

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Thornford Church of England Primary School

Boot Lane, Thornford, Sherborne, Dorset. DT9 6QY

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Salisbury
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 June 2017
Name of multi-academy trust	Sherborne Area Schools' Trust
Date of inspection	4 July 2017
Date of last inspection	2 July 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 144415
Headteacher	Neela Brooking
Inspector's name and number	Revd David Hatrey 844

School context

Thornford Church of England Primary School is a smaller than average school. Most of the children come from a White British heritage. A small number of children are entitled to pupil premium funding. The number of children who have English as an additional language is below national averages. The number of children who have special educational needs is at least in line with national averages. On 1 June 2017 the school became a member of the Sherborne Area School's Trust.

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

- The school has creatively woven Christian values, its vision and spirituality so well into daily life that children are immersed in a community where this language is readily understood and which children recognise as significantly shaping their relationships and achievements.
- The quality of teaching and learning in religious education (RE) is at least good and often better. It enables children to make excellent progress with more children achieving the higher standards.
- Children readily articulate the school's Christian vision (Golden Thread) and explain how this shapes and influences their lives and creates a warm, caring Christian community.
- Leaders are ambitious and dedicated to enhancing the Christian character of the school meeting the needs of all learners.

Areas to improve

- Create more opportunities for children to plan and lead worship regularly and encourage greater involvement in worship.
- Embed the new strategies in RE and use marking to extend children's thinking by giving further questions which emerge from their own ideas which deepens their understanding.

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

Christian distinctiveness is outstanding because of the way the school have woven Christian values, Christian vision and spirituality together so that children perceive the difference these make to their lives and attainment. The school community came together to agree their Christian values which are; service, compassion, courage, forgiveness, friendship, respect, thankfulness, trust, perseverance, justice, truthfulness and generosity. Children have a comprehensive understanding of these, talking about their meaning and what they look like in daily life. Furthermore, this is enhanced by values awards where adults nominate children who show the values in their own lives. Badges depicting the school vision are awarded with the reason for this shared so children see how values are transformative in a range of situations. Moreover, children are immersed in a community where the language of values is so strongly evident. They articulate the links to their learning. The vision is seen through these values which allow God's love and care to shine through. Families of other faiths have joined the school particularly because of this and the degree of empathy which children develop through this approach. Children further draw upon the values and vision as they seek to respond to spiritual questions to inform their thinking and how they can respond. They are confident to share their ideas about how values inform their choices. This is enhanced by the way staff model these values in their own lives which children recognise and seek to emulate. Children know Bible stories which reflect their distinctive Christian meaning. They frequently talk about a number of stories which shows the meaning values have and reason why another value could be seen in it. They are fully aware that God gives values to us which Jesus shows us how we can use them. Comments made indicate that children thought this made you a better person. As a result, bullying is extremely rare and children treat one another with respect. This is because from an early age children are aware that they are special to God. The school's Christian character effectively develops the children's self-confidence and excellent attitudes to learning. As a result, children make good and better progress from their starting points with attainment often above national expectations. The provision for disadvantaged children enables them to make progress similar to their peers. Astute evaluation by the headteacher determined that children's spirituality lacked depth, taking decisive action to give this a higher profile. A definition of spirituality is agreed from which all draw with children having a rich understanding. Opportunities for spirituality are identified in planning covering all curriculum areas, often beginning with a picture which challenges children's thinking enabling them to respond with questions. Ideas recorded in their journals shows a deepening understanding where children are being reflective considering what this means for them. There are some high quality experiences which enhance this. Children recognise how this helps them with their thinking and how to respond to different situations. They articulate their ideas well, knowing these will be valued and respected. The school is confident in children's understanding of Christianity so it is now helping children to see the Golden Thread of treating others as you would like to be treated in other world faiths. Children of other faiths at the school have the opportunity to share what they believe and how they celebrate this. Children find this helpful, demonstrating a high degree of tolerance and respect. This is further enhanced by their visits to a London school where they share ideas with those who come from a range of other faiths. Links with a French school whom they visit, enables children to appreciate how Catholics celebrate their faith in other ways and what this means to them.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Collective worship is good because children have increasing opportunities to contribute and are well engaged. The impact of this is growing because leaders listened to feedback from children recognising that they want to become more involved. Children are now encouraged to do this in various ways, preparing the hall for worship, and a choir leads some of the singing supported by talented musicians. Children are involved in drama, whilst they respond eagerly to questions, using partners to shape their answers. The most recent development sees children plan and lead worship. This is at an early stage of development but is giving children more ownership. Planning for worship deepens children's understanding of Christian values. An aspect is developed each week with positive links made to biblical stories. Planning ensures children explore the main Christian festivals and they make connections between these and Jesus' life. The 'Easter journey' is a good example of church and school working together, providing workshop experiences which deepens children's understanding of the Easter story. This enables children to explain the significance of this for Christians. It extends children's understanding of Jesus and His teachings with younger children offering thoughtful interpretations of parables. Older children are wrestling with explaining the Trinity with increasing confidence. The school has made progress towards the target from the previous inspection to increase the variety of leaders. The vicar, local clergy, Methodist minister and an 'Open the Book' team bring a variety of approaches to worship which children appreciate. Collective worship engages children because there are strong visual elements, good pace and questioning. At present children can only recall a limited number of acts of worship which have made them think or influence their actions. They were not confident to make connections to the vision and values from worship. Younger children are provided with good experiences for prayer. They are introduced to thank you and asking prayers and use these on occasions spontaneously. However, prayers of older children do not

