

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Halesowen Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

High Street, Halesowen, B63 3BB	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Worcester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Dudley
Date of inspection	16 March 2017
Date of last inspection	27 March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 103847
Headteacher	Stephen Payne
Inspector's name and number	Stephanie Boulter 785

School context

Halesowen VA is a slightly smaller than average sized primary school of 218 pupils, located in an area of very high deprivation with the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding being well above average. Attainment on entry is well below national expectations with significant weaknesses in the prime areas of learning. High mobility affects the performance data of many cohorts. The current headteacher was appointed in February 2014.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Halesowen VA Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Christian beliefs and values are sensitively embedded into the life and work of this diverse school so that everyone feels loved and valued.
- Collective worship promotes Christian values and contributes to a very positive and harmonious community.
- Religious Education is well led and ensures that all the faiths in the community are understood and valued.
- School leaders are highly driven by a practical and compassionate Christian vision focussed on the specific needs of the community.
- The strong relationships within the school enable children to have a depth of maturity which allows them to express their opinions confidently and with an intrinsic respect for others in their community.
- The children's excellent behaviour, care for each other and attitudes to learning are rooted in the school motto, 'We care, we trust, we believe. We share, we enjoy, we achieve.'

Areas to improve

- Develop the role of governors in embedding a more formal approach to the monitoring of the school's distinctive Christian character, Religious Education (RE) and Collective worship so that there can be effective and challenging evaluation of their impact on all aspects of school life.
- Establish a robust system of tracking pupil progress in RE, which is focussed on assessment data and can inform teachers' future planning in the subject, to make it even more challenging.

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

A deeply practical and compassionate Christian vision underpins the provision of this school. Leaders and staff have a thorough understanding of the needs of the pupils and their families and supports them to be confident and successful. As a parent noted, 'The school wants the children to thrive whatever their situation.' The school has worked with the local church and other partnerships to develop strong relationships with parents and carers. One of these partners, Phase Trust, a local Zion Christian centre, works closely with the school to develop pupils' self-esteem across all Key Stages and also with vulnerable individuals through individual mentoring. The school's inclusive Christian vision was exemplified when the primary co-ordinator of Phase Trust stated, 'I have not come across a school which has better pastoral care.' The school's distinctive Christian values ensure all pupils achieve at school regardless of any barriers to learning. The promotion of core Christian values embraced by the school sets the expectations for how all the school community should live. This is reflected in the playground, where pupil mentors ensure that all children play happily together. Pupils relate the school's Christian values to Bible stories and the example of Jesus Christ. A consequence of this is that standards of behaviour throughout the school are exemplary and pupils readily use the values in their daily interaction with one another. When asked about fundraising and charity work pupils related this to the Christian value of love, stating, 'It is our duty to love and help people who don't have as much as we do, because Jesus helped people too.' Any child who is considered 'vulnerable' is given additional support, guidance and provision to ensure equality of opportunity and fairness. These significant and bespoke interventions bring life to the school's Christian values which it promotes in every aspect of daily life. The school uses its resources extremely well to inspire pupils to enjoy their learning in a safe and supportive environment. Bible quotes and sayings from a number of religions provide a focus to inspire pupils. Displays of pupil's work celebrate achievement and the rich diverse community. The words 'We care, we trust, we believe. We share, we enjoy, we achieve,' is imaginatively captured under a rainbow and is displayed in all classrooms. This motto links the strongly held Christian values of love, hope, tolerance and peace which underpin everything the school does. These values are lived and articulated by every member of the school community. Relationships are overwhelmingly positive. Staff describe the school's culture as supportive and open. The children work and play together and readily confirm that children of different faiths and cultures are friends. Pupils understand that they will be forgiven when they make mistakes and appreciate everything the school does for them. For example, one pupil said, 'The best thing about Halesowen is the staff, because they treat us like their family.' Parents experience the Christian character of the school in its acceptance of diversity and the inclusiveness of everyone. They feel 'accepted and respected' in an environment that is committed to its children and their families. RE makes a positive contribution to children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development with opportunities for enquiry and reflection. This ensures that pupils talk fluently about aspects of Christianity and have a meaningful grasp of the religious traditions in the community. Exemplary relationships throughout the school show the role that the school motto and Christian values play in the community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is an occasion of central importance, motivating the life and work of the whole school community. Much care and attention is given to the content and styles of worship which include Bible teaching, music, symbolism, silence and celebration. Whilst Christian in content, it is inclusive because it is skilfully planned to engage positively with those of other faiths and cultures, as well as those of no particular faith. As a result, all pupils can articulate how worship allows them to reflect and pray together as a family. It is led by the headteacher, teaching staff and the local vicar. It includes many contributions from pupils, often through their spontaneous responses when they are frequently asked to contribute. On the worship table the symbols of the Bible, the cross and a candle are used as a reminder of the Trinity and as a result pupils' understanding of God as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit is developing. The headteacher recognises the need to extend and deepen this understanding as they move through the school. Focus areas in every classroom have Christian symbols alongside those of other faiths, incorporate children's prayers and thoughts. These demonstrate their increasing depth of response to ideas about themselves, others, the world and God which they have encountered in worship and in lessons. The pupils who make up the Crew, the school worship team from all year groups, lead worship at least once a half term. They also build links between worship in school and in the local parish church of St. John's by contributing to important Christian festivals like Harvest, Christingle and the Easter pilgrimage. Anglican traditions are observed by the use of liturgical colours for the worship table, with worship planning throughout the year reflecting the seasons and festivals of the Christian calendar. It also takes into consideration the special days and beliefs of the other faiths within the school community. Worship focuses on the pupils' learning in RE, the current chosen Christian value, prayer and reflection. Pupils write their own prayers both in school and at home and can explain clearly the

