

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Esher Church School	
Milbourne Lane, Esher, Surrey. KT10 9DU	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Guildford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 February 2015
Name of single academy trust	Esher Church School
Date of inspection	29 January 2018
Date of last inspection	30 January 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 141733
Headteacher	Cathy Bell
Inspector's name and number	Dr Trevor Walker (NSIN 908)

School context

Esher Church School is a two-form entry primary. There are currently 410 pupils on roll. Most are from a White British heritage, although the number of those speaking English as their second language is in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils receiving SEN support is lower than average. The number entitled to free school meals is below the national average as is the proportion of disadvantaged pupils. At the end of Key Stage 2, around half of the pupils continue their education in the independent sector. The school is linked to four local Anglican churches. Since the last inspection the school has become a single academy trust.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Esher Church School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The Christian character of the school positively shapes pupils' behaviour, their attitudes to learning and their achievements.
- Relations across the school community are strong and integral to the school's strong Christian ethos.
- Collective worship is given high status in the school and occasions develop the personal spirituality of all who are involved.
- Pupils enjoy their learning in religious education (RE); their attitudes to the subject are positive, and they achieve high standards.
- Governors have implemented effective systems for monitoring collective worship and other aspects of Christian distinctiveness.

Areas to improve

- Revisit the school's set of values so that pupils can readily link them to the Christian narrative and apply them in all aspects of their life and work across the school.
- Establish an accessible, agreed and shared definition for spirituality and a robust plan for its progression across the curriculum.
- Complete a renewed vision statement, which can be clearly articulated by all who are involved in the school, to guide, shape and inspire the future.

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

The Christian distinctiveness of Esher Church School is made explicit through living out its mission statement: 'Christ at the centre, life to the full'. This statement drives the school and gives purpose to its continuous development. Relationships and behaviour are very positive and shaped by the school's Christian character. The behaviour policy places an emphasis on high expectations, encouragement and living out Christian values. This is reflected in the excellent conduct of the pupils in the classrooms and around the school. Pupils make positive choices and treat each other with respect. Twelve distinctive Christian values are well established and given visual prominence around the school. Introduced over a two-year cycle, a day in every half term is devoted to developing a deeper understanding of each one. Nevertheless, the number of values means that pupils cannot easily recall and explain each value's Christian meaning, other than those values that are currently being focused upon. This was even more difficult for younger pupils, who, because of the range, were unable to revisit and apply them while carrying out their independent learning tasks. For example, one child was unaware of the school's value of creation while undertaking RE work on caring for God's world.

The Christian character of the school shapes pupils' attitudes to learning and achievement. Their overall attainment is high and progress, including that of the disadvantaged, is at least average in core subjects across Key Stage 2 when compared with all pupils nationally. Attendance is good and exclusions are below the national average. This is underpinned by strong pastoral support and genuine concern for each individual's welfare. The school promotes adult well-being among its work-force, a priority represented in the current improvement plan. Christian character strongly supports pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural (SMSC) development. However, spirituality needs a shared and accessible definition across the school and a plan for progression across the curriculum in order to even further deepen reflections and searches for meaning. There are good examples of teaching moral development and pupils move, over-time, from an understanding of right from wrong to considering more profound issues and complexities. Pupils in Year 5, for example, had studied, through reading a challenging children's novel, the effects of partitioning on the Indian sub-continent during a time of religious intolerance and suffering. They spoke articulately regarding the impact of events in the life of a fictional child and his dying father. They explored issues and formed well-considered conclusions with a considerable depth of moral understanding. The school's Christian character promotes respect and social concern through the curriculum and pupils are knowledgeable about matters concerning human rights and sustainable development. The contribution of religious education (RE) to the Christian character of the school is strong. Pupils gain an understanding of other faiths and they are encouraged to embrace diversity and difference willingly. Understandings of the world-wide multi-cultural church is not so well developed, although pupils have explored the use of crosses as religious symbols in a cross-cultural investigation.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship has a high status. It lies at the heart of the school community and includes those of the Christian faith, other faiths and none. All members of the teaching and non-teaching staff join the pupils on most occasions, demonstrating the importance of worship to the school community. Worship is distinctively Christian and uses a good range of Biblical material. The worship seen on the day of the inspection, was linked to the churches' season, and focused on the festival of Candlemas and Jesus as the light of the World. Acts of worship develop collective and personal spirituality for those involved and the planning provides a helpful structure to enrich pupils' experiences, although a longer planning cycle would be beneficial. As a result of the worship, pupils' religious understanding is generally good. The school has formed a worship group known as the 'Ten Teners' (derived from John 10:10). This is co-ordinated by a senior member of staff and includes those pupils who have chosen to be involved. They plan an act of worship each week, which they lead, and this includes lively story telling and singing, accompanied by a music band. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about these occasions and the school is considering how this can further enliven all acts of worship through greater participation and more planning by the pupils themselves. Guests lead on occasions, drawn from the four linked churches and the charities supported by the school. The pupils welcome these visits. The school held a Eucharistic service last summer and this helped to deepen an understanding of Anglican traditions and practice. The monitoring and evaluation of worship, by pupils and adults, has increased and is now having a greater impact on increasing pupils' involvement and enjoyment,