demonstrate a growing maturity. Monitoring of the impact of collective worship has improved through the leadership team. This has led to changes with more detailed planning, more opportunities to contribute to worship and involving children in evaluation. The governors' ethos committee invite children to share their ideas about worship which provides accurate feedback. This is being effectively used to inform planning and improvements.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Religious education is outstanding because the high quality of the teaching and learning challenges children to pose their own deeper questions of meaning, purpose and faith which extends their understanding. The leadership undertook a searching review of RE and set actions to raise its impact. There has been a renewed focus in teaching with observations identifying strengths which are shared across the staff as well as identifying areas to improve. These are regularly reviewed and have led to ongoing improvements which have ensured teaching and learning is at least good and often better. A number of fine features in teaching are evident; effective use of questioning, work that is related well to individual needs and effective use of teaching assistants. This has led to standards in RE steadily rising, with more children achieving age related expectations with recent results indicating that more children are achieving above average expectations. New initiatives have been successfully introduced which have extended staff knowledge and confidence to develop children's responses. For example, 'Understanding Christianity' materials, an enquiry based approach, is engaging children in their learning in greater depth. Children are given opportunities to share their thoughts about issues such as; 'Should religious people be sad when someone dies?' They enjoy sharing their ideas and reason through why they hold these, but are then further challenged as they listen to the ideas of others often reviewing their own opinions in the light of this. Children enjoy wrestling with their responses to these deepening questions. They draw upon ideas from their vision and values which are developed strongly in RE, considering if the Bible offers ideas which are relevant today. Children respond in a variety of ways, using art, for example, to reflect their ideas. This is influencing children's appreciation of the subject, as they perceive the relevance it has for their understanding and daily lives. The coordinator has been active in raising the profile of RE through monitoring and evaluation and effective support. She has put in place a number of action points which has significantly enhanced the subject. There is a new assessment system with clear criteria. Staff have moderated the quality of work across the school which has brought about greater consistency and uniformity. Marking provides valuable feedback to children about what they have achieved, there are some examples of where staff have extended children's understanding by posing extension questions related to their individual responses. Children respond to these demonstrating deeper learning.

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

Leadership is outstanding due to the exceptional ambition and commitment to the continual improvement of the impact of being a church school. Working closely with diocesan advisers, leadership has refined and built upon good practice introducing new initiatives which enriches the school's provision. This is evident across all areas of school life and reflects the quality of leadership which is well distributed. Children are very much at the heart of this with staff committed to how best to meet individual needs. At the centre of school life is the school's Golden Thread; 'Treat others as you like to be treated.' Children know this golden thread is evident across all of school life. In each class there is a thread to which children attach comments which show how they contribute to this. This language is very much part of their lives. Leaders articulate a distinctive Christian understanding of this; that everyone is 'special to God as we are wonderfully made'. This vision permeates throughout the school enabling children to appreciate the rich links between this, the Christian values and spirituality. The school is a Christian community devoted to these principles. Furthermore, the school's Christian distinctiveness is reflected in how it successfully meets the diverse needs of a number of children. Case studies give excellent examples of where this has made a transformational impact on children's lives. Self-evaluation involves all members of the community. Information is gathered through questionnaires and, with the ethos team, through discussions with children who describe the impact that collective worship, RE and values have. This leads directly to new areas for improvement being identified and action taken. A significant factor in this process is the way new developments are not 'add ons' but embedded into the life of the school. Currently one of the main initiatives is to raise the impact of its Christian distinctiveness; well aware of strengths but seeking to extend this further. Moreover, fortnightly meetings between chair of governors and leadership constantly review this. Diocesan links have been invaluable providing expertise and guidance to maintain this degree of improvement. There is a clear history of the church's strong contribution to the life of the school notably through clergy with the current vicar giving considerable time as chair of governors. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.