

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Curzon Church of England Voluntary Aided Combined School

Penn Street Village
Amersham
Buckinghamshire
HP7 0QL

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Date of inspection	24 April 2018
Date of last inspection	19 June 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided Combined School 110429
Headteacher	Jacque Coles
Inspector's name and number	Elaine Skinner 914

School context

Curzon is a smaller than average primary school serving Penn Street village and the surrounding area. Currently there are 148 pupils on roll who are mainly from a White British background. Fewer pupils are in receipt of pupil premium than is the case nationally. The number of pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is in line with national average. The school has recently attained the Silver Quality Mark for religious education (RE). A new subject leader for RE was appointed in September 2017 and supported by the headteacher who has been in post for 12 years. Close links exist with the parish church.

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

- Leaders have established and sustained a deeply rooted and widely acknowledged Christian ethos that impact positively on behaviour, achievement and relationships
- Pupils' spiritual development is very well developed through collective worship, religious education and prayer.
- Extremely strong and mutually beneficial partnerships with a range of others, including dedicated clergy, strongly support the school's Christian values, worship and a sense of extended community

Areas to improve

- Develop the current systems used for surveying pupil opinion so that pupils have even more opportunities to influence the school's Christian character through their feedback.
- Consider how forthcoming changes to the SIAMS schedule could inform and ensure a seamless transition to the next stage of the school's development as a church school.

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

At the heart of Curzon school is an exceptionally clear and powerful Christian ethos. The values of courtesy, confidence, competence, consideration, cooperation and respect (five Cs and an R) are grounded in a Christian context and firmly embedded in the life of the school. Consequently, Curzon is a happy and harmonious school with strong mutually supportive links across the whole community. Pupils are proud of their school and find it virtually impossible to think how it could be improved. Attendance is excellent and comparison with national data shows pupils attain well and make good progress during their time in school. At the end of Key Stage 2 progress in reading and maths is outstanding. Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils readily relate the school's values to themselves and their actions. Parents believe that the school's influence strongly contributes to the care and kindness their children exhibit outside of school. Parents appreciate the way in which the headteacher and all staff go 'above and beyond' to help children and parents. Staff and pupils are adamant that everyone is valued and supported as an individual. Pupils are encouraged to identify a network of five people to turn to for support. Strong relationships and the culture of the school means pupils choose each other, adults including staff and sometimes God. Central to the school's work is a drive to develop understanding and respect for different faiths and cultures. This includes building in first-hand experience of other faiths through visits and speakers and a link with a local and a Kenyan school. Discussion of a recent Christianity Around the World day showed that pupils understand the impact of culture on worship. Pupils clearly recognise that within their own community and beyond, there are many different beliefs and life experiences. They listen respectfully to each other and confidently discuss matters of faith and belief. At school they feel that 'no one is left out' and say that 'all faiths want people to live a good life'. There is an exceptionally strong sense of spirituality within the school. 'God is here with us' said one pupil. Ingrained habits of reflecting and applying the school's values strongly develops pupils' personal spirituality whether they are Christian or not. A recent staff survey shows that staff also believe the school has helped them develop spiritually. Pupils know that the school's values stem from the teachings of Jesus. The knowledge they gain through collective worship and religious education (RE) is therefore strongly applied across the school. A structured programme enables pupils to put their values into practice in the community. Activities include visits to a senior citizens home, grandparents' tea and carol singing in a local supermarket. Pupils actively support a range of charities both local and national. They are focused on making a practical difference and are proud to have provided much needed facilities for the Kenyan school. It is evident from discussions with them that pupils are growing in their understanding of their place in the wider world and the responsibilities that Christians have. The social, moral, spiritual and cultural education provided by the school makes its aim of 'Learning, Sharing and Growing under God' a daily reality.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worshipping together, coming 'under the umbrella of God' as a member of staff described it, plays a vital role in daily school life. Pupils say their worship is 'exciting, fun, and a source of strength.' Their enjoyment and active participation was evident in the act of worship observed. Music and the everyday use of simple liturgy creates a reverential space within which a Biblically inspired creative presentation prompts thoughtful reflection. Worship supports pupils in recognising that values are not always easy to live out. This chimes in with their own experience and so makes worship more meaningful and memorable for them. Their experience of it successfully underpins the responsibility they take for themselves and for others in the wider community. Anglican liturgical colours are used on the altar table and pupils have a good understanding of the cycle of the Church year and the major Christian festivals. In RE and in worship pupils are encouraged to ask, 'What would Jesus do?' Discussion with pupils shows that this is a question which is having an impact for some of them on decision making outside school. Worship goes beyond the school hall in several other ways. Altar tables in classrooms are used and owned by pupils. They choose their own symbols for inclusion on them. Year 3 for example have a small globe to remind them of God's creation. Different settings are used both within and outside of the school. Spiritual trails led by Year 6, and a recent dance workshop reflect the inspirational and influential approach taken to facilitating worship. School practice is further enriched by the regular and popular involvement of the vicar and personnel from other local churches. Prayer across the school is central to worship. Carefully planned strategies progressively develop pupils' capacity to pray. Consequently, prayer is a natural habit for many and some are confident enough to write and share deeply reflective prayers during whole school worship. A small group of parents also meet half termly in school to pray together. Pupils are progressively developed to first participate in, and then lead worship. This starts in reception with a CD of worship songs for everyone and develops so that an RE group can lead a class assembly on the Trinity for younger pupils. RE effectively develops pupils' understanding of the Trinity. Worship reinforces it through symbolism, prayer and the focus on Jesus. For example, three candles are lit at the start of worship. At the suggestion of a pupil a fourth candle in the centre of the triangle represents the school. Planning is based on a two-year rolling programme of themes developed from national examples. The impact of worship is evaluated in several ways. Governors regularly evaluate it and involve pupils in

