

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Saint Sebastian's Church of England Voluntary Aided School

Nine Mile Ride Wokingham Berkshire RG40 3RT	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese / Methodist District [delete as appropriate]	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	1 December 2017
Name of multi-academy trust	The Keys Academy Trust
Date/s of inspection	6 December 2017
Date of last inspection	18 September 2014
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary Voluntary Aided 45285
Headteacher	Martin Gater
Inspector's name and number	Lynne Thorogood 799

School context

Saint Sebastian's is a one form entry Primary School which is smaller than average with 150 pupils on roll. It serves an area that is socially mixed. The majority of pupils are White British but a significant minority are of Eastern European heritage and a small number are from minority ethnic groups. The number of pupils with English as an additional language is above average as is the proportion who have special educational needs. The number in receipt of the pupil premium or eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The current head teacher took up his post in September 2017. The school converted to an academy just before the inspection was carried out.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Saint Sebastian's as a Church of England school are good

- The well-established Christian ethos of the school is valued by all members of the school community and has a positive impact on behaviour, relationships and attitudes to learning in an environment in which all feel included.
- The high profile and respect accorded to religious education (RE) and collective worship, the recognised presence of the local incumbent and the close links with the parish church embed a strong Christian presence within the school.
- The inclusive and personalised approach to learning and care expresses the school's Christian foundation and determination to support the development of the whole child through a wide range of opportunities.
- The distinctively Christian character of the school nurtures supportive relationships between staff, governors, pupils and families and promotes excellent pastoral care.

Areas to improve

- Establish a systematic approach for evaluating the impact of collective worship which enable the views of adults and pupils throughout the school community to inform positive planned future developments.
- Ensure that all governors are involved in regular evaluation, review and challenge of aspects of the school that help define its Christian character to further promote its distinctiveness.

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

The school's strong focus on values (friendship, thankfulness, honesty, forgiveness, compassion and trust) is acknowledged by all to have a positive impact on relationships, behaviour and attitudes to learning. The values are understood to be Christian values and are also appreciated because they are values shared by people of other faiths and those with no religious affiliation. In this sense, they both help to define the character of the school as Christian whilst also creating an entirely inclusive ethos. There are many reminders of them around the building and pupils speak easily of the positive influence they have on day to day life and learning. Parents agree the values help to ensure there is almost no bullying or unpleasantness, and confirm that those pupils who might be singled out for attention because of differences are accepted. Well thought through strategies for pastoral care and support for academic achievement take account of individual needs and abilities. This is attributed to the well-established Christian ethos. Pupils are appreciative of the school's attention to their holistic development, saying things like, 'This school cares about what kind of person you are.' They recognise the benefits of good teaching which helps them do well and attain good results in national assessments. They also understand how they benefit from the wide variety of extra-curricular opportunities: 'This is a school where there's lots of things to be involved with.' A range of sport, music, drama, after-school activities and day trip opportunities is made available to engage and excite everyone. Fund raising and regular contact with a Christian charity in Uganda promotes global awareness. In addition, to build self-confidence and a sense of responsibility pupils have, and enjoy, many chances to accept responsibility and leadership positions. Notable amongst these is the end of year service, in which Year 5 pupils each receive a candle from the departing Year 6. They then agree to the charter in which they take over responsibility for looking after others and becoming role models for younger pupils. The youngest pupils benefit from their engagement with older pupils, who become their 'buddies'. All these opportunities give rise to good spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Spirituality is further enhanced through regular use of a 'prayer trail' around the school and provision of reflection areas in each classroom. Effective pastoral and academic support results in improved attendance, although some parents remain hard to reach despite the school's efforts. The school is committed to further work to reach out to this group. Exclusions are rare, and the strong Christian ethos of the school means that when they are unavoidable they are managed with compassion and attention to what will be best for the individual and family. There are strong links with the local church which shares the same site, and church-led events like 'Messy Church' are very well supported by families from the school. The regular presence of the vicar and his involvement in many aspects of the life of the school embed an overtly Christian presence. This helps to make Saint Sebastian's a place in which it is easy to be a Christian. One parent, whose child moved to the school from another, spoke of her daughter's decision to be baptised as a result of her growing engagement with Christianity through RE and collective worship at school. RE contributes to the school's inclusive Christian character by helping pupils listen to and debate different opinions in lessons. It promotes understanding of diversity and difference through the exploration of the influence of belief and faith on people's lives. As a result, pupils recognise that the subject helps prepare them for life outside of school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils and adults alike speak positively about participating in worship in the variety of contexts in which it takes place, including the church. It is through worship that the Christian significance of the school's values is most fully explored. Pupils explain that they understand, through the focus on the 'value of the half-term' and celebration of Christian themes and festivals through the year, how values are linked with biblical sources. Planning for adult-led worship is undertaken by the head teacher and based on a newly purchased Oxford diocesan scheme. Planning is monitored and staff are supported by the vicar. Collective worship helps pupils understand the continuing relevance of the Bible as well as the values that arise from its teachings. A respectful sense of occasion is evident when pupils and staff gather for whole-school worship. There are regular opportunities for pupils to plan and lead worship, including writing and acting out stories based on parables in cross-age-range groups. These opportunities develop a variety of skills with older pupils thinking about and finding ways to successfully communicate serious messages. Pupils express appreciation of worship led by their peers whose ideas and presentations are particularly appealing and relevant to them. Music is always included in worship, and pupils say they very much enjoy worshipping through the singing of hymns. Prayer and reflection are an important part of collective worship, and pupil-written prayers are used regularly, including before lunch and at the end of the day. This effectively promotes spiritual development. Pupils willingly talk about aspects of worship; for instance, some suggest that they would like more time for reflection, including more use of the prayer and reflection areas in the classrooms. However, the school does not have a systematic approach to evaluating the impact of collective worship which involves all members of the school community. This potentially limits opportunities for the best possible future developments. End of term and festival services are held in the parish church and led by the vicar. In this setting all members of the school community develop a familiarity with more traditional forms of Anglican worship and seasons of the church year. Pupils have a good understanding, from these occasions as well as their RE lessons, of the important place of Jesus in Christian

