

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Blakedown Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School	
Birmingham Road Blakedown Kidderminster DY10 3JN	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Worcester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Worcestershire
Date of inspection	4 May 2017
Date of last inspection	1 May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	116784
Headteacher	Helen Beckford- Bond
Inspector's name and number	C. Ann Stone NS812

School context

Blakedown Primary School is a smaller than average sized primary school serving the village community of Blakedown. The school is in a process of expansion to create one form entry classes and at present has 145 children on roll. The vast majority of children are of white British heritage and numbers with special educational needs and those eligible to receive Pupil Premium funding are low. Attendance is above the national expected target. The school was inspected by Ofsted in June 2016 and judged to 'Require Improvement.' Improvement has been rapid and data shows attainment and progress is now above the national expected requirements. The school has close links with St James the Great Parish Church which is without a priest at present due to retirement.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Blakedown VC Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The ability of all stakeholders to articulate and promote a vision for the school which is rooted in Christian values with the result that every member of the school community feels valued.
- The great value placed on worship which is linked to Christian values and impacts positively on the life of the pupils and staff.
- The ability of the children to show respect for the diversity and difference within other world faiths and their understanding of Christianity as a multi – cultural world faith.
- The strong links between the school and the church community which promotes a shared Christian vision for development and learning.

Areas to improve

- Formalise the monitoring and evaluation of collective worship in order to ensure that children and governors are fully involved in the process.
- Enable children to gain a detailed knowledge and understanding of the Eucharist so that they understand the significance and importance it plays in the life of all Christians.

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

Christian values permeate the whole life of the school and create an ethos that enables children to flourish academically and socially. The Christian values of respect, trust, forgiveness, perseverance and peace are clearly understood by all stakeholders. The children readily acknowledge the impact of the school's Christian values within their daily lives and confidently explain the links to Christian teaching. One child remarked, 'If you don't trust people they won't trust you' and then likened this to how Jesus trusted his friends. The behaviour of the children is of the highest standard and excellent relationships are consistently attributed to the Christian nature of the school. Children have opportunities to deepen their understanding of spirituality through the use of the outside space, Forest School, opportunities provided within the curriculum and visits. An example seen of how creativity was used to enhance spirituality was the whole school project to create a silk painted 'stained glass' window display. All these opportunities allow children to make their own links between beliefs, practices and Christian values. The relationship between the local community, parish church and school is strong and is characterised by mutual respect and a genuine sense of community. Through varied community experiences children understand the need, and have the ability, to put others before themselves. One example given was the 'Socks and Chocs' appeal which relieves hardship and distress among homeless people. Fundraising for global charities has also resulted in children appreciating and respecting global diversity. The church community is involved with school through support and prayer. An example given was how church members and children worked together to create a set of embroidered cloths to use on the worship table. In all these ways, the Christian character of the school has an impact on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children. Parents comment that they are welcomed into school and consider themselves to be valued members of the school community. One parent remarked how she felt the school had nurtured her son's faith and made him feel it is a place where he can grow as a Christian. Christian values and Bible stories are regularly discussed at home and parents link this directly to the Christian distinctiveness of the school. An example given was how a child explained to his parents that persevering will help him work hard in class and achieve his full potential. The care and support shown to a child during a time of bereavement was directly attributed, by the parent, to the Christian ethos and values of the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship at Blakedown is central to the life of the school and is a springboard for learning about Christian values and biblical teaching. Children speak with confidence about the way in which worship shapes their thinking and actions. They clearly articulate the link between Christian values and Bible stories. One child confidently explained how the parable of the lost sheep taught her about perseverance. Planning is detailed and refers to Christian values, major religious festivals, the seasons of the church's year and relevant world issues. Symbolic artefacts are displayed on a worship table and children articulate what they mean to Christians. A range of worship leaders deliver worship although the introduction of more would offer the children a richer and more diverse experience of worship. The foundation governor is exploring ways of introducing an 'Open the Book' team to school. The parish church is used to celebrate major Christian festivals and important school events which are supported by parents and governors, thereby enhancing the school's distinctive Christian character. The church is very supportive of the school and acknowledges its responsibilities whilst without an incumbent. Members of the church community deliver a 'Parents and Children Together' group which is attended by children and parents of the school. Harvest workshops, organised and run by church members, are held in church for the school community. The church displays children's work and reports about the school regularly feature in the parish magazine. In all these ways, the links between the church and school are strengthened. Worship makes a significant contribution to the spiritual development of all children by creating an atmosphere of stillness, challenging children to ask questions and allowing time for them to reflect upon their own experiences. Children have a clear understanding of prayer and how it can help them during their daily lives. All classrooms have a 'Prayer Area' with opportunities for children to write prayers and reflect on important aspects of their lives. Children can talk about areas outside the school building where they go to give thanks for God's wonderful world ensuring that worship extends beyond a set time and place. The Worship Council have a major role in the development of worship. They meet regularly and are involved in planning and delivery of worship. In addition to this, children are actively involved in worship through singing, drama, sharing experiences and leading prayers. The 'Lord's Prayer' and learning about Jesus Christ enable children to make a link between the Bible and lessons for their own lives. Children have a clear understanding of the Trinity and described in detail an activity where they made pretzels to help them understand its concept. Yet to be developed is an understanding of the Eucharist and its significance in the life of all Christians. Parents are invited to the weekly 'Achievement Assembly' which acknowledges achievements of all and reinforces the Christian values needed to succeed. Parents see messages from worship played out in the behaviour of children at home. For example, a parent remarked his child is able to find comfort and reflect on his choices through praying at bedtime. Informal monitoring and evaluation by children, governors and staff occurs but the lack of formal evaluation means that improvement is limited.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Religious education (RE) has a high profile within the curriculum. It is recognised by staff, governors, parents and children as being of great importance to the life of the school. Parents remark how often children talk about their RE lessons and regularly want to explore their learning further at home. The RE subject leader is passionate, knowledgeable and regularly attends diocesan training. She passes training onto staff where appropriate and offers support and advice when needed. She works closely with staff when assessing and monitoring children's work and has a very good overview of progress throughout the school, thereby effectively informing future planning. Children are aware of their targets and are developing an understanding of what their next steps are. Progress and achievement of all children in RE is tracked and evidence shows that the majority of children are working at age related expectations or above. Lesson observations, work moderation with other schools, learning walks and critical discussions take place regularly. As a result, there is a clear understanding of the school's performance and distinctiveness. RE planning is detailed and lessons are lively, interesting and clearly link to the Christian values of the school. Children actively engage in their learning and this is also evident from discussions with other stakeholders. Creative and varied lessons enable children to question and deepen their understanding of the impact that religion has upon themselves and others. Children recognise that RE contributes to their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development through experiences offered during lessons. Their knowledge of Christianity is good and they are developing a deep understanding of diversity within faiths. Visits to places of worship feature in long term planning. The children enthusiastically described their recent visit to a synagogue and were able to explain in detail the symbolic features they saw. As a result, children's knowledge and understanding of cultures different to their own is of a high standard. The retirement of the parish priest, a foundation governor, has resulted in a decrease in governor involvement in the monitoring and evaluation of RE, but it is intended that this will be rectified when new foundation governors are appointed. The governing body is regularly informed of any developments through reports at meetings and informal feedback by the RE subject leader.