their discussion of it. Class assembly logs are monitored and feedback helps to develop practice. Year 6 pupils are supported to evaluate whole school worship. Staff also make suggestions about how worship can be developed. It is evident that worship is continually under review and that evaluation leads to change. The wider range of adults and pupils now involved in evaluation means that an area for improvement from the last inspection has been met.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The newly appointed leader is a specialist with a clear vision for the subject. Development of staff, the curriculum and resources for it are top priorities for the school. Teaching is of a high quality. Consequently, pupils learn exceptionally well. Achievement has been above national expectations and current data shows that pupils continue to make good progress. Selected units and strategies from Understanding Christianity are being woven into the programme of study to further stretch pupils' thinking. A theological focus supports thoughtful learning and critical exploration from Key Stage 1 onwards. For example, in a lesson observed during the inspection, Year 2 pupils had to consider whether God could forget about anybody. This involved challenging them to identify who they most resembled in the story of the prodigal son. In this, and in a Year 6 lesson, teaching used resources creatively and included a demanding level of content. The culture for learning is excellent. Pupils of all ages work effectively with well-established talk partners and contributions to discussion are often insightful. Older pupils recall visiting the church as part of their RE curriculum in younger years. Marking identifies what has been done well and frequently poses another challenge or comment to which pupils respond. The subject leader ensures that termly assessments are analysed and the results used to inform planning and teaching. External moderation confirms the very high quality of pupils' work in RE, the depth of their thinking and their very good knowledge of Christianity. Following on from the last inspection, an RE group meets monthly to explore questions of faith more deeply. Pupils value using these sessions with the Baptist minister to raise questions of their own such as 'Who created God?' RE clearly makes a powerful contribution to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

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

The strength of the Christian ethos and its impact on planning and daily life is exceptional. This is due to the way it is integrated into every aspect of the school's work. Not all families are from a religious background but choose the school because of its values. Parents support the ethos and its clearly Christian basis. They feel able to do so because religion is not forced on them. Rather it is offered to 'step in and step out of' as they wish. Typically, staff see the ethos reflected in each other. Teachers and others speak warmly of a culture of equality, collegiality and mutual support. Team work is a strength in the school. The headteacher is widely acknowledged as inspirational. She works in partnership with strong and able leadership from other senior staff and with governors who know the school very well. Together they ensure that the ethos is always at the centre of decision making. A web of carefully planned strategies and systems successfully translates the ethos into practice. The school's Christian distinctiveness features strongly in the school development plan and in governors' meetings. Governors offer effective support and challenge. Their focus on understanding and maintaining Curzon's distinct identity as a church school is exceptional. Staff development and strong links with the diocese help to develop staff as leaders of church schools now and in the future. Careful thought is given to succession planning to maintain and develop the school's strengths. Governors are exploring membership of the local Diocesan Schools Trust as a further means of securing Curzon's long-term future as a church school. Staff embed the values in their teaching. This happens naturally and provides a consistent environment within which pupils flourish socially and academically. A focus on pupil leadership means that roles have been clearly established for pupils in worship, the library and as part of the school's anti bullying strategy. These are very positive developments but systems for fully evaluating their impact would benefit from further development. Currently there is not a system in place for surveying pupils' opinions across the whole school. However, leaders work with the school council and there are boxes in every classroom for pupils to raise individual concerns. Staff and parents are regularly surveyed for their opinions. Results confirm the strength of the ethos in action. Close partnerships with local clergy bring real benefit to the school. They, and the RE leader, are involved in regular meetings of foundation governors to review and develop the Christian work of the school. Excellent work by the vicar and the local Baptist team make a positive difference to pupils. They lead assemblies, the RE group, the Bible and Art club and serve as a presence around school. When services are held in the church, it is said to be always full. A small number of families have recently begun to attend church at other times. Provision in both RE and collective worship meet current national requirements and the national statement of entitlement.