

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Tipton St John Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Tipton St John, Sidmouth, Devon EX10 0AG

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Exeter
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Name of federation	Otter Valley Federation
Local authority	Devon
Date of inspection	4 July 2017
Date of last inspection	18 July 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary VA 113376
Executive headteacher Head of school	Colin Butler Michael Tuckett
Inspector's name and number	Andrew Rickett (201)

School context

Tipton St John is smaller than average size primary school with 98 children on roll. They are taught in four mixed-age class groups. The majority of children are from a White British heritage. It operates on a split site. Most children come from outside the immediate area. The number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average as is the number entitled to receive the pupil premium. The school federated in September 2013 with another voluntary aided church primary school. They have one governing body. An executive headteacher leads both schools. A head of school has responsibility for the day to day running of Tipton St John.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Tipton St John Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- An explicit Christian vision based on Bible verse makes a significant contribution to the children's spiritual development, their personal wellbeing and their academic progress.
- Acts of worship are inspirational and give children experiences in which they confidently explore faith and belief.
- Religious education makes a valuable contribution to the children's moral and social development and increasingly equips them with skills to articulate their views in depth.
- Leaders and managers are passionate about the school's Christian vision and ensure that it has meaning and purpose for all members of the school community.

Areas to improve

Review links between the vision and values to enable children to explore how they contribute to their personal spiritual development in greater depth by:

- Develop the skills of children and adults to ask questions of meaning and purpose across the whole curriculum.
- Develop the religious education curriculum so that it offers greater challenge.
- Provide support for teachers to acquire the skills to be able to challenge children at a deeper level.

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

The school has made good progress since the previous inspection in continuing to develop a distinct Christian ethos based on explicit Bible teaching. Nine core values have been used for a number of years and are well known to all members of the school community. They have become more clearly linked to Christian teaching through a better understanding of the narrative of the Bible and how at the heart of this is a Christian understanding of love based on a verse from Corinthians. The creation of a joint mission statement across the two schools in the federation has helped to bring consensus between the two communities whilst losing some of the clarity of how the core values at Tipton connect to the joint vision. That is not to say that the core values are not making a difference. On the contrary, values are the mainstay upon which the school's ethos is centred and which drives their everyday thoughts and actions. Values underpin the high quality of relationships that exist between children and adults that is reflected in the care and kindness that they show to each other. The school has no obvious rules because they feel that living out the values is sufficient. More than care and kindness, children have an appreciation that relationships also need trust and compassion and that forgiveness is an essential aspect of this. They state very clearly that love uses all of these values and more. The values also contribute to the quality of the school environment that encourages children to learn and do well, to achieve and be the best they can be. Children do well in their learning and attain standards that are at least in line with national expectations for most children and often exceed them. The very youngest children in Foundation Stage begin their time in the school learning about the school's Christian ethos through Bible stories that they learn about through play. They begin to acquire an understanding of the core values and how they help them to make friends. This develops throughout their time in the school and, by the time they leave in Year 6, children are mature and thoughtful young people. The opportunities for children to reflect are an important aspect of this development and support them to become more aware of a personal spirituality. At times children lack the vocabulary to express their thoughts and ideas in depth although they do have other opportunities to explore these through other media such as art. For example, children drew their understanding of the nature of the Trinity and explained the meaning of their pictures. Children appreciate that everyone is unique and should be treated with respect regardless of background. They have a keen sense of fairness and the need to ensure justice both within school and in the wider community. Religious education makes an important contribution to their understanding of the diverse society of modern Britain and the many faiths that make up modern society.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Acts of worship at Tipton St John are inspirational times in the school day when children and adults come together to learn about Jesus and how He taught about love for one another. They are joyous times for children and adults. Moreover, this is done in a way that includes everyone, regardless of whether they have a faith or not, because the messages children hear are relevant to all of their lives. Collective worship is outstanding because the impact of these messages, explicitly based on Bible stories, combines with high quality opportunities to reflect and pray. Together they create experiences that make a significant contribution to the children's growing spirituality and their appreciation of how a personal faith can provide the foundations for how they live their lives. This is evident through listening to children talk about their experiences of worship in school and how it has enabled them to have time to consider difficult questions about meaning and purpose. Children respond with vigour when asked to contribute their views in worship and are confident to share their thoughts openly knowing that they will be listened to and their opinions treated with respect by others. Collective worship is thoughtfully planned around events in the church year, its significant festivals as well as responding to events in school and in the news. A particular strength of collective worship is that the core values are not contrived to fit in with these themes but are allowed to emerge through the exploration of these themes so that messages heard in worship occur naturally and therefore are more directly linked to the children's own interests and thinking. Children have a mature appreciation of the purpose of prayer and are confident to say their own prayers, either those they have written or spontaneously arising from worship. Older children appreciate that prayers are not always answered in ways that we might want. They firmly believe that God listens to everyone's prayers, whether they have a faith or not, because He created everyone as equals and loves them equally. They sometimes find it difficult to articulate how prayer can actually provide support and help for those in need. There are many opportunities for children to pray and reflect in the school day. The reflection books that each child has, gives them the opportunity to reflect on what they have heard in collective worship and respond with a prayer or a comment. Children also use them simply to write down what they are thinking. For some children, these books are a powerful way to help them to make sense of their thoughts. Acts of worship are distinctively Christian and Anglican in tradition. Regular worship in the adjacent church is an integral aspect of the worship life of the school. The ethos committee comprises children who take the lead in developing worship so that it has meaning. Their role is still developing and they have made some valuable improvements to worship including finding songs that are more enjoyable to sing. The views of children are sought through feedback and this is supplemented by regular monitoring from teachers and governors.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

