

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Shenfield St Mary's Primary Academy

Hall Lane, Brentwood, Essex, CM15 9AL	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chelmsford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	April 2013
Name of multi-academy trust	Mid Essex Anglican Academy Trust
Date of inspection	5 December 2017
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary Academy (VA equivalent) 139763
Headteacher	Sally Taggart
Inspector's name and number	Virginia Corbyn 86

School context

Shenfield St Mary's is a two form entry primary school drawing pupils mainly from the locality of Shenfield. The percentage of its pupils who are disadvantaged or have a special educational need is well below the national average. Pupils are mainly White British and Christian but with a growing number from other faith and different ethnic groups. The current headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed in 2014. As it is an outstanding school, there has been no Ofsted inspection since 2008. It is the only school in its academy trust at present but with plans to grow in the near future.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Shenfield St Mary's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- School leaders set very high expectations which result in excellent outcomes. This is the result of the ways in which all members of the school community live out their core Christian values.
- There is a generosity of spirit across the school which can be seen in many practical examples in daily life and also in ways which reach out to those in need beyond the school.
- A clear focus on reflection both for learning and for living means that pupils are encouraged to develop very well spiritually, morally and socially.
- Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of religious education (RE). This helps them to understand those with different beliefs and the importance of living well with each other now and in the future.
- There is a wholehearted commitment by staff and governors to wanting the best for all pupils. This has resulted in academic excellence balanced with humility, responsibility and respect.

Areas to improve

- Build the capacity of the RE and worship group so that they grow their leadership skills by planning and delivering their own acts of worship.
- In the light of the introduction of new resources, ensure that teaching, learning and assessment in RE reflect the depth of thinking of pupils as fully as possible.

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

Shenfield St Mary's is a vibrant community which lives by its core Christian values of respect, forgiveness, trust, responsibility, thankfulness, justice and humility. All stakeholders are able to articulate the ways in which these values can be seen. The pupils are particularly enthusiastic in sharing examples of how they apply their values all the time. One pupil said, 'Trust brings responsibility', thus showing an ability to link the values one with another. Responsibility is particularly strong across the school. Pupils can talk about this in relation to their own learning and helping others with learning if appropriate. Parents are able to explain the importance of the responsibility which older children take for those who are younger as being a life skill which they value highly. High quality relationships at all levels are characterised particularly by respect and forgiveness. There is a clear recognition that making mistakes is to be expected but that dealing with them by carrying through the school's values brings acceptance and the ability for everyone to move on. All of this combines to produce excellent academic outcomes for all pupil groups which are above the national average for attainment and for progress. Attendance is outstanding because the school is place where pupils feel that they respected, trusted and always treated fairly.

The school is able to show that it is providing many successful opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development across the whole life of the school. A particular focus on reflection means that pupils develop their own spirituality through opportunities offered within and beyond the curriculum. This is particularly evident in the classroom reflection areas and through the prayers in class prayer books. The RE lessons observed were also characterised by reflective questions. The local rector commented that reflection is 'profoundly embedded in the rhythm of life' of the school. Displays throughout the school are designed to help pupils to think about the future and what is important to them personally. For example, a series of posters about inspirational people prompted a pupil to explain that, 'we know we can succeed in our own way like all of these people who are here to inspire us'. This is combined with a very strong sense that the advantages which the pupils possess carry the moral and social responsibility to help others. Raising money for local and national charities has been considerable, often focussing upon children and young people in some sort of need.

