

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Laurence Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School	
Bunbury Road, Northfield, Birmingham B31 2DJ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Birmingham
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Birmingham
Date of inspection	10 July 2018
Date of last inspection	March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided Infant 103459
Headteacher	Caroline Proctor
Inspector's name and number	Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

At St Laurence Infant School there are currently 270 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils who are from diverse ethnic backgrounds is slightly below average. The number of pupils who have special educational needs and /or disabilities is higher than the national average. The headteacher has been in post for three years. The religious education [RE] subject leader is a long serving member of staff. The school shares a site and playing field with St Laurence Junior School.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Laurence Infant Schools as a Church of England school are outstanding

- This is a nurturing and inclusive Christian family community where its young pupils thrive and succeed because of the excellent pastoral care shown to both adults and children.
- The Christian vision of the headteacher, the commitment of the governors and clergy, the passion of the RE subject leader and the dedication of the staff ensure the distinctive Christian character of the school permeates all school life.
- The partnership between St Laurence Church and its schools, through the work of the rector, enriches the worshipping lives of the whole community.
- Pupils' religious knowledge and understanding is excellent and supports their spiritual lives very well.

Areas to improve

- Extend pupils' global awareness of Christianity as a worldwide faith. This includes their knowledge and understanding of local, national and global figures of faith.
- Enable pupils to meet people of faith more frequently as a regular part of their RE lessons to support their spiritual and cultural development.

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

St Laurence Infants' vision, 'Every child to learn and grow with God' is at the heart of this nurturing and welcoming Christian family community. Here each child and adult not only belongs to the St Laurence family but can also belong to God's family, within a context of mutual love and respect. This is because the vision is linked to biblical teaching and Christian values, such as perseverance, respect, compassion and trust. This enables pupils to develop a 'zest for learning' and to grow and flourish within a caring Christian environment. Long serving staff affirm that they too have been nurtured in their own faith and this school 'helps to build the foundations of faith for our children'. They testify to helping the children 'to see their values through God's eyes and help them to grow to be the best person they can be'. Exemplary relationships and behaviour abound, with achievement of the whole child central to the school's mission. With the focus on the individual, staff know their pupils exceedingly well. Working closely in partnership with a very supportive parent body, dedicated staff build relationships and ensure personalised support enables progress. Early interventions and a great deal of transition work, especially for vulnerable pupils, result in academic and personal success for all groups of pupils. Good attendance and a range of achievement is constantly celebrated in school. This extends to outdoor education, where life skills, such as co-operation, negotiation, problem solving and taking responsibility is making a difference in the classroom and to pupils' focus on their work. These young pupils rise to challenges and grow in confidence.

Worship and RE make excellent contributions to pupils' spiritual and personal development and to the Christian character of this infant school. This is enhanced by the strong links with the parish church.