Religious education (RE) makes an important contribution to the school's Christian ethos and very effectively supports the children's moral and social development as well as helping them to apply values within a religious context. Children make good progress in RE to achieve standards that are at least in line with expectations of the locally agreed syllabus for the majority of children. This compares well with other core subjects in the curriculum. The extent to which children deepen their learning, and achieve their potential by challenging them to go beyond the expectations of the curriculum, have not been fully explored. At its best, teaching does provide opportunities for children to respond to questions from teachers that enable children to think at a deeper level. Children respond with excitement and enthusiasm to this and engage in vibrant discussion to share their views and opinions. At times, children lack the vocabulary and skills to enable them to express their thoughts when challenged at this deep level. This is particularly the case when they try to connect what they are learning with the core values. However, the overall quality of teaching is good and children do make good progress. The introduction of the 'Understanding Christianity' material has enhanced the RE syllabus and given the curriculum greater depth in the teaching of Christianity. Teachers are implementing the material with confidence and the initial responses from children are positive. The full impact of using 'Understanding Christianity' has not yet been realized, as the school is well aware, and they are in the process of determining how best to integrate it with the rest of the RE curriculum. Assessment of children's progress and attainment is secure and marking in books is, generally, good but not of a consistent high quality throughout the year. Children's attitudes towards RE are very positive and the work in their books indicates that it is of a good standard and that they have many opportunities to learn by interpreting their thoughts through creative means such as art. The RE leader has an excellent understanding of the subject and a deep appreciation of the contribution RE makes to the children's developing understanding of faith and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. She ensures that RE has a high profile within the overall curriculum and supports staff through good quality training to deliver new initiatives that invigorates RE and keeps it at the forefront of the children's educational experience.

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

An outstanding quality of the leadership at Tipton St John is the passion and commitment from senior leaders to the creation of an ethos that is sincerely founded on a Christian mission to serve the needs of all members of the school community underpinned by explicitly Christian values. The executive headteacher fully supports and encourages the head of school and his staff team in promoting a vision that allows children to believe that they can achieve the best they can in a learning environment based on a Christian understanding of love. Leadership is outstanding because this ethos pervades the life of the school, is understood by children and influences the decisions the school makes. Leaders clearly articulate the purpose of being a church school and this is shared by the staff team who reflect the school's values in their everyday actions and the way they relate to children. The head of school has an insightful understanding of how a distinctive Christian ethos supports children academically and emotionally. He works closely with the RE leader who is equally effective and committed to the children's spiritual development. Governors, similarly, understand how the school's explicit Christian ethos guides the school's approaches to learning and caring for children. They have a very clear grasp of the school's strengths as a church school and what it can do to continue to develop. Self-evaluation is accurate and based on careful analysis of high quality evidence gathered from regular monitoring of collective worship, RE and the impact of the vision and values. The creation of a single vision across the federation has helped to bring the two communities together in many respects whilst at the same time allowing both schools to maintain an individual distinctiveness. Some aspects of the vision and how it connects to the school's core values has become less clear. Leader and managers, including governors, take their responsibilities seriously. They are particularly concerned about plans for the future location of the school, due to environmental issues, and how best to maintain the present strong links with the local community especially the excellent relationship with the parish church. Children regard the church as an integral part of the life of the school. They consider it to be 'theirs' and local clergy as part of the life of the school. The vicar is committed to the school as part of his work in the community and plays an important role in developing the children's knowledge of the Bible and helping them to understand prayer. Parents say that the school allows their children to ask questions about faith and belief. They agree that the school's values teach their children how to treat others with kindness and compassion regardless of their personal background. In particular, parents feel that the school's values help their children by teaching them to appreciate the views of others and treat them with respect. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.