

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Brancaster CE VA Primary School

Market Lane
Brancaster
King's Lynn
Norfolk
PE31 8AB

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Norwich
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Norfolk
Name of federation	St Mary Federation
Date of inspection	27 February 2017
Date of last inspection	18 January 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VA Primary 121131
Executive Headteacher	Sarah Bocking
Inspector's name and number	Anna Reeder 659

School context

The school is a very small rural school with 42 pupils on roll. There has been a significant recent increase in pupils with special educational needs who make up 42% of the school population. In September 2015, the school entered the St Mary Federation with Docking CE and Sedgeford Primary schools. The headteacher became the executive headteacher, and staffing and governance were restructured. The school has just come out of an unsettled period while it attempted to recruit quality staff. This has now been stabilised with the appointment of a new teacher for its Key Stage 2 class.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Brancaster CE VA Primary as a Church of England school are good

- The school has a family atmosphere where strong Christian values underpin inclusive good quality relationships and education.
- Leadership at all levels knows the school well and is continually working to strengthen and improve.

Areas to improve

- Develop new systems for assessment in religious education (RE) alongside the introduction of new teaching materials for Christianity across all age groups. Form links with other schools to support this so that assessment is accurate and pupils are clear about what their next steps in learning in RE should be.
- Develop a revised long term curriculum map for RE to reflect changes of implementing the Understanding Christianity scheme of work.
- Develop pupils' role in evaluating collective worship so that worship includes them more fully as partners and leaders.

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

The school is clear about the Christian values which drive the school and they are understood and owned by both adults and children. Core values such as koinonia (Christian community) and service are taught implicitly and discussed throughout the school day when pertinent, and they can be seen being borne out in the quality of relationships throughout the school. Pupils can also talk about how and when they and others live out these values, both in school and at home. They discussed a recent storm, and spoke about how they had seen service when the local police and firemen had helped people stuck in cars with fallen trees. Older pupils know they should support and look after younger ones, and they do this very well. 'We are all a big family here, we all work and learn and play together, because that's what we do!' Due to the very small numbers of pupils within cohorts, the school's data is variable. At an individual level pupils make progress and this is carefully tracked by the school at this level. The school continues to focus on narrowing the gap in achievement for the most disadvantaged by putting individualised programmes in place for them. The school is highly inclusive and pupils with special educational needs are fully included in school life, as the school states, they are 'equal in the sight of God.' A carer of looked after children talked about how his children are motivated by their teachers and included fully so that they are happy and ready to go to school. Parents spoke warmly about the 'atmosphere and philosophy' of the school where you are made to feel welcome from the very start, and one mother was happy to drive a 14-mile round trip each day to bring her eldest child to school, because his siblings with special needs had thrived at the school and she wanted him to have an equally positive experience. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong and the school monitors the impact on the pupils' spirituality that the planned visits and events each term make such as a trip to Walsingham. The school is monocultural in its makeup and the leadership team are aware of making the most of such opportunities which include visitors like a minister talking about his work in Tanzania, a project about Sikhs and working with another school in New Zealand to develop multicultural learning for the pupils. Religious education contributes to and strengthens the understanding of Christian values in the school because it gives pupils greater depth of understanding and time to reflect on core values such as service.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is well planned by the headteacher, the rector and the religious education leader with growing input from the pupils. Collective worship reflects the Anglican tradition and is monitored regularly by the headteacher and governors, and future worship is adapted according to the success of the planned next steps. For example, the school has been developing the way it starts and ends worship sessions and the pupils and staff have been using liturgical responses to mark this. This has made a difference to the way the worship sessions are marked as an entity and the school is now developing this vocabulary further. Worship is themed over a term and these themes are developed from the school's Christian values alongside feedback from the pupils. They are able to express the role worship plays in their lives and how they would feel the impact of its absence; "we would be lonely without our friends and without God." The leadership team are keen for the pupils to play a role in monitoring worship. They have set up an assembly book to help with this, but feel that this is not yet making the difference they would hope, as the pupils are not yet clear about how to evaluate and need further support beyond the guiding questions to help them make judgements. However, leadership monitoring does currently include a very strong pupil voice. Pupils play an active role in worship. Monitors prepare the space for worship, pupils organise and select music and hymns to be sung and pupils enjoy the privilege of holding candles during worship as well as leading prayers or reading passages from the Bible. On the day of the inspection pupils entered the room singing joyfully and were greeted with a liturgical greeting and they responded with familiarity. Worship linked the coming of Lent to the mathematical symbols of more and less than, and the pupils made the connection that Lent could be about giving things up such as the headteacher's favourite peanuts and cheese and that the money saved could go to help others such as the homeless. A pupil thoughtfully stated that "when we are giving things up and trying to give more, we are trying to remember God." The pupils are involved in worship in the local churches across the year and the rectors ensure they have an active part to contribute to services. The school has also established experiential days such as the Christmas stations where pupils were given the opportunity to reflect on Mary's life, the journey to Bethlehem, and what they could give Jesus. Trinity is understood by most of the pupils; one said 'God is three things, Father, Spirit and Son – and Holy and always there.'

