

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ursula Taylor Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

High Street, Clapham, Bedford MK41 6EG

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

St Albans

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Bedford Borough

Date of inspection

23 March 2017

Date of last inspection

January 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

VC Primary 139990

Headteacher

Vicki Morrall

Inspector's name and number

Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

Currently there are 291 pupils on roll. The school is growing from a lower school into a straight through primary school and will have pupils up to the age of eleven years old from September 2018. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is especially high in Foundation Stage and Year 2. The headteacher has been in post as the substantive headteacher since October 2014. There are close links with the parish church of St Thomas of Canterbury. The school achieved their RE Quality Mark [REQM] Gold award in July 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ursula Taylor as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The excellent commitment to pastoral wellbeing in this Christian family community puts the pupils at the core of everything. Consequently, all children are valued and encouraged to be themselves and are well supported in a spirit of honesty. As a result, all pupils make very good progress.
- Pupils' very good level of religious literacy and outstanding Biblical knowledge makes a significant contribution to these young pupils' spiritual lives.
- The mutual and substantial partnership between church and school, through the vicar, enriches the spiritual journeys of pupils and adults alike.
- All staff are dedicated to creating an overtly Christian environment which celebrates successes and showcases staff commitment to the school's Christian ethos. Strong leadership and management ensures that exemplary practice is shared widely in the community.

Areas to improve

- Extend pupils' experience of planning and leading collective worship to enrich their engagement in the worshipping life of this church school.
- Deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding of key festivals in the church year, such as Ascension-tide, their founder Ursula Taylor and St Thomas of Canterbury, to whom their parish church is

dedicated to nurture their spiritual and personal development.

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

This growing primary school provides a firm foundation for all its young pupils to develop in the true spirit of its mission, 'Living God's love, together we flourish'. This is because the excellent commitment to pastoral care and wellbeing in this Christian family community puts the pupils 'at the core of everything'. Here, pupils can be themselves, are given the support and nurture they need within an overtly Christian environment where honesty and respect dwell. As a result, attendance is high and all pupils make good progress and achieve well, with many pupils achieving above the national average in core subjects. In addition, the 'Sidney club' and the 'build it' and 'grow it' sessions offered to pupils help develop confidence and self-esteem. This includes the youngest children, many of whom have significant special needs. Given their low starting points, they thrive and succeed with focussed interventions in this nurturing environment, which richly supports their spiritual and personal development. This is because skilled teachers know the pupils very well and ensure the pastoral Christian ethos runs like a golden thread through all school policy and practice. An excellent example is the wellbeing hour on a Friday afternoon, when staff spend time with children, getting to know them through den building, cooking and taking walks around the woods. As a result, pupils become confident and happy and ready to learn formally in class. Relationships and behaviour are both excellent. The school attributes this to their commitment to values education, which is well established as well as the strong links which are evident to the church year. For example, exemplary art work displays the events and colours of Holy Week. Pupils' perspectives are deepened through worship and RE days and weeks, such as the 'superweek' in January with its focus on Christianity around the world. Pupils say, 'we had a visitor who was in Kenya and she told us about how they were worshipping God.' One of the hallmarks of this school is that local Clapham people have made the links with countries like Jamaica more real for the pupils. They comment about the symbolism of the Salvadoran cross and their favourite stories of someone who died for their faith. An example is the story of 'Maria Gomez who was a primary school teacher as well as a Sunday school teacher'. Pupils show excellent religious understanding and biblical knowledge for their ages, and can enthusiastically relate the Christian story of salvation very well. Pupils say RE both excites and challenges them, adding 'RE is fun and really exciting as we learn about Christianity around the world and different religions. We learn about Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism, but mainly Christianity.' They go on to say it makes them think. For example, the focus on different churches around the world, which some found 'quite hard'. In addition, charity fundraising, such as the Bishop's annual Harvest appeal, helps pupils' global awareness of communities and cultures different from their own. The school were very proud to be awarded their Gold REQM in July 2016.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is highly valued at Ursula Taylor and makes a significant contribution to nurturing the spiritual journeys of pupils and adults alike. Everyone enjoys worship led by a rich variety of worship leaders, including clergy from the local churches in Clapham, staff and the children themselves. The vicar of St Thomas' Church is a very welcome and regular visitor, leading weekly worship in school. Pupils say they learn much through the Bible stories their vicar shares with them about 'Jesus' time'. Some of their favourite Bible stories include messages about forgiveness where your 'apology is accepted' or 'the miracle of Jesus coming alive' in the Easter story of salvation. In addition, the local 'Open the Book' team and members of the local churches ensure the re-enacting of Bible stories regularly. These take place especially at key times in the church year through the Nativity Barn and Easter Barn at the local Baptist chapel which enriches this worshipping community. Pupils say they particularly enjoy 'singing and the praising' as well as 'praying to God when we are singing', as 'every prayer or song is like a prayer to God', whether in school or in church. Prayer contributes much to the life of the school. This includes the diocesan prayer which is used regularly throughout the school as well as prayers written for them by a neighbouring church school. In turn, Ursula Taylor pupils wrote a book of prayers for them. They are growing in their understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As their vicar says, 'They can understand it at one level, but find it

