

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Bentley St Paul's (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

Ashwells Road, Brentwood, CM15 9SE	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chelmsford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Essex
Date of inspection	23 January 2018
Date of last inspection	March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 115151
Headteacher	Louise Putt
Inspector's name and number	Virginia Corbyn 86

School context

Bentley St Paul's is a semi-rural one form entry primary school on the outskirts of Brentwood. Pupils are predominantly White British. The number of pupils eligible for funding due to social disadvantage is well below the national average. The number of pupils with special education needs is below the national average. Over the last three years, there has been a period of instability with changes to teaching staff, the result being that there has been significant reliance on supply staff. The headteacher has been in post for six years, the new deputy headteacher was only appointed from January 2018.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Bentley St Paul's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- A clear set of core Christian values is embedded within the life of the school helping pupils, in particular, to develop a sense of belonging within and responsibility towards their school community.
- Collective worship is very important in school life and has been developed in creative ways with high levels of pupil involvement.
- There is a clarity of purpose in senior leaders and staff which is based on the core Christian values and which results in a mutually supportive community working for the good of all.

Areas to improve

- Extend pupils' leadership in collective worship so that more pupils are able to benefit from a sense of ownership of this aspect of the life of the school.
- Develop the religious education (RE) curriculum in ways which enable all pupils to question, discuss and demonstrate their thinking more clearly.
- Consult all stakeholders regularly and formally so that their views feed directly into the self-evaluation of the school as a church school.

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

Bentley St Paul's core values are friendship, forgiveness, trust, peace, wisdom, responsibility, and respect and reverence. Each class has ownership of one of these values. These are successfully built upon as pupils move through the school, with pupils showing clear understanding of how these are to be applied in their lives. One pupil said, 'They are everyday things and we show them to everyone even those we do not know. God would want us to do them'. Pupils understand that they are linked to the example of Jesus and unpacked for them in their worship times. They are clearly stated on the website but their Christian underpinning is not explicitly explained there. For all stakeholders, these Christian values are the driving force of the school. For parents, the values mean that 'the school gets the character, spirit and community right' for their children. Staff members use the values in their interactions about attitudes and behaviour to deal with any challenging situations in a sensitive and appropriate way. The governors describe how the headteacher goes the 'extra mile' to make sure that attendance is the best it can be and to avoid excluding pupils, in line with the values of trust and responsibility. As a positive expression of its Christian foundation, very good relationships lie at the heart of the school, making sure that the pupils' individual needs are met and that their families are well supported. This is especially apparent in the case of those pupils with special educational needs. All of this means that pupil attainment and progress rates are above the national averages and that the attainment and progress gap is closing for vulnerable pupils.

Staff and parents speak about the school's success in nurturing the whole child. This means that the school takes the time to value all pupils' talents beyond just the academic, for example with awards for demonstrating the Christian values in everyday life. The views of pupils are taken seriously and acted upon across on a wide range of aspects of the life of the school community. There is a pupil parliament to which representatives are elected, including a worship minister. Spiritual development for all has been a focus for the school since the previous denominational inspection. This has resulted in a deepening understanding and a wider and more frequent experience of prayer and reflection in school. For example, the peace garden is used to help pupils 'to think, reflect and calm down', and there have been many practical and interactive opportunities for prayer within school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is strong. The values of responsibility and respect, in particular, together with the wisdom to make good choices, help to develop pupils morally and socially. Pupils are able to talk about the 'differences between us' when explaining how they study different faiths in RE. They balance this with the need to show respect for difference and diversity. Links with schools in Belgium and Kenya have provided real relationships with others across the world.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Great value is placed on collective worship by all members of the school community. This results from a high level of pupil involvement within this aspect of the life of the school. The involvement is currently limited to a small group of pupils known as the mini team, ably led by a pupil minister who is elected as a member of the school parliament. Other pupils, who have seen the role models within the pupil leadership group, would like to be more actively involved. This has been identified through monitoring and evaluation by the headteacher but has not yet taken place. Pupils speak about learning about the example of Jesus regularly in worship. This is reinforced very well by the regular use of the 'Open the Book' materials, about which pupils speak with enthusiasm. Worship is led by a range of teachers and by various Christian leaders from the locality, including the local incumbent. This means that pupils and staff experience a range of traditions and approaches within their worship. The themes for worship help to reinforce the values of the school and to help pupils to explore the Christian calendar. Reflection is encouraged and this has helped pupils to think about how they should help others locally and in the wider world, as well as focusing on personal attitudes and behaviour. The focus on spirituality since the previous denominational inspection has had an impact upon the prayers within worship, because the pupils have a much better understanding and practical experiences of prayer. They are eager to add prayer ribbons to the tree in the hall and even remind the headteacher that this needs to be done after worship. A number of special events are marked by church and school jointly, including Education Sunday. Parents say that these are important in helping their children to understand the importance of belonging to a Christian community. There is also a school Eucharist three times a year in the local church for which the pupils help to design the services. This enables them to experience Anglican practice and liturgy well. Some pupils in Year 6 are prepared for confirmation as part of an extra-curricular activity. There is some understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit at an age-appropriate level across the school.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