RE has a high profile and follows guidance from the diocese in using the 'Understanding Christianity' resource. This takes its place alongside the agreed syllabus which supports teaching the rich diversity of faith in this south west part of Birmingham. Pupils appreciate diversity and difference and are very accepting of others. They are growing in their local and global awareness. An excellent example is that of a Year 2 pupil who was inspired to collect useful foodstuffs and other items for the homeless. However, pupils are limited in their understanding of Christianity as a worldwide faith and of figures of faith. This includes St Laurence, to whom their church and school is dedicated.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship truly is worship at St Laurence and an important part of school life. This daily gathering time is enjoyed by adults and pupils alike. One member of staff commented, 'When we worship in this school, I feel our communion is total'. It is varied in its approach and has an emphasis on key festivals in the church year, recognising saints, and biblical teaching with Anglican greetings an important part of the liturgy. There are close links with nearby St Laurence Church, through the rector. The pattern of worship includes church services and Eucharistic worship led by members of the clergy. Pupils affirm that for them worship in church happens in a 'more religious place', where they see Bible stories depicted in the stained glass windows. Parents value church worship too and confirm they find 'seeing the sign of peace and the liturgical language very absorbing'. Joint services with the Junior School take place, such as at Ascension-tide or on the school field in the summer term. For example, this year the focus was on how God's kingdom might come in school as an integral part of The Lord's Prayer. The school works closely with the diocese and has helped to develop a diocesan Year 2 Leavers' service. Year 2 pupils have also been members of the worship crew, leading worship fortnightly in school and church. They are a visible child presence always at the front in worship and they help collect everyone's viewpoints on worship in the collective worship learning journal. This is very effective in celebrating the importance of worship in the school and as a monitoring tool, informing leaders and governors for future planning. All staff are involved in aspects of planning, leading and evaluating worship. Pupils are invited to pray and reflect in worship, with The Lord's Prayer well used and known by pupils. For example, pupils know they can say it 'whenever I need to and God will come and help me in difficult times'. Indeed, praying and singing are very important to pupils. As one pupil put it, 'If I'm feeling sad or grumpy or cross I can always pray to God and ask him to help me and heal me so I can be happy and joyful'. Pupils' spiritual growth is greatly enhanced by their use of the 'Thinking Places' in classrooms, the interactive space for reflection in the library area, which is very much at infant level, as well as the school grounds and spiritual garden. Pupils are growing in their understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is because Trinity is an everyday part of their worshipping experience at St Laurence. They explain, 'Trinity is all about God and being three people. He's Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They speak of salvation in their own words saying, 'Jesus died on the cross to take away all our sins'. They recall Pentecost and the 'story of the men who had fire on their heads'. Their biblical knowledge is very strong and more importantly, they make the connection between Bible stories and everyday life. For example, they cite Jonah who teaches us to trust in God and 'the Christmas story when Jesus was born and we celebrate his birth'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Achievement in RE is excellent, as in other core subjects at St Laurence. This is because the quality of teaching and learning in RE is of a high standard, with a focus on what Christians believe and how faith is expressed in different ways. One member of staff put it that, 'In RE too the ethos is such that as individuals the pupils feel cherished in God's eyes and each other's'. The RE subject leader has good subject knowledge and monitors RE with the headteacher. She is very committed to RE, undertaking training and reporting to governors as well as supporting colleagues. RE has its own action plan, which feeds into the school development plan. This ensures RE is monitored termly, with ongoing assessment in place. Pupils confirm they 'keep going and keep trying' to improve in their work. The school is incorporating the 'Understanding Christianity' resources into teachers' planning and teaching. This is already having an impact on teachers who really enjoy it and the pupils who think deeply. For example, Year 2 pupils love big words and readily articulate that 'incarnation means God became flesh in human form'.

Whilst the Ladywood Interfaith Education Project is visited every year, and pupils visit the local mosque, the inviting of faith visitors invited into classrooms is of great value for these young pupils who enjoy meeting people of faith. RE lessons are creative and fun, enabling pupils to explore what makes people worship so they do not misunderstand religion. They value learning from their classmates, for example, how Hindu families celebrate what is important to them. In a creative arts week, the RE focus was on giants of faith, taken from a worship song. This enabled pupils to learn about David who was 'the real giant believing in God' and how Esther 'saved her people'. They apply their learning to their own situations. For example, recalling Daniel who 'always prayed to God and made the right choices as he trusted God'. They explore thoughtful questions, such as, 'I wonder how God must have felt?' and 'Why is this story recorded?' when looking at the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Thus, they show excellent religious knowledge and understanding for pupils of their age.

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

Leaders firmly believe in the core purpose, vision and mission of the school, in that every child matters to God in this school. Here at St Laurence, there is a real team effort to help each child to fulfil their God-given potential. Staff absolutely care about the children's wellbeing, which is paramount, and are very good at listening to children and providing excellent pastoral care when needed in a calm learning environment. Consequently, pupils enjoy their learning, thrive and make good progress. Parents are very positive. This includes those who may not have been to church before their child came to this church school. Such parents affirm they feel part of the school family and feel at home here in the peaceful and nurturing environment. Some say singing and praying now takes place in the home too.

The excellence which St Laurence exudes stems from the strong Christian vision of the headteacher who, with her committed governors and hardworking staff, ensures the very evident Christian character of the school permeates all policy and practice. It is a beacon of exemplary Christian distinctiveness in an infant setting. Consequently, the strong Christian ethos and vision, putting each child's spiritual growth at the heart of this school every day, is the driver for all the strategic decisions taken and the way forward for the school in maintaining its excellence as befits an outstanding school. The very well established RE subject leader has been instrumental and passionate in this. She is integral to strategic decisions in the context of RE and worship modelling Christian distinctiveness. This means RE is exceptionally well led, managed and resourced and both RE and worship meet statutory requirements very well. Links with the diocese are very supportive, with the school benefitting greatly from diocesan training. Leaders at all levels are supported in their roles and responsibilities. Community links are very positive, especially with the parish church, with the school held in high regard by parents who take an active part in school life. Staff confirm this is a special place to work, with support both inside and outside the classroom. Above all, they uniformly agree, 'We love God and one another'.

SIAMS report July 2018 St Laurence CE VA Infant School, Northfield, Birmingham B31 2DJ