

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Antrobus St. Mark's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

School Lane, Antrobus, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 6LB

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Date of inspection	9 November 2017
Date of last inspection	September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	111246
Headteacher	Sandra Finney
Inspector's name and number	Anne B. Woodcock 445

School context

Antrobus St. Mark's is a small rural school near Northwich. The vast majority of the 75 pupils are of White British heritage and they come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding for social disadvantage is much lower than average. The school supports a lower than average proportion of pupils with additional needs. However the number of pupils with educational health care plans (EHCP) is higher than average. The school entered into a two year collaboration with a neighbouring church school in September 2016. The headteacher, who shares her time between the schools, was appointed at that time. The deputy headteacher, who has a 0.6 commitment, was promoted to her post also in September 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Antrobus St. Mark's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The outstanding Christian leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, dedicated staff and governors, directs and inspires all aspects of school improvement.
- Explicitly expressed and displayed Christian values impact strongly on pupils' excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes to life and learning.
- The very high standards achieved in religious education (RE) make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual development and cultural understanding.
- Strong links with the church, local community and other Christian faith groups enhance the school's Christian character and support pupils' spiritual development.

Areas to improve

- Involve all members of the school community in a full review of the school's vision and values in the light of the deepening collaboration so that all can agree and share the school's unique Christian characteristics.
- Engage parents in the regular church school self-evaluation process so that they fully understand, share and influence the school's core Christian values and distinctiveness.

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

Deeply embedded Christian values, expressed through the school's motto, 'Hand in hand with God we live, love and learn together', are thoroughly understood and used by all members of the school family. One Reception pupil described this as, 'You can't see Jesus, but you can feel him in your heart.' Extremely strong, caring relationships, based on Christian love and forgiveness, support pupils and staff.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary because they strive to show their kindness and trust. They are highly motivated, enthusiastic learners who thoroughly enjoy all the experiences provided for them, so attendance is good overall. All pupils are well-supported, particularly those with additional needs. This reflects the school's belief that everyone is a valued and loved child of God, worthy of respect and inspired to achieve their potential. Although standards of attainment are affected by small cohorts, they are generally above national averages. Pupils make extremely good progress, striving to achieve the aspirational targets set for them. Parents agree that the school supports and encourages their children so that they can all flourish and achieve.

Pupils' spiritual and personal development is excellent. This is because provision for pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural (SMSC) development is promoted across the curriculum very effectively. Pupils have regular, high quality experiences through which they express their ideas creatively. The excellent art displays resulting from the work on the Holy Spirit exemplify the quality and maturity of pupils' ability to reflect and respond. Strong church and local community links enhance provision for spiritual development. As a result, pupils are mature, highly reflective and passionate learners who are confident that their ideas can be expressed freely in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect.

Pupils have a well-developed understanding of their place in God's world and their responsibilities for caring for others. This is closely linked to their understanding of Jesus' teaching. 'God wants us to come into his kingdom and share his love,' explained a Year 2 pupil, 'so that's why we help other people and do charities like Children in Need.' Their awareness and understanding of diverse faiths and cultures is developed well through excellent RE. They appreciate and respect differences, including the way in which Christians around the world celebrate and worship God.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a much valued key feature of the school day. 'We care about God in this school and during worship we praise him,' wrote a Class 2 pupil in the evaluation book. A Year 5 pupil explained that they enjoy worship because they feel included and involved, especially when they help to act out stories or read from the Bible. The fact that one Year 6 pupil was able to state, 'I'm not sure yet if I am a Christian, but I do use the Christian values in my life,' confirms the inclusive nature of collective worship.

Worship planning is firmly based on Bible teaching and Christian values. As a result, pupils have a very good knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus. They talk confidently about parables, making clear links between the meaning and their actions. 'Jesus used parables to teach about how God wants us to live. If we use them we can become better people,' explained a Year 6 pupil. 'The Good Samaritan teaches that we should help everyone, even if they are our enemies.'

Pupils' have a remarkably mature understanding of the nature of God. They refer to 'God above and Jesus beside us' consistently from the very youngest age. A Year 1 pupil wrote, 'When I go for a walk, Jesus is holding my hand.' As a result of a regular focus on the Christian concept of the Trinity, pupils speak of the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of a caring God who forgives us through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Prayer and praise through joyful singing are key features of daily worship. Pupils know the Lord's Prayer. They write prayers and willingly volunteer to pray 'freely' during worship. Time is given for reflection and pupils make effective use of their classroom worship spaces.

