

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary Magdalene Church of England All Through School

Kingsman Street, London SE18 5PW
Old Dover Road Blackheath SE3 8SY

Millennium Way Greenwich Peninsular SE10 0NF

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Southwark

Previous SIAS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Greenwich

Name of federation

Koinonia Federation

Date/s of inspection

30 & 31 January 2018

Date of last inspection

February 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary aided 100171

Federation co-headteachers

Claire Harrison and Victoria Wainwright

Inspector's name and number

Lyn Field 151

School context

This rapidly expanding school currently occupies three sites and, together with Christ Church Church of England Primary, forms the Koinonia Federation under a single governing body. The founding site in Woolwich is a two-form entry primary school serving families of predominantly Black African heritage and with an above average proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged. The second campus on the Greenwich Peninsula is part of a newly emerging community with a high proportion of international families and a wide range of social backgrounds. The 'super block' under construction is due to open next academic year. The five existing classes from Reception to Year 3 will move from their temporary accommodation and eventually grow into the two-form entry primary phase. Current Year 7 & 8 students will move from the temporary Blackheath campus to become a six-class entry secondary phase with a sixth-form opening in September 2019.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary Magdalene as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The co-headteachers and co-chairs of governors have a proven track record of growing the school's Christian presence in the community. Their unwavering determination to provide local communities with Christian education for the whole of children's journey in education from 3 to 18 years, means the school is fully engaged with the Diocese and is regularly at the forefront of leading initiatives for church schools.
- St Mary Magdalene transforms the lives of pupils and their families because the whole staff and governing body share a deep understanding of the school's Christian identity, its core purpose and deliver the vision with passion and integrity.
- Religious education (RE) and collective worship are central to the whole curriculum plan. Highly effective practice equips pupils with the motivation and leadership skills to take active roles in a diverse society because of the consistently high status given to these areas.

Areas to improve

Ensure that the pioneering work of establishing a Christian presence in secondary education sustains and enriches the high quality that current pupils experience, particularly in:

- developing a pattern of worship that fully meets the needs of young adults
- delivering a curriculum for RE in Key Stages 2&3 to fully prepare and inspire pupils for success in Key Stages 4&5
- utilising the opportunities afforded by the design features of the new building to keep the school at the cutting edge of delivering new thinking in church school education.

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

The words of the Christian vision, 'Family Faith Fellowship' and the name 'Koinonia' fully express the way this school operates on a daily basis and the exemplary care shown to pupils and their families. Everyone from the headteachers to the youngest pupils reference the vision to biblical teachings so there is a shared understanding of the school's core purpose.

The impact extends to families. Parents understand that values are about the whole human being and some talk of having reconnected with their religious upbringing from the experience of being part of the school community. Others arriving from a variety of countries worldwide describe the deeply rewarding experience of seeing the spiritual and moral impact of lessons on their children.

Pupils apply the excellent teaching about Christian values to their learning and behaviour so classrooms are exciting and harmonious places. Primary prefects explain how they must be humble in their roles in order to praise examples of how other children strive to live in peace with each other. Children make an exceptionally strong start in Early Years across all areas of their learning and this is built on so that they consistently attain higher than average levels by the end of Key Stage 2. Leaders have adopted a rigorous approach to tracking in Key Stage 3 that monitors the variations between cohorts in order to set realistic targets as benchmarks for progress towards GCSE and eventually A level. This currently shows pupils are making at least expected progress.

Leaders completely understand the potential of an 'all through' school to grow the primary curriculum into secondary. Planning for Key Stage 3 shows clear progression in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development from Year 6 and students respond with excellent reflections on topics such as a Christian's view of Macbeth and global inequalities related to fairtrade and slavery. At a practical level the Koinonia award takes students out of their comfort zone. It places them in a unique position to understand their community and equips them with the skills to perceive the challenges that some groups face. They visit care homes to establish relationships with the residents to ensure no-one feels abandoned.

Behaviour and relationships are of the highest standard. Much of the school's success in raising self-esteem and enabling pupils to learn effectively is the result of restoring goodwill or helping children to establish new and meaningful relationships with a trusted adult. This is based on the research of Margot Sunderland and aligns completely with the Christian teaching that it is never too late to make a new start. This and similar strategies result in regular and above average attendance with very few short exclusions which are rarely repeated. Incidents of a racist or homophobic nature are almost unknown in the primary years and very low in secondary. Pupils know that any forms of bullying must be challenged and they explain the reason from the perspective of Jesus' teaching.

