

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Dereham Church of England Junior Academy

Gilpins Ride, Littlefields, Dereham, Norfolk, NR19 1BJ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Norwich
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Date of academy conversion	01 November 2015
Name of multi-academy trust	Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust
Date of inspection	08 December 2016
Date of last inspection	21 September 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Junior VA Academy 142395
Headteacher	Neil Toplis
Inspector's name and number	Judith Ruff 528

School context

The school converted in November 2015 to become part of the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT). It is larger than the average junior school, taking pupils from Year 3 to Year 6. There are currently 449 pupils, 35% in receipt of free school meals and 16% of pupils receive special educational needs (SEN) support, both above the national average. Pupils are predominantly from a White British heritage and 16% have English as an additional language. Since the previous inspection there has been a change of headteacher. The church of St Nicholas is within walking distance of the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Dereham Junior Academy as a Church of England school are good

- There are strong and vibrant partnerships established with the local parish church, but also with other Christian communities within the local area. These greatly enrich the pupils' understanding of diversity within the Christian church and inform significantly their understanding of Christianity as a living faith, worked out daily through words, deeds and actions.
- Class 'learning forums' are successfully embedding the school's Christian values and importantly, enabling pupils to reflect on the application of these in their own lives, particularly in terms of their personal learning skills and development.
- Religious education (RE) within the school is led with passion and a conviction that this subject contributes significantly, not only to the Christian character of the school, but also has importance in enabling pupils to understand and respect differences amongst other faiths and cultures.

Areas to improve

- To provide opportunities for pupils and other staff to plan and lead worship, so that they deepen their understanding of the structure and importance of worship to Christians.
- To ensure that governor monitoring activities result in robust stakeholder discussions of current practices, particularly in RE and collective worship, which lead to improved provision in those areas.
- Develop pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith, so that the richness of the worship practices in other countries and settings are understood and appreciated.

