

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Guston Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Burgoyne Heights, Dover, Kent CT15 5LR

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Canterbury
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Kent
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	Not applicable
Date of inspection	20 June 2017
Date of last inspection	21 March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 118687
Headteacher	Deborah Day
Inspector's name and number	Melanie Williams 911

School context

Guston is a small, rural primary school of 134 pupils in six classes. The intake includes many pupils from a military base bringing a high degree of pupil mobility. About half of pupils have English as an additional language and the population has high religious and cultural diversity. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is low but the school receives additional funding to support its service children. The percentage of pupils with additional educational needs is around the national average. Ofsted judged the school as 'Good' in November 2016. The headteacher has been in post for nine years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Guston as a Church of England school are good

- This happy, inclusive school is built on clearly stated, distinctive Christian values that successfully drive its work to support all to achieve good outcomes.
- Collective worship is highly inclusive. The impact on relationships and the shared, daily life of the school is identified and appreciated by all stakeholders.
- Senior leaders know all pupils well, making considerable efforts to engage families and meet a wide range of needs.
- Involvement of pupils in leading worship brings about a high level of engagement and forms a strong foundation for further participation.

Areas to improve

- Improve pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith in preparation for life in different global communities.
- Establish regular routines that help pupils learn about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and enrich pupils' experience of worship in this church school.
- Ensure that evaluation and monitoring of religious education (RE) and collective worship include the views of all members of the community in order to engage and challenge learners.

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

The school values of equality, friendship, compassion, forgiveness and endurance are evident throughout the school. They were chosen for their relevance to this community and are clearly understood and displayed in relationships and the school environment. Cultural and religious diversity is acknowledged but pupils are treated equally and readily form friendships across all groups. There is a strong commitment to supporting every pupil. This is seen in the strategies employed and the progress made to reduce the incidence of persistent absence. It is also seen in the successful integration of vulnerable pupils from other schools. The school is developing its provision for pupils with mental health concerns. The care of each pupil as an individual has led to good standards of achievement.

The school is successful in providing experiences and an environment where pupils of all faiths can safely explore spirituality. There are established reflection areas where pupils can express their thoughts using a range of media. A special club to support children in corresponding with parents on active service is effective and valued. The development of shared values through teaching, worship and daily interaction with staff inspires pupils to apply their learning in practical ways. This is illustrated by fund raising for disasters such as the earthquake in Nepal and contributing to the local food bank. They use their understanding of the school values to resolve any conflict between themselves. Pupils' behaviour, based on compassion, friendship and forgiveness, is excellent. Pupils in this multi-cultural environment have a strong understanding of diversity and difference between faiths. This enriches their lives as they have direct experience of living alongside people with a range of traditions and beliefs. Pupils have some awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith but this is not well developed. Their experience of other Christian denominations is also limited.

Pupils speak positively of their experiences in RE which is taught using a range of approaches. These include discussion, conscience corridors, storyboards, artwork and role-play. Pupils particularly enjoy opportunities for drama. RE is taught using diocesan plans for the Kent Agreed Syllabus which includes learning mainly about Christianity and also about the other major world religions. This further supports pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in an inclusive, respectful environment. Occasionally parents and staff are called upon to talk about the beliefs and traditions of their own faiths thus demonstrating equality and valuing diversity. Pupils receive their statutory entitlement to RE and are taught for about an hour a week. Additional challenge for more able children is built into lessons but too often this takes the form of a requirement for more writing rather than deepening thinking or analysis. Special events such as 'Experience Easter' allow older children to present their learning about aspects of the Easter story to parents and younger children. Parents and governors speak highly of the impressive way pupils communicated complex ideas. Staff are skilful in using questioning to help pupils clarify their thinking. Special activity weeks with themes such as light and water feature periodically, providing additional occasions for pupils to explore spirituality. Although pupil creativity and originality are promoted in some lessons this is not seen routinely in their work.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Whole school worship is a daily feature of the school timetable. It is valued by pupils and staff as a time when everyone comes together to think about important ideas and issues. Worshipping together successfully builds shared values and experiences in this diverse community. Pupils are able to apply what they learn in worship to daily life. They report that themes of friendship, compassion and forgiveness encourage them to quickly resolve difficulties with other children. There are few recorded incidents of poor behaviour. Learning about endurance encourages pupils to keep trying when their work is challenging. Parents appreciate the inclusive approach in which families of all faiths feel welcome to attend and join in. As a result, all pupils, whatever their faith, attend daily worship. Parents are well represented at weekly celebration worship and services at key points in the year.

