

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### St Leonard's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Brookfields Road, Ipstones, Stoke on Trent ST10 2LY

**Current SIAMS inspection grade**

**Good**

**Diocese**

**Lichfield**

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Local authority

Staffordshire

Date of inspection

9 March 2017

Date of last inspection

January 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

VA First 124381

Headteacher

Kelly Stanesby

Inspector's name and number

Lizzie McWhirter 244

#### School context

Currently there are 32 pupils on roll in this very small school in the Staffordshire Moorlands. All pupils are from a White British background. 40% pupils come from out of the catchment area. The proportion of SEND pupils is higher than the national average. There have been significant staffing changes since the last inspection. The headteacher teaches 0.5 of the week. In September 2016 Ofsted judged the school as requiring improvement.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Leonard's as a Church of England school are good

- This is a small Christian family community where pupils enjoy their learning and achieve well in a spirit of 'friendly togetherness'.
- The dedicated team of teachers and governors work hard to support the pupils and each other so all can grow in confidence in this nurturing Christian environment.
- The partnership with the church enriches the worshipping life of this school community where prayer is an important part of each day.

#### Areas to improve

- Extend the systematic monitoring and evaluation of collective worship and religious education [RE] so governors are better informed about these key aspects of Christian distinctiveness. This includes ensuring the assessment of RE is embedded, using new resources, to inform planning and raise standards.
- Enable pupils to grow in knowledge and understanding of Christianity as a worldwide faith and enable them to meet people of faith and visit their places of worship more frequently to enrich their spiritual and cultural development.
- Embed the new Christian values of endeavour, respect, curiosity and love so the whole school community can recognise and live out these values daily.

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

The Christian character of St Leonard's has now been made more explicit and is evident in its daily life, ensuring the links with St Leonard's Church are stronger. This is because the old school motto has been incorporated with St Leonard's Church motto to form 'sparks reaching up, flames reaching out, hearts and minds glowing with God's love'. Pupils explain this as 'reaching up is trying to get better at your work and reaching out helps your community'. In addition, the governing body have revisited their aims and vision, valuing every child, encouraging them to flourish and preparing them for the next stage of their life journey. Relationships are good and everyone is treated with respect. The school acknowledges that the Christian values of endeavour respect, curiosity and love have only been recently introduced, and need to be embedded so everyone can recognise them and demonstrate them in their lives. There is a commitment to the wellbeing of all within a community where all achievement is celebrated. For example, music is positively encouraged, with pupils offered guitar lessons. Attendance is good, with any vulnerable pupils or needy pupils given individual support within a nurturing environment of endeavour and forgiveness. As a result, recent data shows that all year groups have maintained or improved attainment at or above expectations. Between 79% and 93% pupils have made good or better progress across the school in English and mathematics. The focus is now very much on presentation of work and the use of learning ladders, as well as building staff confidence and moderating with other schools. In addition, a team of volunteers now helps with reading. Pupils have very positive attitudes to RE and are growing in their knowledge of Christianity as a worldwide faith, as one might expect in a church school. Pupils know that their church foundation is important. For example, they know 'St Leonard helped prisoners to feel happy so they weren't so sad. The chains remind them us of this link.' Regular visits from a Christian Aid worker as well as charity fundraising ensures pupils are involved in activities about global awareness. As a rural, mono cultural community, the school has identified that enabling pupils to meet people of faith from different communities and cultures and visit their places of worship more frequently enriches their spiritual and cultural lives. In the past, visits to places such as the National Memorial Arboretum have enhanced RE. Pupils say they would welcome this and it would 'be really good to 'go on trips and visit places of worship for other religions in RE'. Pupils enjoy God's creation and their view of the Staffordshire moorlands with outdoor learning activities, such as welly Wednesdays and gardening club. They have also been involved in helping to design a spiritual garden. Such activities help to support their spiritual development.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

