

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St. Luke's Church of England Primary School

Kidderpore Avenue, London, NW3 7SU

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	London
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Camden
Date/s of inspection	19 October 2017
Date of last inspection	26 September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Free School 136807
Interim Headteacher	Helen McGovern
Inspector's name and number	Jan Matthews 855

School context

St. Luke's is a smaller than average, Church of England Primary School situated on the borders of Camden and Hampstead. This free school was set up, by volunteers, in 2011, in response to a local need for school places. Home/school distance is the only admissions criteria. Each year, the school admits 15 pupils. Children enter just below average baseline entry levels. About 60% of children speak English as an additional language and 18% receive extra funding due to social disadvantage. The immediate surrounding area is considered to be in the 20% least deprived households, nationally.

Considerable staff and leadership changes have resulted in almost all staff being appointed within the last three years. An interim head has been in place for two terms. Governors are actively recruiting for a substantive headteacher. The school was inspected by OFSTED in September 2017 and judged as good.

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

- The school's founding vision to be a Christian school serving the local community is evident in every aspect of school life.
- Excellent and compassionate relationships between and among adults and pupils lead to a harmonious learning environment in which pupils can thrive, learn and know that they are valued.
- Children make good progress in religious education (RE) and have a solid understanding of Christianity and other faiths and cultures.
- The school benefits from very close links with St. Luke's Church which impact positively on its life and work as a church school.
- Prayer is an integral part of the school day which leads to an attitude of thankfulness and of blessing each other throughout the school community.

Areas to improve

- Provide for the future leadership of the school through strategic professional development and clear succession planning.
- As part of the planned update of the RE curriculum, ensure that children have opportunities to respond creatively and staff have the freedom to present lessons in a variety of ways.
- School leaders are passionate about their vision and aims for the school as a church school, but they need to ensure that this vision is clearly articulated to stakeholders.

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

The founding vision, to be a Christian school that serves the local community, is the golden thread that runs through every aspect of school life. Every child, with all their gifts, talents, foibles and complications, is valued as a unique and special child of God. As such, staff make sure they know the needs of each individual child and provide challenge and support to enable all to progress well, regardless of their starting points.

Parents speak enthusiastically about the way in which all staff care for the children. Indeed, one parent described the school as an 'anomaly in today's world' because every single member of staff is so loving, only wanting the best for each individual. Parents and children speak overwhelmingly about the standards of love and care, many citing the school's values of faith, hope and love as having a real impact on the community. Few, however, linked this with the school's status as a church school. Members of staff model the school's core values in their relationships with children, encouraging them and treating them with care and respect. This makes a valuable contribution to the quality of behaviour and learning, which is excellent across the school. Children want to be part of the school community therefore attendance is good. There have been no exclusions.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of the school is promoted well through a rich curriculum. Children experience a wide variety of visitors, visits to places of interest, after-school clubs, and joint activities with St. Luke's and other local churches. Opportunities to stop and reflect are scattered throughout the school day and space is provided for reflection on topical issues. For example, when the school council were choosing a value for the term, they discussed the recent terrorist attacks in London and chose 'peace' as the value on which to focus.

The sound teaching of RE enables children to learn about their own and each other's faith and the faiths represented in the wider community. Children clearly appreciate that a good knowledge of RE will help them to understand each other whilst at school as well as part of the multi-faith society in which they will take their places as adults.

St. Luke's School was created in response to a need for school places in the local area. Its admissions policy ensures that children are admitted purely according to home school distance and so the population of St. Luke's accurately reflects the area in which it is located. Faith has a high status within the school and pupils and parents have opportunities to share both their cultural and faith stories in lessons. The school benefits from very close links with St. Luke's Church. These links impact positively on its life and work as a church school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Prayer and worship are integral parts of each school day. Each class prays together at the beginning and end of the school day as well as giving thanks before lunch. As one parent said, the focus on reflection and stillness leads to 'a positive attitude of thankfulness and of blessing each other' throughout the school community. Another, speaking of an assembly to which parents were invited, said 'events like these are always well attended – a sign that parents see this as a special place'. Children speak enthusiastically about assembly and are eager to play an active part with roles such as lighting the candle, writing prayers, praying and singing.

During a particularly turbulent time of high staff turnover, the fact that church staff have been integral in the evaluation and planning process for collective worship has been vital in ensuring a well-planned and consistent programme of collective worship. One assembly a week takes place in the church and is led by church staff. Throughout the week, children have appropriate opportunities to consider the school's Christian values as well as biblical teaching, the person of Jesus and Christian festivals. They are able to make clear links between them and their own attitudes and beliefs. For example, a group of children, whilst discussing some of Jesus' teachings easily related the story of the lost coin to times when they have wanted to give up, but it has taken faith to keep going. They listen well and can speak articulately about symbols such as the candle signifying God's presence. Pupils are aware of difficult and abstract concepts such as the Holy Trinity and can talk about them with age appropriate understanding. Whole school 'Sharing Meal' activity brings the concept of the Eucharist to life.