Pupils readily participate in worship by listening attentively, working with partners to discuss the theme and singing with enthusiasm. The programme for worship is drawn from the diocesan scheme and adapted to suit events and the interests of the pupils. Collective worship meets statutory requirements. Stories from the Bible are used regularly to illustrate values and learn about the life of Jesus. Pupils relate these to their everyday lives. The story of Jesus feeding 5000 people was used to explore values of compassion and generosity. This led on to learning about overseas development work and challenging pupils to live in a sustainable way. Pupils' moral and spiritual development was supported by being encouraged to 'sow beauty, not destruction'. Worship takes a variety of approaches including the use of visual media, music, readings, singing and prayer. Older pupils have a basic understanding of the books, chapters and verses of the Bible. A candle is lit as a focal point to encourage quiet reflection and pupils join in with known Anglican responses. Learners can talk about many festivals in the church year but are not fully aware that there is a cyclical pattern.

There are occasions for prayer during worship, at lunchtime and the end of the day. Reflection areas have been set up around the school to support pupils' spiritual development, providing a place to think, reflect and pray. These are particularly well used in times of change such as the active deployment of parents. Pupils know The Lord's Prayer and sometimes contribute prayers to worship. Children learn about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit during the year but do not speak about this with confidence. It is not an integral part of their daily experience of worship. The worship programme is planned by the headteacher and usually led by senior staff and local clergy. In response to a previous inspection point, the school has set up a thriving worship club where pupils plan for and lead worship each week. They are also responsible for the content and resources in one of the reflection areas. Each class leads worship during the year. Good progress has been made but pupil leadership is not yet fully established as a feature of daily worship. Worship takes place in the school hall and occasionally in the local parish church. One pupil said that on the annual residential trip their chalet group prayed together before lunch. Pupils enjoyed taking part in 'I-Sing Pop', an event which combines singing with values education. Experience of other Christian denominations and traditions is limited. The school has improved its monitoring of worship this year but does not yet regularly include the views of parents and pupils. The impact of this in providing insight for further improvement is not clearly articulated.

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

School leaders clearly express a shared commitment to a vision for the school that is soundly based on Christian values. There is a passion for securing the best outcomes for each unique child. The leaders' hopes and intentions that pupils develop confidence, resilience and skills for life lie at the heart of their work. Pupil achievement has strengthened with results often exceeding national averages. The school's inclusive ethos exemplifies its values of equality, friendship and compassion. The headteacher recently visited Brunei to meet families and prepare them for an imminent battalion move to Guston. This has helped to build new relationships and smooth the transition. The school adopts an open-door policy which facilitates good daily communication with parents of all cultural backgrounds.

The school knows each pupil well and works hard to address all types of need. Staff training on mental health and engagement with other agencies is enabling the school to provide appropriate support. The school successfully retains pupils with complex needs, helping them to achieve good standards. Leaders carefully evaluate school performance and are diligent in taking measures to address weaknesses in pupil performance. There is a drive for excellent classroom teaching with additional coaching given to children who are not reaching the expected standard. As a result, achievement is good. In the last year the school has focussed on monitoring its Christian distinctiveness. Consequently, the school's values are more prominent in the environment and pupils' knowledge and application of them has improved. The school includes some stakeholders in self-evaluation, monitoring and gathering views about its Christian distinctiveness but this is not yet routinely extended to pupils and parents.

Values are frequently discussed in RE and collective worship. Pupils attribute their excellent behaviour and attitudes to the positive messages they encounter. Monitoring of RE through scrutiny of pupil work has led to improvements in marking and feedback to learners but lessons have not been observed regularly. Leaders are currently reviewing and developing the whole curriculum to enrich provision and provide more challenge and higher expectations in all subjects.

Links with local churches provide governance, support for the worship club and good experiences for learning in RE. Pupils regularly visit the church for special services and events. For example, a class recently enjoyed acting out a baptism service. A Christingle service was appreciated and well supported by children and parents. The school is part of the Samphire collaboration of local schools providing staff and governors' training, moderation of standards, sport and music. These facilities are well used. Links with the army chaplaincy are strong at times but subject to regular changes of personnel. Twinning with a Nepalese school has strengthened pupils' understanding of global issues and the local community. Links with local businesses have provided good quality experiences in science. The school makes use of diocesan networks and training for RE leaders. Courses such 'Godly Play' support the school in improving provision for RE and spiritual development. Senior leaders are included in planning and evaluating provision for RE and worship and two are completing the national professional qualification for senior leaders (NPQSL).