

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Charing Church of England (VA) Primary School

School Road, Charing, Kent TN27 0JN	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Canterbury
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	July 2017
Name of multi-academy trust	Aquila
Date of inspection	16 November 2017
Date of last inspection	October 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary Academy 44835
Headteacher	Alison Crockford
Inspector's name and number	Anne Southgate 820

School context

Charing is smaller than the average sized primary school. The headteacher has been in post since September 2015. This followed a prolonged period of instability in staffing and leadership. Many parents chose to move their children from the school during this time. This led to the school being undersubscribed. Numbers are increasing. Pupil mobility is high. Most pupils are from white British backgrounds. A significant number of pupils have a Gypsy Roma or Traveller heritage. More pupils are eligible for free school meals than the national average. The school joined the Aquila Academy Trust in July 2017.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Charing as a Church of England school are good

- A clear Christian vision and set of values have transformed behaviour and morale in the school, so that these are now good.
- Leaders have clear and helpful action plans to improve the school further.
- Pupils are offered a wide range of opportunities, which enable them to develop very well spiritually, morally, socially and culturally (SMSC).

Areas to improve

- Relate Christian values explicitly to learning, so that they are more effective in driving up attainment.
- Establish consistency in the teaching of religious education (RE), so that pupils across the school achieve to the best of their ability.
- Increase capacity to improve provision by training a new leader of RE.
- Develop and increase pupil leadership and evaluation of collective worship, so that pupils have greater ownership of this area.

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

The introduction of Christian values of love, kindness, friendship, truth and hope has transformed the school. A prolonged period of instability in leadership and staffing followed the previous denominational inspection. This damaged morale and achievement. An unhappy and unstable school has become a caring and nurturing environment, where adults and pupils enjoy working. The values are grounded securely in biblical stories so that everyone understands that they are Christian values. The impact of the values is that attendance has risen, exclusions have fallen and pupils behave with courtesy and consideration. The values have also helped to raise self-esteem and underpin significant support for pupils and their families. Behaviour for learning is good and pupils generally want to achieve well. However, outcomes are significantly below national averages. The Christian values have had a significant and very positive impact on behaviour and wellbeing. The values have not had an impact on raising attainment. This is because they are not regularly related explicitly to learning. New pupils to the school are made very welcome. This includes those with different backgrounds to other pupils and those with little English. Pupils have an awareness of, and a sensitive interest in, different cultures and beliefs. This results in a generally harmonious and inclusive school community.

Attractive and interactive reflection areas around the school pose questions for reflection and offer opportunities for prayer. These are changed regularly so that they continue to challenge pupils to think about the questions that they pose. Pupils appreciate having time to think deeply and to reflect. Outside space is used well to encourage pupils to ask questions and to reflect further. As a result, pupils talk with ease about moments of wonder and they develop well spiritually. The school offers a wide range of cultural opportunities, for example, visits to the Natural History Museum. These are new experiences for many pupils. Consequently, SMSC development is strong.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship provides a time of quiet reflection and calm with which to start each day. Pupils respond very well and they participate enthusiastically in singing and in answering questions. Worship contributes to the sense of community in the school, with adults participating alongside the pupils. The school's Christian values are related to biblical stories and to the pupils' lives. This often results in questions being posed and in pupils being sent out with a thought for the day. As a result, pupils have a good knowledge of Bible stories. The symbols used in worship, such as a candle with three wicks, are carefully explained. Therefore these symbols help pupils to develop an understanding of Christian beliefs, such as the Trinity. The strong relationship with the local church ensures that pupils experience Anglican traditions. Pupils also celebrate a wide range of Christian festivals both in the church and at school. Parents are invited to attend weekly celebration worship and the festival services in church. Those who attend feel a greater involvement and connection with the school. Clergy and parishioners regularly lead school worship, as do senior staff. This ensures a variety of approaches and styles of worship. Collective worship is inclusive. It allows pupils to pray or to reflect, according to their own beliefs. Most pupils choose to pray and they know Christian prayers, such as the Grace and the Lord's Prayer. Pupils respect the views and beliefs of others.

A group of older pupils are worship leaders. These pupils say the gathering and sending sentences and they sometimes lead prayers and readings. Very recently, pupils led an entire act of worship for the first time. This gives them a greater sense of ownership of worship. More pupils would like to have a greater involvement in leading worship more often. The worship leaders collect the views of pupils about the acts of worship. This allows leaders to monitor the effectiveness of school worship, alongside occasional monitoring by governors. Monitoring is not effective in highlighting areas for improvement, as it tends to focus only on what pupils enjoyed.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

Attitudes to RE have improved with the introduction of the new syllabus, 'Understanding Christianity'. Pupils are now more motivated and enthused by RE. Many pupils enjoy the increased level of challenge and they think deeply about the questions posed. This is not consistently the case across the school. Where teachers have embraced the new approach teaching is exciting and effective. This encourages pupils to ask 'big questions' and to reflect on possible answers. In other classes, pupils are less enthusiastic about RE, as a result of weaker teaching. Standards are improving, but they are below national averages. Assessment in some classes highlights further questions for

pupils to consider, and so it advances their thinking. This is not consistent across all classes. Pupils in most classes enjoy learning about Christianity and about other religions. Some pupils display an impressive level of knowledge and understanding of Christian beliefs and traditions. RE in most classes encourages pupils to reflect and to think deeply. Displays around the school pick up on questions posed in RE and offer pupils opportunities to reflect and respond to these. This contributes to their SMSC development.

RE is led by the headteacher, following the resignation of the previous RE leader. This shows that RE is important in the school. The headteacher has attended training on the new syllabus and has cascaded this to staff. However, she does not have the capacity to devote the time needed to develop RE in the school. Consequently, monitoring and support is not as effective as it should be. There are plans to train a new RE leader, but these have not yet been implemented.

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

The headteacher has transformed the school by her swift action to embed a Christian vision and Christian values. Consequently behaviour and wellbeing have improved immensely. Charing is now a community to which all stakeholders feel they belong. This is as a result of leaders' vision for the school which is akin to St Paul's description of the church as a body with many parts. Parents feel a much greater sense of involvement in the school since the arrival of the current headteacher. Communication with parents is strong and the headteacher has built trust. The school community now has an understanding of spirituality as an essential aspect of each pupil's development. Effective partnerships exist with the local church, the diocese and with governors. The new partnership with the Aquila Trust is offering invaluable support. Teachers are linked with peers in other church schools and expert advice is accessed. Governors provide good challenge and support for the headteacher. Self-evaluation is very honest and it has led to clear and helpful action plans. Statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are fully met. New teachers are well supported and are quickly inducted into what it means to work in a church school. The headteacher has created a school where people want to work and so staff turnover is much lower than it was previously. This has brought stability.

Leaders have brought about considerable improvement over the last year and they are continuing to deepen the impact of the school's Christian character.

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