According to parents, their children show interest in faith by talking about it and they are curious to learn more. Pupils have a very good understanding of Christianity, shown through responses in worship and in RE. They know that it underpins what their school believes and that it forms the basis for their values. Pupils have a very clear understanding of why they learn about the different faiths of the world. Responses to this question included, 'So that we can see a different point of view, so that we are not racist and do not exclude others'. Another pupil said, 'All religions should be treated equally', relating her view to the school value of justice.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship which explores the biblical basis of the school's values makes an outstanding contribution to the way in which the school's Christian values are applied in everyday life. There is a clear structure to worship, including liturgical responses and rituals, which ground it in Anglican practice. Worship takes place in the local church on a fortnightly basis. This is further underpinned by termly Eucharist services, developed in age appropriate ways and involving pupils as servers and readers. A key part of worship is regular periods for reflection so that all members of the community can give time to the development of their own spirituality. There is a clear focus on what the Bible teaches about the school's values. Pupils are developing a good understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit from their RE lessons, together with some prayers and responses in worship. One pupil explained the Trinity symbol in the hall as showing that, 'even if the world ends, God will still be there'. Pupils write and offer their own prayers with empathy for and understanding of the themes for worship. The RE and worship group members help to lead some acts of worship alongside the headteacher. However, they do not prepare the material independently in ways which mean that they have ownership of leading this aspect of the life of the school. Pupils regularly monitor and evaluate acts of worship and directly feed back through the RE and worship group. This is done as a reflection on worship, further adding to the school's focus on this way of looking at the world. Worship for the major Christian festivals, in either the school or the church, are events which parents describe as characterising the invaluable partnership of the school with the church and with the community.

The effectiveness of religious education is outstanding

Pupils are able to give an articulate account of why RE is important, 'it is good to learn about other religions and find out how they look at the world'. They also articulate how they are expected to think through their own ideas in

their RE lessons and then explain them clearly to others. They are encouraged to explain their ideas and justify their arguments. One Year 6 pupil did this very convincingly in relation to those who stand up for their faith and the fact that situations where this happens are often very unjust. Pupils' evidence and teachers' assessment over time demonstrates that RE standards are generally above national expectations. Teacher subject knowledge is secure and is improving rapidly as a result of the introduction of 'Understanding Christianity' from September 2017. These new materials to support learning are also ensuring that the strategies for encouraging deeper thinking are varied and providing a new level of challenge for pupils and for teachers. In upper Key Stage 2, for example, pupils can talk about different Christian viewpoints about the creation of the world. Pupils can use a range of religious vocabulary confidently, including for concepts such as incarnation in relation to Christmas. There are high expectations of recorded work for all pupils. Teachers hold regular dialogues with them by asking questions through their marking to which pupils personally respond. This helps to meet the individual needs of pupils and to develop their spiritual thinking. Senior staff and governors have supported the introduction of 'Understanding Christianity' well by committing time and resources to the training of the RE leader and then for all other teachers. Following the recent introduction of the new syllabus which incorporates 'Understanding Christianity', clear expectations for written evidence which reflects pupils' deeper thinking are not embedded into current practice.

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

The Christian vision of the headteacher for her school is, above all, aspirational. It supports all members of the school community to be the best that they can be by living by the school's values in service to others. This means that all are included and that the flourishing of the whole child lies at the centre of all that is done in school. Pupils' development beyond the academic is nurtured and celebrated. This, in turn, leads to very strong outcomes for both attainment and progress for all pupils. The headteacher is very well supported by the deputy headteacher in modelling the Christian vision and the values which drive the school. Governors know their school well and they closely monitor the school as a church school. The RE leader is highly effective and works closely with the governors to support and improve this area within the school. The school meets statutory requirements for RE and for collective worship.

Staff members feel personally nurtured and cared for, both professionally and personally. This is demonstrated in practical ways, such as by being given a 'gift day' for themselves each year. One teacher said that she felt that she had 'never felt more welcomed' than when she arrived at St Mary's. Professionally, staff members are encouraged to be actively involved in the life of the school as a church school. In particular, the new RE curriculum has made teachers think 'outside the box' and to encourage pupils to do the same. This attitude which supports yet challenges all staff means that succession planning is seen as a natural part of the development of all members of the school team.

The school is outward looking in terms of making sure that everyone can be the best they can be. There are plans to expand the academy trust in the near future to the mutual benefit of those who join. Links with the local church, particularly through the rector, are very strong. School contributions to the Sunday Parish Eucharist for Education Sunday and for Harvest strengthen the links beyond the school week. One parent said that she sees the 'triangle between school, church and home' as the key strength of the school for her. Training from the Diocese has resulted in the successful introduction of 'Understanding Christianity'. The diocesan youth adviser has worked successfully with the school in a number of ways which he describes as 'making lots of difference to the diocese'.

SIAMS report December 2017 Shenfield St Mary's CE primary (VA equivalent) academy, Essex CMI5 9AL