Since the last inspection, a regular programme for evaluating the effectiveness of collective worship has been established. The collective worship leader and church staff meet to discuss the results of regular questionnaires and discussions with the children. Recently, children reported that they would like to sing more and so a 'singing assembly' was introduced and a wider variety of worship songs are being learned. Children report being very happy about the fact that school leaders listen to them and that they are able to influence decisions. Film, questions, artefacts and paired talk have also been effective in catching children's attention and making them think. Whilst the general attitude to worship at St. Luke's is one of learning, positivity and enjoyment, the importance of worship and prayer in the lives of believers is not always articulated fully.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE is has a high priority throughout the school and there is a good balance between teaching of Christianity and other world faiths. Standards of achievement are generally high and in line with other curriculum expectations. Pupils have a secure understanding of Christianity and speak knowledgeably about a range of religions.

Children engage well with RE lessons and can utilise a range of skills such as enquiry, analysis and interpretation. Teachers use questioning techniques very well to enable children to think beyond the obvious. For example, through skilful questioning, children were able to understand and empathise with the main characters in the story of the good Samaritan. This led to a discussion about not pre-judging people because of their race or culture with one child exclaiming ‘... maybe the Samaritans aren’t so bad after all!’ There seems to be a common understanding, amongst pupils, that learning about religion will help them to understand people in the wider community. ‘Getting on with neighbours’, ‘understand why people dress like they do’ and ‘stop wars’ were just some of the reasons that children gave for studying RE. Even very young children learn to empathise with characters. Particularly strong teaching in Reception resulted in great enthusiasm and evident delight in ‘being’ the lost sheep that was ‘found’ by the shepherd. Good levels of support, for example, parallel teaching and use of Makaton, are provided in order that all children can access the learning.

The newly appointed RE leader has already made significant improvements to the ways in which the effectiveness of RE is monitored. She has made some accurate assessments about the quality of RE teaching and learning and has a clear plan for moving the subject on. For example, a full evaluation of the RE syllabus is underway and alternative schemes are being considered. RE books are very well presented and show a very good level of understanding about religion. Less well developed are opportunities to learn from religion. In lessons, children engage well but they report not enjoying RE as much as other subjects because of the high volume of writing. The RE lead, quite rightly, has identified that opportunities to teach creatively and respond creatively should be a focus for improvement. She is passionate about promoting the subject but it is still too early to see what effect these evaluations will have on the quality of provision.

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

The commitment and Christian vision of the founding governors has never wavered since the school’s inception. Because their vision is written into every policy, procedure and set of guidelines, the governors and church staff have been successful in keeping the vision alive and prominent throughout a particularly difficult time of staff instability and change. Almost all staff have been appointed within the last three years, yet they talk passionately about their part in achieving the vision of being a church school serving the local community. The interim headteacher has recently established a committed and effective leadership team who are developing a good understanding of development issues within a church school context. Staff morale is excellent. The fourth headteacher in three years is about to be appointed. To ensure stability in the future, strategic measures and effective professional development need to be put in place so that the school raises its own church school leaders.

Parents recognise that the school is a welcoming, safe and caring place for their children and so support the school in its aims. Some parents described the exceptional support that the school has offered to families in particularly difficult circumstances. Overwhelmingly, they talk about the way the school develops the whole child, not just English and maths. As one parent commented, ‘I really like the fact that they teach a lot of ethics here and that is really good’. Whilst parents recognise and appreciate the care, the morals and the values of the school, very few make links between the school’s status as a church school and the excellent educational experience it offers.

Educational and social events are very well attended. Children achieve well because their lessons are stimulating and they feel valued and safe to learn. Those facing significant barriers to learning through educational, social or economic disadvantage are very well supported. Parents consider that the success of support is due to the way children and their families are known so well by school staff.

Both RE and collective worship are led by members of the senior leadership team, thus ensuring that both have a high profile throughout the school. School leaders allocate sufficient resources to both areas to ensure continued development and the interim headteacher has made very good use of advice and support from the diocese as well as local church schools. Arrangements for religious educational and collective worship meet statutory requirements.

Despite the high staff turnover, the consistency of support from St. Luke’s clergy has meant that collective worship and RE have been monitored and continue to be developed; for example, the RE syllabus is currently being evaluated and reviewed. The very close links, described by one person as ‘only a porous ceiling between the school and the church’ have certainly helped the school through a significant time of change.