

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

<b>St Helen's Church of England Primary School, Wheathampstead</b>	
Address	Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, AL4 8AN
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	
Overall grade	Good
The impact of collective worship	Good
The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Excellent

School's vision
<p>'God will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.' Hebrews 6:10</p> <p>We work together to understand, show and share God's love. Adults and children act with honesty and kindness, appreciate each other's differences and love their neighbours. We strive to approach all learning with a positive attitude, a sense of collaboration and a desire to achieve.</p>
Key findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Christian vision expressed by leaders nourishes the life of all so pupils and adults watch over one another with devoted love. Formal systems for leaders to capture the impact of the vision are, however, at an early stage of development.</li> <li>• Religious education (RE) is excellent because pupils acquire a depth of knowledge that surpasses expectations for their age. The subject is exceptionally well led and taught and so contributes to wider personal and academic growth.</li> <li>• Inspired by the vision, love is shown to others. All ages act with kindness and consideration towards their neighbours.</li> <li>• A culture of deep reflection provides spiritual nourishment. However, the lack of a shared definition and understanding of spirituality limits spiritual development.</li> <li>• Collective working binds this nurturing community together. Time for worship is highly valued and enriched by a fruitful partnership with the local church.</li> </ul>
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify the different statements on vision and values so the Christian vision is more securely known across the school community.</li> <li>• Embed formal systems of monitoring the Christian vision so this explicitly drives the ongoing development of the school as a Church school.</li> <li>• Establish a shared language and definition of spirituality so staff may confidently plan for spiritual development across the curriculum and life of the school.</li> </ul>



## Inspection findings

The Christian vision at St Helen's works in tandem with its associated values. Over time, a number of statements have evolved. The values and vision to 'love your neighbour' are clearly identified with the life of the school. Multiple statements do however lead to confusion as to what exactly is the school's expressed Christian vision. That vision, and its biblical inspiration leaders chose from the book of Hebrews, however, has sustained the school community through challenges. Reflecting and applying the vision through the dearly held values enables people to continually help each other, even when differences arise. Changes to leadership are characterised by generosity of spirit. Senior leaders and staff work with mutual respect and appreciation. Governors know the school extremely well and safeguard its Christian character. They make strategic decisions, for example on staff development, in line with their desire for all to achieve. Currently, systems for monitoring the impact of the vision to inform school development are more implicit.

Love of others emanates around the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and supportive. Genuine care is both given and received. Parents are hugely appreciative of the care extended to them as well as their children. When awards are presented for showing the values parents, as well as adults in school, nominate pupils and staff. This helps build an ethos of palpable fellowship based on Christ's teaching. Families where children may have additional needs cannot praise the school highly enough. A striking example is how the school has embraced the use of Braille. Pupils and staff are keen to learn this method of communication. Great care is taken to support wellbeing and positive mental health. Better attendance is the result, particularly when pupils are anxious. Staff and pupils benefit from, and honour the gentle and kindly example of the headteacher. With her new deputy in his supporting role, a dynamic partnership is emerging which transmits to great enthusiasm in staff. This culture of strong family is energetically and lovingly supplemented by Ernie, the school's therapy labrador.

A remarkable aspect of the school is the way staff are encouraged to continue their professional development. St Helen's grows future teachers and leaders of church schools. It is like a cradle and nursery for other schools, and indeed dioceses. Partnership with the Diocese is close and this enhances the effectiveness of the school as a Church school. Similarly, partnership with the Church and community has led to a joint environmental project.

The vision to achieve is lived out in a vibrant, carefully considered curriculum. This is enhanced by extensive use of the outdoor space. The 'Opal' programme of outdoor play and learning means playtimes are energetic and joyful. Pupils learn positive lessons from the example of staff. St Helen's plays mixed ability sports teams, not solely the most talented players. In this way it conveys a positive message about inclusion. Pupils are confident to extend their thinking and are unfazed when they make 'marvellous mistakes'. A notable feature is the school's commitment to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This demonstrates that pupils develop a wonderful sense of diversity and global citizenship. For example, studying Mary Seacole along with Florence Nightingale. As a result of the vision and EDI commitment pupils are good citizens to each other. Many take on leadership roles and have been vocal campaigners to support the local foodbank and to welcome Ukrainian families. As such, pupils show love in their continuing help for others. Several pupils demonstrated this when running alongside fellow athletes to encourage them on sports day.


Within the school day there are frequent opportunities to reflect and consider personal views. Pupils are confident to share these and very much appreciate the time to think and respond to 'big questions'. A parent notes how her children ask about these at home, so the impact of school extends beyond the school day. While the culture of reflection is deep, the school

does not have a shared definition or policy guidance on spirituality. This limits opportunities to plan for spiritual growth.

RE is quite simply stunning. Pupils are inspired by their learning, fully aware that the subject helps them to understand and so help others across the world. Rarely would pupils talk with such confidence of the similarities between different religions. This includes exploring Christian spirituality and the Buddhist eight-fold path. RE makes a significant contribution to the personal, social and cultural development of pupils.

Collective worship is a clear expression of the vision to act with honesty and kindness. Pupils and adults value the time to gather, to learn, reflect and pray or reflect as they wish. Worship relies on examples from the Bible. Volunteers from the 'Open the Book' team invite pupils to retell Bible stories and are offered more help than can be used. The school is blessed in its support from the Anglican parish. Local clergy relate exceptionally well to pupils, and this fosters the extended family feel of the school. As a pupil said, 'I feel at home here and in church.' Singing is jubilant and bright and reflects Christian traditions. Pupils look forward to time for worship each day and like its variety. Worship in class, hall or church is special to them. Worship provides time to look more deeply at the values through the lens of the vision and Christian teaching. For example, reflecting on the value of respect, pupils know that Jonah learned the hard way to respect God. The impact of worship is evident in the way pupils talk of how worship 'helped me make good choices'. A memorable act of worship allowed pupils to crumple paper and release sadness in their hearts. This exemplifies the strong culture of prayer and reflection across the day. Pupils express delight in leading aspects of worship and do so with great confidence. Many state that worship is 'time to talk to God and tell him about our day.'

A natural grace and delight pervades St Helen's. This school has an effective Christian vision that is true to its historic roots in the village and indeed Church of England.

	The effectiveness of RE is	Excellent	
	<p>The RE subject lead is a highly experienced specialist. She skilfully supports colleagues to gain a breadth of subject knowledge and to make lessons inspiring and engaging for pupils. Work in books and learning evident through discussions is impressive and goes beyond that expected of pupils in Church primary schools. Monitoring of progress in RE is highly effective. Assessment processes capture progress, are rigorously moderated and inform pupils' next steps in learning.</p>		
Information			
School	St Helen's CofE Primary (Wheathampstead)	Inspection date	8 February 2023
URN	117462	VC/VA/Academy	Voluntary Assisted
Diocese/District	St Albans	Pupils on roll	256
Headteacher	Kaye Healy		
Chair of Governors	Diana Batt		
Inspector	Allyson Taylor	No.	768