

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Blandford St Mary Church of England Primary School

Birch Avenue, Blandford St Mary, Dorset, DT11 9QD

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Diocese	Salisbury
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 July 2014
Name of multi-academy trust	Blandford Education Trust
Date of inspection	7 December 2017
Date of last inspection	27 November 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	141046
Headteacher	Daniel Lasbury-Carter
Inspector's name and number	Anna Willcox 915

School context

Blandford St Mary Church of England Primary School is a single form entry school with 184 children on roll. It serves the village of Blandford St Mary, close to the market town Blandford Forum, and more than half of children come from outside the catchment area. The school converted to an academy in 2014 as part of a new multi-academy trust (MAT) with two other local church primary schools. The school has a higher than average percentage of children with special education needs including 3% with an Education Health and Care Plan or a Statement for Special Educational Needs. The school has had 2 changes of headteacher since the last inspection with the current headteacher taking up post in September 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Blandford St Mary CE Primary School as a Church of England school are satisfactory

- Clearly defined core values, which are distinctively Christian and well-known by all members of the school community, are a strength of the school. Children's understanding of these and their biblical foundation are well developed through collective worship.
- The new curriculum materials for religious education (RE) are not yet well established. As a result the children's depth of understanding of Christianity and other world faiths is not consistently deep.
- Insufficiently strong links with the local church community have resulted in the children experiencing a lack of regular spiritual guidance and support. The headteacher has proactively worked to address this situation.

Areas to improve

- Establish a cohesive system for routinely monitoring and evaluating the Christian character of the school, including the impact of collective worship, in order to bring about measurable improvements which improve outcomes for children.
- Ensure thorough and ongoing training for staff in the effective use of 'Understanding Christianity' to enable this resource to enhance the depth of children's understanding of the Christian faith.
- Embed newly introduced materials for assessment in RE and use these to identify, and act on, key areas for improvement to further enhance provision in the subject.
- Build on the new links made with the local church community to instil a sense of belonging and to ensure that children and the school community feel valued as part of the local and wider church family.

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

Core Christian values, which are securely grounded in scripture, underpin every aspect of school life at Blandford St Mary. A thorough review of the school's values, which included all members of the school community, resulted in new values being identified. These have reinvigorated the Christian character of the school. Children confidently talk about the values, what they mean and how they have made a difference to their experiences at school. When discussing recent improvements in behaviour at the school one child identified that "the values encourage people to behave better". One child in her first year at school explained how she shows love to others by being kind to them and how someone showed love to her by helping when she fell over. Children are very proud to be awarded with tokens for demonstrating their values and are able to articulate clearly why they have received them. The intensity of the work that has been carried out in developing values has enabled a good depth of understanding in a relatively short time. Relationships in the school are a real strength. Both staff and children attribute this to the values of the school and all describe the environment as supportive and safe.

Recent attainment data has shown an improvement with Key Stage 2 outcomes above the national average. School leaders and children cite the Christian character as impacting on the quality of learning in the school. They say this is through children's attitudes and understanding of how their core values can impact on learning. As well as adults supporting children to see where they use core values in their learning, children also encourage each other. One child wrote in her book that her friend "should get a love token because she helped me". Children with special educational needs and disabilities feel supported and included in every day school life. As a result of the personalised support packages which have recently been put in place, progress is clear and children are able to talk about how they are making improvements.

There is currently no clear definition of spirituality in the school which results in varied degrees of understanding amongst staff and children. School leaders have begun work on this, together with the multi-academy trust, and have plans to continue this in order for it to become increasingly embedded. Children have varying degrees of understanding of Christianity as a world faith. They have a clear recognition that people are all different and that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity regardless of their background. Religious education contributes to the Christian character of the school through this.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Collective worship is a key part of the school day which is valued by the children. Children participate well in all aspects of worship and sing with great enthusiasm and confidence. Most children enjoy worship. One child described it as "the time we learn more about God and how he helps people". They find it difficult to talk about how worship helps them in their lives. Reflection is used in worship and some children describe this as a useful time to think about what they have learnt. Collective worship is Christian in nature and includes some Anglican traditions such as lighting a candle. A recent focus on prayer has been successful in deepening the children's understanding of the purpose of prayer. Children and staff add prayers to the 'post-it prayer board' and many of these are carefully thought out. The children have an awareness of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit although the depth of understanding is inconsistent across the school. There is a planning overview in place for worship and this identifies links to the school core values for each term. The school uses 'Values for Life' and 'Roots and Fruits' to support planning of worship. Almost all worship is led by the headteacher. He has been proactive in seeking additional support in this area and has secured the highly valued commitment from clergy at Blandford Parish Church. The school have rightly identified this as a key area to improve in order to broaden the children's experiences of worship. All members of the school community are very positive about recently introduced visits to church for special acts of worship. Some feedback about worship is gathered by school leaders although this is not yet being used to bring about improvement. There is no formal monitoring system to analyse the impact that collective worship has on the children's every-day lives. Despite it being a focus for development on the last inspection report, children are not currently involved in leading or evaluating worship. The headteacher and collective worship leader have plans in place to address this.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