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

The headteacher is an inspirational leader who articulates well the school vision. The excellent understanding of all adults of how Christian values and spiritual development make a difference to the whole school community ensures these are at the heart of the school's vision. Governors know the school and articulate well the understanding of their role as strategic leaders of a church school. Every class has a designated governor which allows children to build up a special relationship allowing them to ask questions relating to it being a church school. They are an intrinsic part of school life and are involved in outings, support fundraising, attend parent forums and have informal contact with parents in the playground. Parents know that their concerns are dealt with sensitively and link this to the Christian distinctiveness of the school. They comment that the Christian vision shared by all leaders and staff contributes well to behaviour management and the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of all children. One parent commented that, 'Staff know our son really well and value and recognise his strengths and talents.' They know their views are welcomed and valued and feel privileged to be part of the school. Members of the 'Parent and Teacher Association' volunteer their time and talents as well as giving financial support to the school enabling the parents to become totally involved in the life of a church school. The RE subject leader attends diocesan training, disseminates information to staff and governors through formal and informal meetings and has a clear action plan to increase the effectiveness of RE within the school. Pupil voice is strong through the School Council and Worship Council who choose the charities to support, present their own 'Worship Council Star Cards' and share their opinions with staff, all of which links well to the social development of the children. Mutual respect and support between the parish church and school enable all to flourish and fulfil their mission to the school, the local community and beyond. An example being parents who work with the Parish Council talking to children about their work, which helped children broaden their understanding of local issues and community cohesion. The development of all staff and governors is achieved through individual support, attendance at school and diocesan training and the mentoring and support of each other which leads to a positive impact on the Christian distinctiveness of the school. Following a review of the governing body new appointments were made to ensure that they were fully equipped to move the school forward as a distinctive church school. Leaders and governors ensure both worship and religious education meets statutory requirements. The supportive relationships between all members of the school community are clearly rooted in Christian values, providing an excellent example of a school which is both distinctive and highly effective.

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