Clergy lead worship regularly so pupils are familiar with aspects of traditional Anglican practice. Pupils' experience of different styles of Christian worship is broadened by occasional visits by leaders from Methodist and other traditions. The church is used for special festival services. These are valued and well attended by parents who are also invited to class-led worship in school. Pupils take an active role in delivering aspects of these worship events. Older pupils plan and deliver worship occasionally and they are eager to do so more frequently.

Robust monitoring and evaluation ensures that collective worship continues to evolve and inspire. Pupils, staff and governors provide regular feedback which is used to inform future planning and provide insight as to the impact worship has on attitudes and beliefs.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils' enthusiasm for and enjoyment of RE is clear. 'We love RE. It's really great because we do exciting things and we have the freedom to present our work in any way,' stated a Year 6 pupil. 'It is good because most of the time it is your own thoughts so there is no right and wrong.' They are excited, challenged and inspired by their work. Consistently good, sometimes outstanding teaching, ensures that the needs of all pupils are met within well-planned lessons. Pupils develop key skills through which they explore challenging questions about belief and faith. Standards of attainment have improved dramatically since the last denominational inspection. As a result, over 90% are reaching age related expectations and pupils believe themselves to be 'really good at RE.' Progress is therefore exceptionally good.

Extremely effective subject leadership of the highest quality has raised the profile of RE and secured the substantial improvement in standards. Teachers are well supported both in the delivery and assessment of RE. Impressive class books and pupils' individual books demonstrate the high quality achieved. Highly effective assessment processes have been established so that pupil progress is tracked and gaps in learning are identified. Marking is effective because it shows pupils how to improve their work. Pupils are engaged in assessing their achievement at the end of units of work. Monitoring and evaluation by senior leaders and governors is thorough and highly effective because it has clearly led to continuous improvement and raised standards.

Through their work in RE pupils gain a broad knowledge of Christian belief. They are challenged to consider their own beliefs and to respect the cultures and beliefs of others. Through the study of Judaism, Islam and Hinduism, they learn to understand diverse cultures and faiths. They make effective links between stories in the Old Testament and the Torah and identify some similarities as well as differences in the ways in which people of faith worship God. This is supported by some first-hand experiences, such as visiting a mosque. Special weeks, such as the recent Interfaith week, ensure that opportunities to explore RE across the curriculum are not missed.

The school was awarded the silver RE Quality Mark in July 2016.

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

The inspirational Christian example and leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher and dedicated staff and governors, has revitalised the school's distinctive Christian character and secured stability for the future. Relationships across the school are founded on deeply embedded Christian values. Staff and pupils feel valued and respected and they know that their well-being is considered in decision-making at all levels.

The challenging financial position which brought about the collaboration with a neighbouring church school has been managed effectively. Governors have secured exceptionally strong leadership and ensured the future growth and success of the school. Challenging staffing and budgetary issues have been managed skilfully and with Christian compassion. Effective training and support has ensured that governors have a clear understanding of their role in determining the strategic direction of the school. As a result, they are in a good position to deepen and extend the collaboration. Governors have ensured that skilful, passionate leadership of RE and collective worship has brought about substantial improvements and raised standards. Both meet statutory regulations and are well-supported and resourced. Issues from the previous denominational inspection have been fully addressed and changes continue to be monitored.

Leaders and governors agree that the collaboration is bringing substantial benefits to all aspects of school provision and the ability to meet the needs of all learners. This is having a very positive effect on outcomes for pupils. The self-evaluation process ensures that church school issues are prioritised within whole school improvement planning. However, parental involvement is not regular, so they are not able to fully understand and influence the school's Christian values and distinctiveness. Leaders recognise that, with the deepening of the collaboration, a full review of the school's vision and values is appropriate. Shared values can be identified alongside those which are considered to be unique to the school.

Partnership with the diocese has been key in securing the collaboration, improving governance and supporting the development of RE. Links with other local church schools, the local and wider community and the church contribute significantly to the school's ability to increase its distinctiveness. They support the school's continued drive to provide the very best possible environment in which pupils can achieve and flourish. Pupils know that their opinions are heard and acted upon and they are proud of their personal and collaborative achievements.

The school is therefore very well placed to move confidently into the future.