worship and why worship is addressed to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Many parents, including those of other faiths, take and value opportunities to attend worship services both at school and in church.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Religious education benefits from the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm of its recently appointed subject leader. She uses up to date and ongoing developments in the subject, liaison with school colleagues and diocesan guidance to review and revise the RE curriculum. In addition, she takes account of whole school learning and teaching initiatives to ensure that RE contributes well across the curriculum and is in the forefront of developments. In response to a development suggestion in the last SIAMS report, the subject leader is trialling a new assessment system. Early indications suggest this supports pupils to attain good standards, in line with those in other subjects, and to make good progress. The subject leader is aware that revisions to the system such as cross-school moderation are necessary to ensure assessment is always both robust and reliable. Teaching and learning in RE are good, and teachers' marking practice poses additional questions for pupils to consider such as, 'Do you think heaven would be the same for everyone?' Pupils are then given time to respond and thus developing a dialogue. The best questioning skills challenge thinking and pupils show impressive maturity in some of their responses. Lessons engage pupils in a wide variety of activities which develop a range of higher order skills. The well-planned curriculum ensures pupils develop a secure understanding of key aspects of Christianity and the other religions studied. Parents, visitors and pupils are happy to share their own views and faith experiences in a well-established atmosphere of mutual respect. In this way, they learn from one another about the impact of religious beliefs and practices on the lives of believers. This open ethos of sharing enables pupils to understand similarities and differences between religious traditions and significantly enriches their SMSC development and their understanding of the school's values.

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

Leaders express a clear Christian perspective on the six values which underpin all aspects of the work of the school. This is made clear on the website, in school documentation and in collective worship. The values are more than just words; they are understood well by pupils and modelled by staff. They have a positive influence on behaviour, relationships, aspirational attitudes to pupil progress and pupils' SMSC development. In line with the recommendation in the last SIAMS report, governors have undertaken a variety of training to support them in their roles. There have been several recent changes to the governing body and new governors have been appointed. They have all attended some training already, and more is planned. Governors are fully involved in the life and work of the school, and make regular visits. Governors begin meetings with prayer reflecting their strong commitment to the school's Christian foundation. The vicar and foundation governors take a particular interest in matters of church school education, collective worship and RE. However, not all governors are involved in regular evaluation, review and challenge of aspects of the school that help define its Christian character and distinctiveness. Nevertheless, Christian values and principles are the major drivers of much decision making. For instance, the pastoral care of a member of staff was prioritised even though there would be financial implications for the school. Motivated by Christian principles, they also agreed to additional spending to ensure that a pupil from a vulnerable family was able to attend school more regularly. Leaders' commitment to the value of each child gives rise to detailed self-evaluation. This means they have good understanding of standards pupils attain and the progress they make. Using this information, strategies have been developed to address areas in which improvement is needed. For example, there is a current drive on improving writing throughout the school. Parents confirm they feel 'listened to' and that communication with the school is very good. Many are enormously appreciative of the impact the school has on their children and respond by volunteering their time and skills, including interpreting for new parents who do not have English as a mother-tongue. One parent describes the school as "a beacon of light in this area". The school's capacity to develop leaders for church schools has been enhanced by the extension of the management team to enable more staff to develop their leadership and management skills. Excellent links with the local church, the diocese, other local schools and local organisations such as businesses and shops, all enhance the profile of the school in the community and bring reciprocal benefits. The school meets all statutory requirements for the provision of RE and collective worship.

SIAMS report December 2017 Saint Sebastian's Church of England Primary School, Wokingham RG40 3AT