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

The school's ethos statement, 'Jesus came to give life better than we ever dreamed of' sums up the school's aspiration and determination to set its work within an explicitly Christian context. Recent work in terms of aligning specific values to the church calendar and festivals, as well as shortening the period of focus on each one, has successfully raised the profile of these across the school. The creation of class 'learning forums' (CLFs) has also increased opportunities twice a week for each class to reflect on how the chosen value can impact on pupils' personal development and well-being. Pupils understand that 'I can give something a go even though I don't feel very confident'. Underpinning these values are biblical texts and stories, which the pupils can retell and discuss the inspirational examples that these give us in our present lives. Feedback forms provided by class teachers to the CLF co-ordinator show that pupils are praising and supporting each other, as well as building their learning resilience through pushing themselves to persevere when work is challenging. Attainment and progress rates are improving through an increasingly rigorous approach to raising the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Nurture group provision for vulnerable pupils is sensitively delivered, enabling an increased sense of safety and security and supporting growth of self-esteem and confidence. Interventions are bespoke to meet individual and small group needs, reflecting the Christian conviction that we are all different, but equally valued. The impact of these in terms of pupil outcomes is closely tracked to ensure that they are accelerating pupil progress. Attendance rates are rising and there has been only one single day fixed term exclusion over this term, an improvement on the previous year. Pupils behave well, they are keen to learn and display positive attitudes to their learning. The four 'golden rules' based on mutual respect underpin the values code. Pupils are given good opportunities to take on responsibility within the school through becoming house captains, prefects and school council members. They welcome the opportunity to make a difference, such as raising money for 'Children in Need' and 'Red Nose Day'. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision is good. Spirituality is deepened and developed through reflection areas, where pupils can respond to questions such as, 'How can you bring joy to others?' They are able to learn first-hand about the diversity within the local Christian community through visitors into school and visits out to compare faith buildings. Threading through RE are opportunities for pupils to explore Christian concepts and to relate these to the school's values. RE also enables pupils to understand the importance of faith and belief in shaping people's lives and behaviours. Awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural global faith is not well developed.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is well planned and led within the school by the headteacher. This gives it a high profile and staff and pupils increasingly appreciate the centrality of its message on attitudes, behaviours and relationships. As the three newly qualified teachers said, 'It is an opportunity for the whole school to gather together and to emphasise the values that are important to us'. Collective worship is providing a 'springboard from which the values are launched' and these are followed through effectively in the CLFs to embed and apply them to each member of the school community. All staff being present for worship has meant that values work can be followed up within a Christian context of Bible stories or scriptural texts. Pupils understand that the chosen values have biblical sources, particularly in the teachings of Jesus. Pupils interviewed spoke of the sense of peace and calm that they feel when the candle for worship is lit. They enjoy learning more about the chosen value. As one Muslim pupil said, 'I can see many similarities between Islam and Christianity in our shared values'. Pupils also understand that singing in worship gives praise to God. They enjoy these opportunities to sing together and experience the uplifting emotions that this brings. Regular weekly leadership of worship by clergy members enables pupils to listen to stories and presentations from different perspectives and points of view. There is a good variety of worship leaders, including 'Kidz Club' a local Christian organisation, which is very popular because of the way in which the worship becomes interactive and engaging, with pupils joining in through role play activities. Pupils enjoy opportunities to write prayers for church services and special events. They know the Lord's Prayer, but not others from the Anglican tradition. Pupils appreciate time to be still and think about the worship theme, 'I think about how I can make a difference and have positive thoughts towards others'. Pupils have an age appropriate understanding of the Trinity and trinitarian prayers are included within worship. Setting the atmosphere for worship requires more thought, particularly when all the school files into the hall. Worship opportunities are currently limited to whole school worship and that which takes place in the local church. The church is used for festivals such as Christmas, Easter and a leavers' service. Pupils surveyed are keen to become more involved with the planning and leading of worship. Staff, apart from senior leaders, are not currently involved in leadership of worship. Parents are appreciative of invitations to join in Friday's 'Best Efforts' assembly and the church based worship. They have not been surveyed on their views of the worship opportunities that the school currently offers. Monitoring of collective worship lacks rigour. It is informal and there is insufficient evidence that governors have a secure understanding of the current strengths and areas for development in collective worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Through discussions with RE leaders, scrutiny of pupils' work outcomes and attainment and progress records kept across the school, attainment in RE is judged by the inspector to be in line with national expectations. However, the recent emphasis on a more coherent enquiry based approach to each taught unit is successfully enabling pupils to engage more interactively with thoughts and ideas. This is accelerating progress rates. Pupils at all ability levels are responding very positively to these planned opportunities to share their knowledge and understanding. The use of pupil self-assessment offers a choice of three levels of challenge, bronze, silver and gold against the key learning objectives. Completed self-assessment sheets show pupils are making good progress in terms of their responses and levels of understanding. Pupil perception surveys from 2013 onwards show an increasing enjoyment of RE and an improved perception of its importance as part of the school curriculum. Pupils enjoy opportunities for cross-curricular links with drama and art. They remember with enthusiasm the visits to other faith buildings. Recently some pupils had the opportunity to cross-question a group from the local church community on the subject of 'What does it mean for a Christian to have a relationship with Christ?' As an outcome from their searching questions, they learned more about how faith and belief can influence day to day living. A RE learning walk, with a particular focus on years 3 and 6, showed teachers demonstrating what they had learned from the recent two twilight sessions led by the diocesan RE adviser. The ideas that they have gained from this training have led to an increased emphasis on pupil discussion and sharing of ideas through innovative approaches, such as 'silent debates' where each group responds to a picture linked to the current topic or key question. There was a real 'buzz' in classrooms as learning progressed. Training on the 'Understanding Christianity' resource has also added to challenging debates, such as 'Was Jesus the Messiah?' Pupils enjoy learning about other religions. In year 6 pupils have been focusing on 'What it means to be a Hindu' and learning about the impact of 'Ahimsa' (non-violence) on Mahatma Gandhi. Pupils interviewed spoke of the importance of learning to respect and understand other faiths. A RE work scrutiny showed some variation in teachers' marking, with a literacy focus in feedback, rather than attention to the subject specific learning objective. Pupils are therefore unclear as to how RE work can be improved. RE is led by two co-leaders with passion and conviction of the important part that it plays within a Christian school, in terms of SMSC development through an opportunity to embed the school values, but also to learn about and reflect on the importance of faith and belief in people's lives. RE leaders have improved the quality of provision in RE by implementing the recommendations from the diocesan RE health check in 2015. They offer support and advice to teachers and have organised high quality training on embedding a consistent, enquiry based approach across the school. This is already having a positive impact on both teachers' and pupils' levels of engagement and enjoyment of RE. Governors are not sufficiently aware of standards and provision in RE as monitoring activities are not in place.

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

Senior school leaders do articulate and promote a vision based on distinctly Christian values. More recently, this approach has been further developed and more sharply articulated through the formation of an ethos committee. Although this group has met formally on just two occasions to date, there have been very useful discussions as to how the Christian character of the school can be further refined and developed. Leaders have given greater prominence to Christian values being embedded across the school through the formation of the twice weekly CLFs to discuss the everyday application of these. Parents report that this approach has fired their children's awareness of the impact that living out these values can have on their lives. As one parent with twelve years of experience of the school said, 'The church ethos has changed beyond recognition. It is now more prominent with overtly Christian worship taking place. Children take comfort from the school as a church school'. Self-evaluation is accurate and has led into appropriate and well-focused areas for further development within the 'change plan'. These areas of foci are already contributing significantly to the Christian character of the school through a tighter link between the chosen values and their application to support both academic and personal development. Opportunities for SMSC are valued and promoted by leaders through the RE, collective worship and CLFs. Pupils are developing well in their confidence and ability to articulate the importance of space to think and reflect, share worries and concerns with a listening, sympathetic adult. Pupil leaders are also growing in their awareness of how responsibilities assumed place an onus on individuals to model the values and actions that are appropriate in a church school. The local church, through the committed leadership and involvement of the rector and curate, are contributing significantly to the Christian ethos, through their regular commitment to leading worship, but also as well-known and liked members of the school pastoral team. Links with the diocese have been increased through DNEAT membership and there is a guiding influence exerted through diocesan representation on the ethos committee and the local governing body. The involvement of the diocesan RE adviser has very successfully supported, encouraged and guided the two excellent RE leaders. Governors are very supportive of the church foundation, but are not always sufficiently involved in the strategic direction and evaluation of the school as a church school. However, this role is beginning to take shape and grow through the ethos committee.

