

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

| Bourton St. George's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School | |
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| Church Track, Bourton, Gillingham, SP8 5BN | |
| Current SIAMS inspection grade | Good |
| Diocese | Salisbury |
| Previous SIAMS inspection grade | Outstanding |
| Local authority | Dorset |
| Date of inspection | 20 June 2018 |
| Date of last inspection | 5 July 2013 |
| Type of school and unique reference number | Voluntary Aided 113756 |
| Headteacher | Michael Salisbury |
| Inspector's name and number | Neil Revell 894 |

School context

Bourton St. George's has 114 children on roll. It serves a predominantly rural area within the parish of Upper Stour. Around half of the children live outside the school's catchment. The proportion of children with special educational needs is just above the national average. The percentage of children in receipt of pupil premium funding is significantly below average. Most children are of White British heritage. Attendance is above the national average. The long-standing headteacher will leave at the end of this term following promotion to the headship of another school. Governors have appointed a new headteacher from September 2018.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Bourton St. George's as a Church of England school are good

- The day-to-day actions of those who learn and work at the school are rooted in its Christian values. There are positive relationships and a high level of care within the school community.
- The school is proactive in ensuring many curriculum opportunities for children to learn about and celebrate diversity. Children speak with respect and understanding about a range of cultures, faiths and about the importance of inclusion.
- There is a close and mutually beneficial partnership between the school, local churches and the surrounding community. Children and adults recognise the importance of service to others.

Areas to improve

- Develop arrangements for self-evaluation, involving all groups in the school community, so that leaders' judgements about the impact of the school's work are robust and fully evidenced.
- Establish a concise Christian vision for the school in which strategic and curriculum choices can be rooted.
- Refine the large number of Christian values so that each can be more clearly understood and referenced by children.

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

The school's Christian character shines through as everybody knows how God infinitely values them as a unique and precious person. All members of the school family greatly appreciate the love and time which the school extends to them in every situation. A parent whose children transferred to the school commented on 'how lucky' her family has been 'to find ourselves welcomed into the heart of such a professional, caring school community'. Children's achievement in national assessments is consistently above average. Children feel 'safe', 'secure' and 'very happy' at St. George's. There is a shared understanding of spirituality. The curriculum in all classes includes many occasions, planned and spontaneous, when children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is supported. Children are aware of opportunities and challenges, not just from their own perspective but also from others' standpoints. Children are very empathetic to the needs of others. Regular whole school 'spirituality days' start with a reflection about a shared Bible verse and include walks to local churches, with planned breaks along the way to think about elements of God's world. Children and adults speak about how 'powerful' these occasions are in shaping minds, influencing thinking and 'reflecting together on what really matters in life'. Every child keeps a reflection diary in which they express their own on-going thoughts and learning about SMSC matters. The impact of this work on children's development is routinely monitored which was an area for improvement from the previous inspection. Children like the fact that they can express their reflections in any way which they choose, 'because sometimes Art helps you think but other times you want to write'. They unanimously describe the process of keeping the diaries as 'very special' and say that this work 'helps us to understand more about all that God and Jesus can do for us'. The school successfully ensures that children have a range of opportunities to learn about religious, cultural and social diversity both through off site visits and by welcoming visitors from a range of faith and other groups. Children are highly aware that there is a variety of world faiths and talk with huge respect about the richness of diversity. They understand that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith. Children are equally respectful and sensitive to a range of needs and challenges which individuals face linked with disability and other health-based matters. 'Anyone who comes to our school is one with us', said a group of children when talking about diversity. These responses demonstrate how the school's Christian values, including respect, kindness and community, are deeply embedded within the daily life of the school and in the lives of the children. They help to shape children's thinking. At the same time, there is a consensus that there are too many Christian values to effectively remember and focus on them all. Children are mainly excited by opportunities to reflect on challenging SMSC questions in religious education (RE). They largely enjoy their learning in this subject which contributes effectively to the school's Christian character.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Through collective worship, children gain a secure understanding of biblical links to the school's Christian values. Some children in Year 1 confidently explain, for example, how the value of 'forgiveness' can be understood through both the parable of the Prodigal Son and the story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. A range of school staff, clergy and community members, including the 'Open The Book' team, lead collective worship. Acts of worship are held in various local churches at points in the year. Children are developing their understanding of different Christian traditions of worship and talk confidently about key events in the Christian calendar. There are many opportunities for reflection in collective worship and children 'like this time to think'. They appreciate and respect the importance of prayer. One child commented that 'prayer lets you communicate with God and Jesus which gives you a hope that your prayer will make a difference, so long as it not just a selfish prayer'. Children value being invited to contribute prayers to collective worship by placing them on the prayer tree. They say that 'writing a prayer is important as it makes you stop and think what you are really asking for'. In all of these ways collective worship encourages children's spiritual development although children agree that the sense of reverence is often lost as some children talk when leaving the hall immediately after an act of worship. Collective worship has inspired children to take action in the service of others and in stewardship, including supporting Gillingham Food Bank and developing the school's garden club. The concept of the Trinity is explored in collective worship and children talk confidently about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Children add that, 'these words are part of the grace which we say most days in worship so we often think about this'. Children sometimes lead elements of collective worship. They enjoy being involved in worship and speak deeply about their learning when, for example, supporting the 'Open The Book' team. All children speak highly about the vicar's 'great guitar songs' which 'make learning about Jesus really fun'. Staff in partnership with the church plan collective worship themes. There is a coherent focus on values and biblical text for all worship. Children in Year 6 complete written evaluations of worship which are reviewed by governors. Children say that there have been some changes to elements of worship based on their feedback. Beyond this, leaders, including governors, do not regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of collective worship. The school's self-evaluation of collective worship over time lacks rigour.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Religious education (RE) is valued as a core part of the curriculum at St. George's. There are high expectations for children's learning. Children take pride in their work; their outcomes are in line with, and sometimes above, national expectations. The school has implemented effective systems for assessment in RE. Both teachers and teaching assistants tailor teaching to meet the needs of individual children. Most children make good progress. Across the school children are asked questions to challenge their thinking and they, in turn, respond with maturity and thought. When children in Years 5 and 6 were asked, 'If God is holy and perfect, what would that look like?', responses included, 'when the sun comes out and is very powerful, that is when you feel God's love and think what He looks like'. Children say that they 'enjoy such big questions because no one really knows any of the answers so, although you may not be right, no one can be sure that you are wrong. They certainly make you think'. Where the use of such questioning is followed up with opportunities for children to be creative and original in the way that they express their learning, RE is highly effective. This is not consistent in all classes. Children have a secure knowledge of both Christianity and of the main practices and beliefs of other faiths studied. An interactive reflective area in Years 5 and 6 has allowed children to think about elements of Sikh practice. Children speak very respectfully about all faiths, emphasising the similarities rather than focusing on difference. Staff are excited by the newly-introduced 'Understanding Christianity' resource and value the opportunities which this provides for staff and children to explore Christianity in greater depth. The RE Leader stays informed about developments in RE. All teaching staff are supported in their implementation of the curriculum. There is not regular formal monitoring of RE to inform the subject action plan for improvement. This limits the depth of the school's self-evaluation of the subject.

