wider community. The influence of senior leaders and foundation governors maintains the importance of Christian values and the training and support offered to families has established it as the 'nerve centre' of the community.