

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### Dr Walker's Fyfield Church of England (VC) Primary School

Walker Avenue, Fyfield, Essex CM5 0RG

<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Chelmsford</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Essex
Date of inspection	7 November 2017
Date of last inspection	September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 115125
Headteacher	Fiona Reid
Inspector's name and number	Virginia Corbyn 86

#### School context

This small school has more pupils joining at other than the usual times. The percentage of pupils who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs is average. All class teachers, except one, joined in September 2017. There have been three interim headteachers over the past 18 months. A substantive appointment has been made for January 2018. There is a vacancy on the Anglican ministry team which includes the village of Fyfield. Few pupils attend church regularly and there are none from other faith groups in the school. Its last Ofsted inspection was in March 2017 and it was graded as 'requiring improvement'.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Dr Walker's as a Church of England school are good

- The development of strong core Christian values has led to rapid rates of progress over a short period for all pupils including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Pupils are able to reflect spiritually and with considerable maturity on their behaviour and attitudes.
- Since the previous denominational inspection, the quality and profile of collective worship in school and in church has been raised so that the whole school community is now much better supported in its religious life.
- There are high expectations in religious education (RE) which have led to increased levels of pupil engagement and enjoyment.
- The way in which all of the staff team work closely together, living out the Christian values of the school, means that pupils thrive and succeed.

#### Areas to improve

- Maintain and sustain the clear focus on raising achievement for all pupils through the day to day application of Christian values by all stakeholders.
- Develop more ways to ask the 'big questions' in RE so that all pupils' thinking is challenged and extended.
- Ensure that pupils develop the skills and understanding that enable them to play a full part in the leadership of worship.
- Build on the current self-evaluation of the school as a church school by regularly including input from all stakeholders.

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

The leaders at Dr Walker's have maintained a clear and concerted focus on six core Christian values of respect, responsibility, courage, creativity, perseverance and compassion over the past year. This focus has led to rapid improvements in pupil achievement, attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning during the last 8 months. The short time frame in which the improvements have taken place means that they are not yet embedded. This is clearly understood by school leaders. This period has also coincided with the end of a particularly turbulent time in terms of school leadership and staffing. The values were developed through consultation with different stakeholders, including pupils. The ways in which the school environment and the members of the school community have fully embraced the biblically based values is evident in day to day living by pupils and by all school staff. This results in a calm and purposeful environment which supports learning well. The pupils are particularly enthusiastic about their commitment to their school values. The Year 2 class, for example, recites them each day before lunch and reflects on which value they have demonstrated that morning. For older pupils, there is depth to their understanding of the values. They encourage pupils to take personal responsibility, with one saying, 'God wants everyone to be happy and have free will'. Pupils feel safe because of the supportive and respectful relationships within school, at the same time acknowledging that things sometimes go wrong because of human weaknesses. When that happens, they know that they need to go to an adult to seek help and reassurance, again 'taking responsibility' for their actions. For parents, the core values result in the fact that the school 'knows us and knows our children' with another saying that 'the children need core values at an early age'.

There is a strong culture of quiet, personal reflection in the school with areas in the classroom and elsewhere for pupils to take 'time out'. When asked why this was important, one pupil explained that, 'When things get a bit much, you need to take responsibility to go there'. Within these areas, pupils can also offer a prayer which links their emotional and spiritual development and helps them to articulate their feelings well. Their moral and social development is supported through the values of respect and compassion in particular. This development is evident in very good behaviour and in their care for the school environment and for each other, especially older pupils for the younger children. Pupils enjoy their RE lessons especially their RE days on which there is a focus on faiths other than Christianity. These have been creative and cross curricular and pupils have gained knowledge and understanding of a range of world faiths as a result. They have also helped pupils to appreciate the need to understanding the beliefs and practices of others in a world of many faiths. Only some pupils were able to talk about the big questions which are raised and explored by religion which limits their thinking and levels of challenge within RE. They did, however, talk about the importance of expressing their own opinions within their RE lessons.