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

All members of the school community praise the passion of the headteacher in living out the school's Christian values. They speak of the commitment he gives to ensure that, 'no stone is ever left unturned for any child so that there are lifelong benefits for everyone who passes through St. George's'. This ethos, centred on well-being and realising potential, is shared by all adults in school. Children consistently secure good levels of achievement and have high aspirations. A range of statements has evolved over time but the school does not have a precise and explicit Christian vision that links with its Christian values. This, in part, limits the depth of self-evaluation as there is not a clear set of criteria against which impact can be gauged. Foundation governors form the 'pastoral and spiritual committee' to review the school's work as a church school although self-evaluation does not routinely involve all members of the school community and is not consistently robust. Improving procedures to monitor and evaluate the impact of the school's work as a church school were foci for development from the previous inspection. There are exceptionally strong relationships between the school and the local church. The vicar and 'Open The Book' team are weekly visitors in school. Children and adults value this 'important and very visible partnership'. In turn, the school is highly involved in church events; for example, children contribute work to the parish art exhibition. Many children periodically attend church services, specifically representing the school, throughout the year. Children have a strong sense of community and of service to others underpinned by the school Christian value of respect. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about their partnership with the school and refer to it as a 'family'. They praise the way that the school addresses world events, 'including those which are challenging', with their children, saying this has helped the children to gain deep respect for diversity. Parents significantly appreciate this given that cultural and religious diversity is not widespread in the school's demographic. Governors are proactive in seeking partnerships with other schools in order to maximise opportunities for everyone at St. George's. Partnership work with another local school in maths, for example, has recently proven beneficial in further raising standards. High importance is placed on staff development, including the enrichment of church school distinctiveness through the diocesan partnership service agreement. Staff from the school have, in recent years, been promoted to the headships of other church schools and the headteacher has recently been promoted to the headship of a larger church school in the diocese. The school meets statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.

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