Older pupils refer to the practice of restorative justice and the importance of listening to the other point of view. RE plays a major role in developing pupils' exceptionally mature attitudes to diversity and difference that are central to the school's Christian character. It is not just the result of studying six world religions but of delving deeper to explore religious ideas and concepts. Pupils in Years 5 & 6 speak of 'It is what is inside and how you act. Jesus gave people new chances no matter what they looked like.' RE enjoys high status because it is a prime tool in implementing the Christian vision and values.

The non-judgemental approach of pastoral staff has led to high levels of trust between staff and families. The chaplain's skilful approach to his role enriches what the school offers because he manages both spiritual support and counselling sessions with no assumptions about faith background. Parents are, therefore, confident that the support and nurturing will continue into the new building because seeing familiar faces has made the transition from primary into secondary seamless for their children.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is at the core of school life and plays a very significant part in promoting the spiritual wellbeing of staff and students. This is because it happens every day across all campuses and everyone benefits whatever their personal faith positions. Its inclusive nature is fundamental to the school and skilful leadership ensures that neither its inclusiveness nor its distinctive Christian character are ever compromised, as parents from all backgrounds eloquently confirm.

The level of participation is exceptional on all campuses. This ranges from silent observation and reflection on thought-provoking issues to student faith teams leading worship for younger classes or planning presentations to help contextualise Christian concepts for their peers. Students make positive choices about how to engage with worship because what is offered is relevant, age appropriate and inclusive of all faith backgrounds. For example, Year 8 listen with the rapt attention to the street preacher who uses art and magic tricks to challenge thinking and Year 3 enthusiastically sing worship songs.

In Key Stage 3, the pattern of worship is evolving as leaders respond to the different needs of teenagers within the community and are wisely looking ahead to when sixth formers join. Systematic monitoring and the weight given to

student feedback have already led to adjustments to family group worship being made. Students are gaining new insights into the religious beliefs of their peers through exploring topics that are not part of their regular social interaction.

Leaders of worship represent a range of Christian denominations so pupils gain a sense not just of Anglican practice but of the wider Christian Church, its varied structures and liturgical traditions. The quality of relationships between pupils and worship leaders is exemplary because the school is careful to have a core team of regular leaders who consistently implement well thought out policy. Leaders are familiar figures including the site manager who has a background in ministry. This opens yet more avenues for discussion of spiritual matters.

Pupils of all ages are familiar with how beliefs about Jesus Christ and the Trinity are expressed in worship and talk about it confidently. All pupils experience the service of Eucharist half-termly and some choose to attend the optional weekly Eucharist on a regular basis. The confidence with which they share the Peace in worship shows how well the school's values are taught as having a distinctively Christian basis.

Prayer has a very high profile in the life of the school but pupils of all ages are very clear that it is always invitational. They engage with it at whatever point and in whatever tradition or manner they choose and what is on offer is rich for both adults and children. It includes parents' prayer meetings, quiet places, prayer boxes for leaving prayers and, unusually, boxes to respond when you feel your prayer is answered. The school prayer, written over several months in collaboration with all stakeholders and known by every child, follows the pattern of the Lord's Prayer and perhaps captures better than any document the essence of this school in lines such as 'We pray that our schools will be a bit like heaven where everyone feels accepted, loved, safe and cared for.'

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils across the school and of all faiths are excited to talk about RE. It is immediately clear that they are confident to hold different opinions but have the greatest respect for the views of others. A telling comment from a student was that discussing religious beliefs in class had given her greater insight into her own beliefs. For pupils of all ages, lessons provide a safe place to talk about topics that might be regarded as sensitive elsewhere. The accurate presentation of other religions completely dispels any misconceptions and older students are confident to explain where the media has to be challenged in order to get a fairer picture of each religion. This is the direct result of consistently good teaching. Teachers' secure subject knowledge has strengthened through training with local schools, an initiative led by the co-headteachers. This is typical of the relentless drive to improve that all staff share. In spite of pupils' high attainment in RE and their confidence to use religious terminology, the school has still adopted the new resource Understanding Christianity in order to embed pupils' knowledge of Christian concepts and beliefs and raise the level of their religious literacy.