## **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

Pupils show reverence and respect during collective worship. The centrality of worship in supporting the Christian ethos of the school has been re-established as a part of improving outcomes for pupils. It enhances pupils' understanding of the school's Christian values as underpinned by biblical teaching which can then be seen in action within the everyday life of the school. Pupils also give examples of using the values they heard about in worship at home. Worship is well planned by the worship co-ordinator with support from the vicar. As well as focussing on Christian values, worship also takes into account recent and relevant events, which means that pupils can see its importance for today. Attitudes to collective worship are generally positive and this is shown by pupils' willingness to contribute in various ways, such as by leading prayers or by helping the leader with various practical tasks. They also take leadership roles in special acts of worship for the major Christian festivals, held in church. However, they are eager to take a more active part in daily acts of worship which will enable them to take greater ownership of this increasingly important aspect of the life of the school. There is a growing understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit across the school, in both worship and RE. Pupils are very clear that Jesus is the best example of someone who shows their Christian values in action.

The local vicar has worked well alongside the school to raise the profile and the quality of worship. She is helping to build the confidence of new staff in their leadership of worship by modelling good practice. There are some elements of Anglican liturgy present within worship, including the use of candles and the regular use of the Lord's

Prayer. One pupil said, 'Even the youngest children know this prayer really well already'. Increasing numbers of parents are attending worship for special occasions in church. They say that links with the local church have been a consistent and helpful feature of the school across difficult times. One parent said that 'the basic grounding in the fundamentals of Christianity', in particular through worship and church links, was one of the things that made this the school of choice for her. Governors monitor and evaluate worship regularly. The growing importance of pupils' views and input in school includes asking what they would do to improve this aspect of the life of the school community.

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

Effective leadership and commitment from all staff has resulted in rapid improvement for Dr Walker's as a church school over a short period of time. This follows a period of significant change and uncertainty. There is a realistic recognition that issues of maintaining and sustaining this progress remain for the school. The daily application of a set of core Christian values, well matched to the needs of the school, means that attainment is being raised and outcomes are being improved for all pupils. Pupils with special education needs and disadvantaged pupils are being tracked effectively and supported well so that they make good progress from their starting points. The school's biblically based values underpin the learning environment which means that pupils are able to take responsibility for their own learning and show courage and perseverance when they meet challenges. One pupil said that the values helped him 'to make good choices' in his learning. Teachers show a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities within a church school, articulating how the strong ethos of the school has supported them in having to bring about rapid improvements. Their sense of working very closely as a small team in a small school means that they understand the importance of being held to account through clear monitoring, performance management and regular professional meetings. RE is well led and managed. High expectations have been set for the current school year resulting in consistency of presentation and good levels of engagement from pupils. Governors support the school well through regular monitoring and evaluation. The issues raised by the previous denominational report have been addressed. Statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are met. The school's self-evaluation is detailed and accurate. However, the current version was not drawn up with the full participation of a range of stakeholders.

Parents and families are confident that the school addresses the individual needs of their children. One parent said that this school has helped her children to 'grow into the people we want them to be'. In reflecting on recent times, another parent said that 'the fun is back in the school'. The school has received good support from the Diocese in addressing issues raised by the Ofsted report in March 2017 and in ensuring that the Christian ethos of the school has been strengthened. Strong links with the local church have been important in maintaining the school's Christian distinctiveness and in holding together school, church and community. Although the local clergy team is not fully staffed at present, there are regular visits from the local vicar who supports the RE leader very well. She has also worked hard to make the church into an 'extended classroom' by, for example, displaying pupils' work and including individual flower arrangements from every child in the school for harvest celebrations in the church this year. One parent said, 'The vicar is just like another teacher'. The current interim headteacher has built confidence and capacity to enable continued improvements into the future.

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