incomprehensible in another way'. Pupils explain The Holy Trinity in their own words as 'like segments of an orange, with the pips representing the Holy Spirit and the flesh representing Jesus and the skin is God the Father.' This is because when the community gathers for worship, they follow a simple liturgical pattern. Pupils say, 'when we light the candles and say as we gather today we think about God the Father, Jesus the Son and The Holy Spirit. We think about our value of respect [or whatever the current value is]. We all say it together like a big family in school.' For example, generosity and kindness prompt collecting for the local foodbank and for charities, such as Water Aid. Pupils are conversant with the key festivals of the church year and know much about the saints. The school choir sings at the Christingle service in church. However, they are less secure in their knowledge of Ascension-tide, their founder Ursula Taylor and St Thomas of Canterbury, after whom their parish church is named. The school acknowledges this is an area for development, with the help of their vicar. Currently, pupils enjoy planning and leading worship, but say they would like to do this more frequently. The school has already identified that extending these experiences for pupils supports their spiritual and personal development. Regular surveys as part of ongoing monitoring by the governors gathers the views of pupils and staff on worship to inform future planning and enrichment of worship. For example, pupils say they enjoy worship outdoors, such as using the poppy garden at Remembrance-tide. Parents say how much they value the vicar coming into the school as well as being able to attend church services themselves. Some parents speak highly of how the church is 'so involved' in school' and how 'the church is the final leaving point for children at the Leavers' service'. In addition, some pupils have been baptised during their time at school.

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

Strong leadership and management at Ursula Taylor ensures exemplary practice is shared widely in the community. For example, the school has hosted diocesan meetings for the action learning sets for outstanding schools in the diocese. This is because all staff are dedicated to celebrating success and showcasing the Christian ethos within an environment where the school's values and biblical teaching is intrinsic to all school life. Consequently, RE and worship have a high priority and meet statutory requirements exceedingly well. Senior leaders ensure these areas are well led, resourced and effectively managed. In addition, Christian distinctiveness is a standing agenda item on curriculum committee meetings and full governing body agendas. Governors are very reflective in their practice and along with other leaders evaluate themselves regularly and accurately. This means the school has not stood still since the last inspection, addressing all areas of development and focusing very effectively on future priorities for action, such as growing the school. Leaders are committed to excellent professional development for all staff. The commitment to wellbeing for all as well as an expectation for high standards ensures pupils and adults thrive and succeed in this nurturing and inclusive Christian environment. This includes extending and enriching pupils' development as they stay two more years in school. The partnership with the diocese is significant. For example, the headteacher benefits from attending local meetings of church school heads, and both head and deputy attended the recent diocesan retreat in Canterbury. Year 3 pupils visit St Alban's Abbey annually. The RE subject leader has benefitted from training by the diocesan RE adviser, and is looking forward to weaving the new 'Understanding Christianity' resources into the current agreed syllabus for RE and embedding this. Leaders support his passion for creativity in RE, including drama, art and music in RE lessons. This also enables opportunities for him to lead training for the staff and encourage his hosting of RE network meetings. For example, using big questions every half term has surprised staff about how well pupils respond. Excellent partnerships between church, school and village community thrive because everyone values and supports each other. For example, the school choir regularly sings for the elderly residents of a local care home. Their contribution to the local community is much valued. Staff say, 'every child is valued and celebrated. We know our children and families very well.' In turn, staff say they too appreciate the 'love, support and friendship' they find here where children and staff work together and show the school's values, such as honesty and respect, every day. Parents testify that pupils are all treated as individuals for their individual needs. This is because the whole curriculum and school life is underpinned by the vision of 'Living God's love, together we flourish', resulting in impeccable behaviour and exemplary relationships. In all these ways Ursula Taylor gives its pupils a very strong foundation for life, and the capacity for future development as a growing primary school is very good.