There are opportunities for spiritual reflection through the course of the school day. The practice of personal prayer is given a high priority and each classroom has a reflective space that is resourced by, for example, pictures, symbols, prayer cards and cubes. An occasional prayer and reflection space was established as a result of bereavement in the school community. A space containing an 'empty chair' allowed both pupils and adults to reflect on their feelings and offer their prayers. Teachers regularly use Christian meditation as part of the school day. Here pupils are given the opportunity to stop and engage in deeper reflection. This mostly takes place after

lunch but is sometimes used within RE lessons to clear heads and focus attention. Elements of this time include singing a reflective Christian song, chanting the Aramaic 'Maranatha' and guided meditative reflection. Pupils respond well and most find it to be an inclusive experience, giving an opportunity to pause, relax and reflect. One pupil said: "I think a lot of God's creation", another talked about 'being with God'. Community prayer is encouraged through half-termly parent prayer meetings and an e-prayer list that is sent to those who wish to subscribe.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils' attitudes to RE are positive and they enjoy learning about the subject. Achievement is high and progress is broadly the same as in the other core subjects. Pupils' written work, as evidenced in their books and display, is of a high standard generally. Each year group has a presentation folder that captures the experiences offered, covers the work completed and celebrates achievements. In the best examples, the folders demonstrate an emphasis on a range of work that represents pupils' thinking and creativity in the subject. Pupils show a good understanding of the practices and beliefs of other faiths. Visits to the sacred buildings of some of these faiths have been undertaken. Easter Pause Days give an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the festival for Christians. Pupils in Year 4 could talk about their study of some of the 'heroes of faith', including, William Wilberforce and Eric Liddell. They could explain the contribution and legacy of each one.

The school follows the Guildford Diocesan Guidelines and RE is considered to be a core subject within the school. Teaching and learning is at least good overall. During the inspection some good and detailed classroom discussions were observed whereby pupils gave thoughtful and extended responses to probing questioning. In the lessons seen, pupils were learning about the Old Testament character Saul and, in another class, the importance of Brahman for Hindus. Teachers showed good subject knowledge, although there is a need to provide more challenge for the more able in their independent work and their group tasks. Christian meditation is sometimes used in RE lessons for contemplation and inspiration. Assessment is thorough and a good assessment framework for end-of-year attainment is being developed through working with other local church schools. So far, however, no moderation of standards has been undertaken with other schools and this would further strengthen the assessment process. There is no regular reporting of standards to the governing body and this should be considered. Leadership of the subject is having a positive impact and the subject leader has used diocesan advice to good effect.

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

Since the last inspection the school has effectively addressed the improvement points that were given. All stakeholders can readily recall and share the current mission statement. It provides a clear sense of purpose that has had an evident impact on academic standards and personal development across the school community. However, it still lacks the necessary emphasis of a clearly articulated and inspiring vision that can guide and shape the future. Leaders and governors have, nevertheless, been actively considering the implications of the Church of England's vision for education and how this can direct and inspire the school. Work already undertaken on the school's emerging vision is an essential response to this document and will influence the planned revision of values. Governors have implemented effective systems for monitoring collective worship and other aspects of Christian distinctiveness, for example the Christian meditation. Reports of visit have led to discussion with teachers and the findings have, where appropriate, led to further consideration of practice and change. The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning embraces all aspects of the school's work combined with areas concerning Christian distinctiveness. Leadership of RE and collective worship is effective and both leaders have had a notable impact in their respective areas of responsibility. The governing body have appointed a teacher with specific responsibility for Christian distinctiveness and he has made a positive contribution to the work of the school, especially in terms of collective worship. There is a good programme of professional development and future leaders have been developed for headships. Suitability and willingness to work in a church school is an integral part of the recruitment processes for all teaching and non-teaching staff. The partnership with the local church has further developed since the last inspection. The clergy visit the school regularly and there are more opportunities for members of the churches to share occasions such as the summer picnic involving children, parents and members of congregations. To broaden experience, the school uses Christian organisations such as 'Kick London'. The group teach a range of sports during the school day and these are lessons which the pupils say they really enjoy. The partnership with parents is strong and the school carries out annual surveys of parental opinion. These show that an overwhelming proportion of parents think that the school's Christian values are evident in relationships between all members of the school community and that the school effectively encourages the SMSC development. These views match the findings of this inspection. The school meets the statutory requirements for collective worship and RE.