Across the school, leaders are ambitious for the subject and this plays out in the decisions made about the curriculum and the deployment of staff. Year 5 & 6 pupils develop an implicit understanding of RE as an academic discipline albeit at an early stage. They refer to the differences between gospel accounts, for example, because they are learning to scrutinise religious texts and recognise that the tasks they are set enable them to explore deeper questions of meaning and purpose. Their task to produce an advertisement for Christmas demonstrated this very clearly.

At secondary level, wise and far reaching decisions about the status of RE have had very positive implications for pupil's academic learning and their personal development. It sits alongside English and maths as a core subject in a way that is rarely seen. This means RE enjoys prime morning timetable slots and pupil progress is scrutinised by senior leaders on a regular basis. It shows that pupils are regularly reaching expected levels and a significant proportion doing better. Current predictions for GCSE, although necessarily tentative, suggest the first cohorts will be at least in line with national figures.

Leaders have not compromised on the quality of staffing even though this has meant delaying an RE related leadership appointment until the right calibre of candidate was available. Meanwhile, the pace of developing the secondary RE curriculum has been sustained because of the high quality expertise provided by the Diocesan consultant. At primary level, guidance from the primary adviser has eased the integration of different programmes of study. However, this arrangement has missed the importance of treating the curriculum as one entity in an 'all through' school to ensure that each stage fully equips pupils with the skills they will need in the following stage.

The quality of teaching is consistently good, sometimes outstanding, and always addresses the different needs of pupils. In secondary, this is effectively managed through streaming of classes but across the school the pride pupils take in their work is clear in their books and in their attitudes to learning.

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

A deeply Christian vision, rooted in biblical teaching, shapes and sustains the development of this remarkable school. It has a holistic and transforming impact on young people because it is part of a much bigger vision to establish church school education in this community from ages 3 to 18. This has been the long-term aim of the inspirational co-headteachers and co-chairs of governors who are of one mind and have a proven track record of managing change on a large scale. This innovative model of paired leadership is underpinned by dynamic staff and student leadership teams across the Koinonia Federation. This ensures there is mutual benefit to both St Mary Magdalene and Christ Church. At no point is the leadership of any area the responsibility of just one individual. Leaders both support each other and constantly hold each other to account. This safeguards the integrity of this rapidly expanding organisation. The relentless focus on vision equally applies to the design of the new building which has the potential to use its facilities in ground-breaking ways.

Leaders take maximum advantage of being both an 'all through' school and part of a federation in order to grow new leaders and to create a rich curriculum with RE and collective worship at its heart. Decisions have been made at the highest level to allocate prime timetable slots to these areas. The significance of this can be seen in the huge impact on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the way they are prepared for life beyond school. What marks this curriculum out is that all students in a year group experience the same cultural activities in school and further afield. The sense of 'Family' and 'Fellowship', therefore, are part of the way the school delivers equal opportunities.

Staff at all levels flourish and many sought posts at the school because of its holistic Christian ethos. Leaders frequently emerge from within the school because the co-headteachers have an insightful knowledge of staff and use the opportunities offered by the different campuses for leaders to gain new experiences and hone their skills. The headteachers are impressively confident to make brave decisions at a time of rapid expansion and hold back from appointments or create alternative models to ensure the school has the capacity to deliver and sustain the Christian vision. Fundamental to the school's development has been the exceptional commitment of the chair of governors over many years. The exemplary structure of governance that has evolved places the Christian vision at the centre of governor business and the ethos group enjoys equal weight with other committees. Meticulous attention to detail is characteristic of systems throughout the school. In particular, the terms of reference ensure that the Christian vision directly influences all decisions, appointments, monitoring and strategic planning. For the ethos committee, this task has fallen to the team rector as chair of the committee and joint vice-chair of governors. It reflects a wider picture of the church's active involvement and of governors who are passionate about the school. Leaders at all levels are highly reflective. They are acutely aware of the challenges that face them in sustaining the current high standards into the secondary phase and that future exam results will inevitably define success. All campus leaders, and all staff, see this as a shared responsibility. Each phase ultimately contributes to the achievement of the oldest pupils but, in so doing, each phase refines its practice so there are no weak links.

The strong partnership with the diocese is of mutual benefit in developing the quality of church school education within and beyond the locality. Its officers have been a valuable source of guidance in establishing and expanding the federation whilst the co-headteachers are actively involved in the initiating training and conferences.

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