Children have pride in their religious education (RE) work which is consistent with learning in other subject areas. School leaders report that children make good progress in RE but this is difficult to evaluate as the assessment and record keeping systems are new and there is no historic data for RE attainment. The school had already recognised the need to embed the new assessment system in order to effectively track progress. The school uses the 'Discovery RE' scheme to deliver the syllabus and has recently supplemented this with the 'Understanding Christianity' resource in order to deepen children's understanding of the Christian faith. This work is in its early days. Teaching in the lessons observed demonstrated good subject knowledge. Deepening teacher's subject knowledge has been identified by the RE subject leader as an area for development as this is not yet consistent across the school. The school has plans in place for training in 'Understanding Christianity' in order to support teachers' subject knowledge and, consequently, deepen children's understanding of the Christian faith. The school's core values play a key role in RE teaching and are referred to throughout lessons. Children talk about how their values link to RE. Teachers plan lessons to motivate children. For example, in a lesson with older children, the teacher planned a rotation of practical prayer based activities to help them understand the main uses of prayer: praise, thanksgiving, request and forgiveness. Children explained clearly what they were learning, including children with special educational needs. Children are taught about other world faiths in single units for relatively short periods of time with minimal opportunities to consolidate understanding. Consequently, they can name other world faiths and some of their main beliefs and practices but depth of understanding is limited. The new subject leader is enthusiastic, focused and has great potential for leading whole school improvement in RE. She has engaged in thorough and accurate evaluation which is already leading to improvements, particularly regarding assessment. She and the headteacher have started monitoring the quality of provision in RE. It is too soon to see the impact of this work on children's achievement in RE.

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

The school is led by a highly effective headteacher who, very soon after appointment, identified key areas for development regarding the school's Christian character. He actively sought advice from the diocese and acted on this, leading to improvements being made at a rapid pace. He is well supported by his deputy headteacher who shares his determination and drive to improve. The distinctively Christian nature of the school's vision and values is clearly articulated by school leaders. The biblical roots of these values and their relevance to the school have been carefully and thoughtfully planned in order for them to have maximum impact on the children and school community. As a result, these have become quickly embedded and are already impacting on all aspects of school life. Parents are happy with the education and pastoral support their children receive at school. One parent said, 'My children are always happy to come to school.' Another commented, 'It's a warm place to be.' Parents were positive about the way the whole school community had 'pulled together' to become stronger during a recent period of turbulence and felt that this was largely due to the leadership of the headteacher. The staff agreed that they feel they 'have clear direction'. School leaders have rightly identified that links between school and the local church community have not been sufficiently strong to provide the necessary spiritual support and guidance to the school community. The headteacher has now proactively sought and secured the support of members of clergy from Blandford Parish Church. Both the church and school have shown great commitment to build on this new partnership. Children and their families respond very favourably to holding special acts of worship in church. The chief executive officer of the MAT provides a good level of support and knows the school well. She said, 'The staff care deeply for the children and there is an uncompromising ambition for them.' She has a good understanding of what makes a good church school and is supportive of the school leaders in their continued drive to bring about improvements. There are trustees on the board with key strengths in church school governance who ensure that a high priority on Christian character of the school is maintained. As part of a current restructuring of the Trust board, an Ethos Committee is being established to monitor the Christian distinctiveness of its schools. This has been identified by the Trust as a key area for improvement to secure the future of Blandford St Mary School as a church school. Formal monitoring is not yet in place. Arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.