Collective worship at St Leonard's is affirming and involves and engages everyone. For example, pupils and adults gather round the cross to 'explore forgiveness and what this means in our lives'. Pupils explain this as 'when we fall out and don't get along, we can make up and be friends.' They go on to say, 'it's your responsibility to say sorry and help other people. You have to forgive people and be kind to everyone, shake hands and show forgiveness.' Pupils and parents value church services. Parents say the church link becomes natural for the children and 'church is part of the community, part of everyday life. The children love to sing in church and kneel in the pews and are confident to speak and read in the services.' Pupils can explain the symbolism of Christingle, Ash Wednesday and Lent and other key festivals in the church year. They say worship 'helps me to be a Christian more and say my prayers'. The Lord's Prayer is always part of worship 'when the vicar comes on Mondays', with pupils citing this as 'things we have to stick to or stand up to'. Prayer is an important part of worship in church or in school with teaspoon prayers often used. They say they enjoy 'passing the cross and saying prayers' and want to do this more. There is always an open invitation to pray in collective worship. Pupils' views on worship are gathered, with action taken. For example, younger pupils said they wanted to 'have some telephones to talk to God' so a telephone is now in their role play church in their classroom. New staff are excited about leading worship. Pupils say they would like to plan and lead worship more as 'it helps me to get more confidence to say speeches in front of people'. They also welcome more worship outdoors. The school has identified these areas for future development. Pupils are growing in their Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They enjoy lighting candles to represent The Trinity. They speak of God the Father as creator who 'made

the world. God the Son is Jesus. He died on the cross and saved us from our sins so we can be alive.'

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory**

Pupils enjoy RE which is called beliefs and values at St Leonard's. The new focus on RE has resulted in new books to record pupils' learning. Pupils say they find RE fun and enjoy learning about Christianity and other faiths through 'stories of other religions'. Lessons have a strong emphasis on Christianity through an enquiry approach. For example, younger pupils explore why the palm cross is a special symbol. They are helped to appreciate, through the use of puppets and drama that Palm Sunday celebrates Jesus as a king. Older pupils extend their learning about Jesus, asking why he was in Jerusalem. They explore why Jesus wore a crown of thorns, re-enact the story and are given its Bible reference. Consequently, they can explain the story of Holy Week and Easter well. They know the symbolism of the Last Supper. They go on to explain Ascension-tide as 'when Jesus went to the top of the hill and left the Holy Spirit'. They relate Pentecost as when 'he sent the Holy Spirit down, like a wind as you can't see it. It ran round Jesus' friends and turned into flames'. They are respectful when noting their thoughts about God and say, 'God is not a word to use as a swear word'. Pupils know how to improve in their work. However, the school acknowledges that assessment is a work in progress and the building blocks need to be in place so there is a firm foundation from the Early Years. To this end, the school is beginning to use a new resource, 'Understanding Christianity', focussing on key concepts such as creation, incarnation and salvation to take pupils through the church year. The school recognises that assessment which includes the impact of this new resource is yet to be embedded and evidence gathered through monitoring. Currently, progress and attainment in RE is in line with other core subjects.

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

The headteacher has worked hard to build a good team around her so the Christian vision and values of the school shine through. Staff are dedicated and support and help one another in this small, friendly nurturing community. Governors too are committed to and passionate about this school. They say that everything they discuss is based on 'salvation for all' and that Christian vision and values guide very decision and choice they make. They say, 'The Christian faith is the driver for any policy, data or strategic decisions, seen in the light of that faith'. For example, governors are working on a new strategic plan and effective monitoring and evaluation is very much part of that. To this end, link governor roles have recently been re-allocated. Governors acknowledge the need to record their monitoring visits of RE and worship more formally. The headteacher leads RE which ensures it has a high profile in school and is well led and managed. For example, RE is an integral part of the current school action plan and also the current and on-going Christian distinctiveness improvement plan. This has already identified the progress made since the last inspection, and together with the new staffing and governing body structures, the future priorities for action. For example, improving the monitoring of RE and providing training and support for teachers to enable them to be more confident in their teaching. RE and worship both meet statutory requirements. The new governors' wellbeing committee is ensuring policies reflect an understanding of the gospels and there is space to develop personal spirituality through prayer. This is well supported by the partnership with the church. For example, there was a service for pupils to see the new bells before they were hallowed by the Bishop of Stafford. Parents were very impressed by this as they 'wouldn't see this again in their lifetime'. There are good links with the community, involving the parish church and the Methodist chapel. This includes the Festival of Light and the annual Christmas tree festival. The school features in 'Moorland Churches News' and takes part in the local agricultural and Remembrance services. Parents are active in the life of this small, rural school and praise the positive male role models as well as the buddy system where pupils sit down and read together. They speak highly of the good friendships 'caring like a little family. It's brilliant.' Staff are proud of the friendly children who are thriving and enjoying their learning and the worship, which brings out the best in everyone. They say, 'It is a place of community and togetherness where all members are valued as individuals and work closely as a team. We recognise all aspects of a person, whether academic, spiritual or personal. The children are at the centre of what we do.'