Attainment and progress across is generally good. Expectations and standards are broadly in line with those in literacy. Pupils know that RE helps them to learn more about Jesus and that, without RE, 'we would not know so much about the world around us'. They understand that learning about other world faiths is about 'knowing that everyone has different ideas and beliefs and we need to respect them'. Teaching in RE is judged to be good or better by the school, which was generally backed up by outcomes in pupils' books and by interviews with the pupils. They enjoy RE lessons especially when approaches are creative and cross-curricular. Pupils in Key Stage 2 like the fact that there is a wide range of ideas within some of their RE lessons and that everyone has the right to their own views. Learning about Christianity is enriched by focusing upon the major Christian festivals in order that pupils can lead worship in church services. This supports positive and appropriate links between RE and the worship programme well. The local church is used as an effective teaching resource. Some RE visits are arranged to broaden pupils' knowledge and understanding of religion in society. Teaching observed across the day of inspection was, on the whole, good. Pupils were engaged and there were some good examples of pupils reflecting well on their learning about and from religion. Pupils are able to show some examples of how their teachers ask them questions in marking and how teachers' comments help them to think further. The school has identified the need to adopt the 'Understanding Christianity' resources in order to improve the quality of teaching and of learning in RE, especially for Christianity. At present, however, the depth of pupils' questioning and discussion, upon which the school bases its assessment, is not sufficiently evident in recorded work.

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

The headteacher and her school leaders have a clear vision expressed as, 'Growing together in faith, love and trust, we will succeed'. All members of the school community seek to live out this vision through the core Christian values of the school in day to day life. By nurturing the gifts of each pupil in line with these values, pupil outcomes are good and individual needs are effectively addressed. For example, one parent of a pupil with special educational needs said, 'Teachers helped me to understand my child better through the Christian values'. She explained that this had made her child's learning journey easier. An ethos of support and encouragement results in mutually beneficial relationships across the whole school community and its families. All stakeholder groups speak of a strong sense of invitation to all, underlined by a warm welcome. As a result, staff members describe how they are able to settle quickly. They said that, as a happy staff, they can ensure happiness for their pupils. Staff skills are recognised and nurtured, so that all adults are fully involved. These skills are then further developed through local training in the collaboration of schools of which Bentley St Paul's is a member. Church school leadership is built by involving the deputy headteacher in the development of the school as a church school. The previous deputy has been appointed to a headship in the Diocese and the new deputy was closely involved in the inspection, even though she has been in post for less than three weeks. She has also taken over leadership of RE quickly and with enthusiasm, planning to train for 'Understanding Christianity' in the near future.

Governors monitor the school as a church school well and attend training when appropriate. The issues for development from the previous denominational inspection have been addressed carefully, thoughtfully and with positive impact. Aspects of church school development are woven in well to the school improvement plan, being seen as integral to school effectiveness. However, not all stakeholder groups are consulted formally and regularly to inform school self-evaluation. Links with the church are strong as indicated, for example, on the school website. The incumbent leads worship regularly and is a member of the 'faith and worship group', together with the headteacher and a group of pupils. This group has helped to raise the profile of the worshipping and spiritual life of the school, for example through its focus on prayer. Regular liaison with the school through the church's outreach group means that links continue to grow and evolve. The school's relationship with the Diocese is good, in particular through the school improvement adviser. Training events are attended as appropriate, an example of this being the diocesan headship conferences. Statutory requirements for collective worship and RE are met.

SIAMS report January 2018 Bentley St Paul's CE primary (CE VA), Essex CMI5 9SE