

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Stephen's Church of England Primary School

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| Address | Hall Lane, Low Willington, Willington, Crook, County Durham, DL15 0QH | | |
| Date of inspection | 31 January 2019 | Status of school | Voluntary Controlled Primary |
| Diocese | Durham | URN | 114216 |
| Overall Judgement | | Grade | Good |
| How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish? | | | |
| Additional Judgement | | Grade | Excellent |
| The impact of collective worship | | Grade | Excellent |
| School context | | | |
| St Stephen's C of E is a primary school with 196 pupils on roll. The school has very low levels of religious and cultural diversity and very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is above national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with national averages. The current senior leaders led the school through the most recent Ofsted inspection, which judged the school to be good. | | | |
| The school's Christian vision | | | |
| We believe that, 'There is something.... potentially wonderful in everyone' therefore our vision it to nurture and inspire our whole school community to use their God-given gifts to be the best that they can be so their light can shine to the world. (Matthew 5.v16) | | | |
| Key findings | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Stephen's is a securely good Church school on its journey to excellence. Pupils, staff and governors live out its deeply Christian vision on a day to day basis. Adults and pupils feel valued, respected and cared for, and they 'let their light shine' in all areas of school life. • Pupils, staff and the school community clearly articulate the impact of the effectiveness of the school's Christian vision on their lives. They speak the language of the vision and clearly understand its biblical roots. Pupils in particular have developed a strong spiritual vocabulary. • Invitational, inclusive and inspiring worship is at the heart of the school. Highly creative approaches draw in families and church members to worship with the school on a monthly basis. This has a great impact on and, in some instances transforms pupils' and adults' lives. • The headteacher and deputy head provide exceptional leadership of the school, ensuring their vision shapes all that they do. They use the excellent relationships they have built with all stakeholders to support all their pupils to 'be the best that they can be.' • Governors are passionate about the school and are proud of its work and partnership with the community. The strategic role of governors is not sufficiently embedded to ensure there is a collective responsibility for rigorously monitoring and evaluating the work of St Stephen's as a Church school. Consequently the systems for holding senior leaders to account do not fully provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge. | | | |
| Areas for development | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For governors to embed a systematic and rigorous monitoring programme in order to develop a strategic awareness of the effectiveness of the Christian vision on the work of the school. For all governors to understand their roles and responsibilities and provide effective support and to challenge leaders. • Enable pupils to challenge injustice and inequality by engaging in, and initiating, social action projects. | | | |

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

St Stephen's has a deeply Christian vision rooted in the Christian narrative and is the core of all that the school does. The vision fits the context of the school's community, bringing pride, hope and aspiration for staff, pupils and their families. Parents wholeheartedly support the school and talk about it being a 'second family'. They recognise the significant impact the vision has on their children, and feel their children are 'cared for within a loving Christian environment'. The pupils are a real credit to the school. Their behaviour is exceptional and their ability to articulate the vision is authentic. They are able to relate it to how they live their lives both in and out of school. Relationships are a key strength of the school. They allow adults and pupils alike to express how they feel, make a valued contribution and have their voice heard in a caring, nurturing and safe space. The vision effectively shapes the school's curriculum. Pupils develop their 'God-given gifts' in all subjects. The curriculum caters for individual learning styles, and allows pupils to express their talents in a creative and personal way. For example, pupils in Year 5 explore their emotions and feelings through the use of drama, and Year 6 pupils are given the opportunity to respond to 'big questions' in their personal spiritual journals. Staff work closely together to sharing expertise and to ensure that they provide a rich and stimulating learning environment for pupils to learn. For example, children in Nursery were building sledges for the snow-dog so he could return to the South Pole, and Reception children were designing, making and testing out boats to see how well they floated.

The school's vision is expressed through impressive collective worship and the provision for religious education (RE). Both are given a high priority in school. Collective worship brings the vision alive for all members of the school community. Staff, parents and pupils talk enthusiastically about the impact it has on their lives. An imaginative combination of drama, music and visual prompts are used very effectively by both pupils and adults to 'paint pictures' for pupils, enabling them to think about the message being shared. The school works closely with the local church community and clergy to support and enhance the provision for collective worship. RE provision is in line with the Church of England Statement of Entitlement. The subject is well resourced and staff receive regular training, including from the Diocese. Pupils explore RE through critical thinking based on key questions. They have a good understanding of Christianity as a living faith and of other world religions. Pupils consider their learning and the impact of this on their own beliefs and convictions. The recommendation from the previous SIAMS inspection has been fully addressed. This has resulted in pupils having a very good understanding of the Christian faith as a global religion.

Pupils and adults alike, flourish and shine at St Stephen's. Everyone in the school is treated as an individual and treasured as a child of God. Parents and carers comment on the importance the school places, not just on academic achievements but also on the whole child - 'we see our children flourishing and grow before our eyes'. Pupils make good progress from their starting points. They attain significantly above national averages in writing and mathematics, and above in reading, at the end of their time in school. The school meets the needs of vulnerable learners, including disadvantaged pupils and this is reflected in the progress these pupils make in all stages of their school life. Staff work collaboratively to develop the curriculum and share their subject expertise. They have high expectations of themselves and their pupils and ensure they meet both the academic and spiritual needs of learners. There is a good use of enquiry questions and pupils' voice to allow them to express their views and explore ideas. The introduction of Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) programme has had a significant impact on pupils' attitudes and approaches to learning. Staff make very effective use of the forest school area to enhance learning and to develop social skills and life skills such as resilience. The school works closely with parents to identify and address any barriers to learning for vulnerable pupils. This includes supporting pupils with behavioural issues and mental health concerns through the 'Relax Kids' programme. The school welcomes pupils from other schools, referring to them as 'late gifts'. They work tirelessly to ensure they are accepted and are supported to overcome any problems and flourish. One pupil expressed their experience of joining the school and said 'it's wonderful here - I can trust them and I know they won't ever let go of me'. Through its work based on 'Valuing All God's Children', staff and pupils embrace difference and promote respect for all - 'everyone is equal and everyone is special'. The school supports a wide range of charities. Leaders have identified that pupils have less ownership of this area. They recognise that pupils should develop this work through social action projects in order to challenge injustice.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher drive the school's vision to ensure all in their community are able to 'let their light shine'. They have successfully improved the life chances for all in a loving and nurturing environment. They provide an inspiring role model for others - walking the walk of the Christian vision. This approach has

enabled all members of staff to feel valued, knowing that their contribution makes a difference, and that they will be supported in times of need. Staffing in school is very stable as no-one wants to leave. However, leaders recognise the importance of succession planning so that the school remains effective well into the future. There is a strong partnership with the parish church. This is a two way process between church and school where both benefit. For example, the crib service on Christmas Eve was led by the school's pupils in church. Parents and members of the church community talked enthusiastically about the service and the benefits of the community working together. Governors are proud of their Church school. The headteacher provides them with information and guidance so that they are able to articulate strengths and weaknesses of the school's provision. They do not, however, have a full understanding of the impact of the school's Christian vision, and what makes St Stephen's an effective Church school. Recent changes in the governing body means that not all governors understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

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| Headteacher | Alison Richardson |
| Inspector's name and number | Jo Warner |