different purposes of prayer. Parents of all faiths attend worship at St. John's and they speak positively of the impact worship has on their children. Children write their own prayers and parents describe how this spirituality is also taken into the home. Parents confirm that the school's Christian values introduced in worship help their children, acting as their own moral compass. Monitoring of collective worship is managed efficiently by gathering feedback from staff, pupils, parents and governors. Evaluation carried out by school leaders ensures that the impact of collective worship on the community is continually reviewed and provision is relevant and inspiring.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE has a high profile at Halesowen and supports the school's vision and Christian values of treating all children equally. Standards of attainment and progress in RE are in line with other core subjects. The baseline on entry is very low, therefore pupils make good progress as evidenced in lesson observations and the work sample. The school adopted the Worcestershire Agreed Syllabus in 2016 and staff are gaining confidence in using key questions to challenge pupils in their thinking. Staff work hard to ensure pupils achieve their potential in RE despite the whole school issues with speech and language. Enquiry and reflection in lessons are developing well and as a result learners are beginning to ask searching questions and relate themes studied to their own experiences. The RE lead has identified tracking and assessment as an area of development, with staff exploring ways they can assess in different ways not just by writing. Pupils enjoy RE and can articulate the importance of learning about other faiths to ensure everyone is respected and treated equally in the world. A Year 6 pupil was very proud of the fact that Halesowen were unbeaten in the RE debating competition run between primary schools in the local area. Staff share ideas and are given good support with planning and the delivery of the new syllabus. Understanding Christianity has yet to be introduced into the curriculum but training for this will take place in the summer term. The ethos of the school underpins RE teaching and during the two lessons observed, pupils made clear links between the value of love they had learned about in collective worship and the Christian idea of forgiveness and hope. The RE co-ordinator monitors teaching and learning through observations and scrutiny of work and these in turn inform an RE impact document which identifies improvement and changes that need to be made.

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

The headteacher, well supported by governors, staff, clergy and parents has a personal vision and commitment to the Christian foundations of the school. This has a profound impact on learning, behaviour and understanding of diversity, which is recognised by the pupils, parents and the wider community. All stakeholders articulate, understand and ensure that the school's motto and the distinctive Christian values and ethos pervade all policies and decisions, and underpin the school's vision. The vicar is a regular visitor nurturing the very close links that exist between church and school. The governors are particularly supportive of the strategic drive to improve academic progress and well-being for every child and informally monitor the impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness, collective worship and RE. They have identified the need to implement robust systems to formally monitor and evaluate these aspects, so that they can independently challenge and further improve the school's provision for the whole community. Collective worship and RE are creatively led with an enthusiasm which radiates through to staff and pupils. Purposeful, effective and strong partnerships exist with the church, diocese, parents, multi-agencies and the wider community. Very effective cohesive links within the multi faith community are generated through active engagement, which shows love, care and respect for the families of their pupils. Parents are unanimous in their support for the school and all it does for their children. They describe how the school influences their family life with children talking about Christian values, RE and prayers at home. Requests and issues are dealt with efficiently and appropriately. They speak highly of the school and the care and concern shown for every child. One parent commented, 'You are always welcome no matter what religion you are.' The outstanding leadership at all levels leads to effective practice, where each pupil is valued as a child of God, with unique talents. This leadership in turn results in positive, caring enthusiastic pupils who live life to the full and who appreciate God's world and their role in it.