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The school now has a new religious education (RE) subject leader in place, and she has made good progress in a short space of time; she is well informed about current developments in RE and uses training and diocesan support effectively to make changes to teaching and learning. The subject leader has received diocesan training which she is now disseminating across the federation, and the impact was clearly seen in the engaging and active lesson in KS2.

The school has begun to use new materials for teaching Christianity, and this has just begun to be trialled in the subject leader's class and has developed pupils' ability to discuss and reflect on big questions relating to their lives. An updated curriculum map has yet to be put in place as training has not been completed. The current focus on developing enquiry skills and the use of big questions ensures that pupils engage theologically with the subject. It remains a focus on the development plan as it is not yet embedded across the school. The focus from the last inspection on developing enquiry skills and being able to interpret and reflect in RE lessons has been successful. Much of the pupils' work in books is reflective and each topic starts with finding out what pupils know, what they want to know and what they can find out, with planning adapted to meet each class's needs. Pupils have targets to develop this further such as 'I can say how my beliefs affect my life, and compare this to others.' However, current assessment methods using 'I can' statements do not tie in with the new teaching resources which means that assessment is not always secure. Those in the Key Stage 1 class were learning about why Christians pray and thinking about why they might pray and what they could pray about. They sang a rap song which reminded them that Christians can say sorry, please and thank you when they pray. They then looked at a selection of prayers and identified why people were praying; for example they felt afraid, were worried about someone who was ill, or they had just had a great day. The pupils then chose an idea of their own and wrote a prayer that would contribute to collective worship. The youngest pupils in Foundation Stage were understanding and recognising the importance of values. They worked in groups to rank a set of values cards and then chose that card, for example kindness, sharing, forgiveness, to illustrate with an example from their own lives. A joyful example was found when another pupil happily shared a rubber with their neighbour. In Key Stage 2 the pupils were discussing a picture of an amazing open box with a handle. They were having to think about what they would put in their box to represent their world, and what values would they choose to turn the handle of the box to bring the world to life. 'What turns your world and underpins it?' The pupils spoke freely about love, kindness, excitement and happiness. The session was engaging and exciting with drama-based freeze frame activities to inspire a range of ideas. Pupils were able to reflect on their own personal experiences to decide which values were important to them. 'I like honesty. Honest friends. That's important to me.' RE has a high profile in the school's curriculum and has a development section in the federation's development plan which is currently focussed on developing inquiry based teaching and developing the recently appointed RE co-ordinator's role. RE is taught regularly and the quality of work is good. Pupils are engaged and enjoy the subject. After a period of instability, much has been put in place and the impact of these changes has been positive.

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

Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate, shared and perceptive. The school is very aware of its strengths and areas it wishes to develop, and because of this improvement planning has led to improved quality of teaching in RE and increased opportunities for spirituality in collective worship. Leaders clearly articulate and are proud of their Christian values. 'We are unashamedly Christian.' They state in their values that they 'will develop an ethos that is deeply rooted in the Christian faith' and this is the case. The school is proactive and makes good use of opportunities that arise for the development of staff and governors, such as the diocesan training for the Understanding Christianity project which has contributed to supporting pupils in developing their own thinking and their understanding of Christianity. The governors and senior leadership take succession planning very seriously. All staff are given responsibility and are encouraged to play a part in school improvement. For example the lead teacher became the school's special needs co-ordinator and now has taken on the role of RE leader. All staff participated in a spirituality development day which led to an action plan for activities to enable this to develop further in the school. As a new federation, the leadership of the school is keen to ensure its distinctiveness is maintained and monitoring procedures are in place in the school's development planning to ensure this is continually evaluated. The governors have carried out learning walks to look at Christian distinctiveness and involved the pupils to work alongside them. The federation and school have a new vision statement flowing from Galatians 5:22 that was led by the governors "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" This has been shared with staff and pupils alike and they have ownership of what this means for the life of their school. A parent governor spoke about how the pupils 'own this vision' and how it is 'astounding how they understand how it works, independently of us.' The school has excellent links with the churches in its parish, attending and leading services in them as well as using them as resources. The school has an active rector who helps plan and lead worship, acts as the school's chaplain and is the well-being governor, and is actively involved in monitoring. She supports the school in its drive to maintain its unashamedly Christian ethos. The rector at Docking is equally proactive, being part of the executive group, leading on federation services, supporting in times of difficulty and monitoring and seeking feedback on federation issues. The governors appreciate the opportunities that the new federation gives the school. They understand that the school through its ethos gives the pupils the opportunity to gain faith and to be part of church life and the local community.