

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Steeple Morden CofE VC Primary School

7 Hay Street, Steeple Morden, Royston, Hertfordshire. SG8 0PD

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Ely
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Date of inspection	22 nd March 2017
Date of last inspection	16th March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled Primary; URN 110793
Headteacher	Richard Lloyd
Inspector's name and number	James Adkins 821

School context

Steeple Morden is an average size voluntary controlled primary that serves a number of local villages. The numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals are below the national average as are those with English as an additional language. The number of pupils with a statement of educational needs or an educational health care plan are below national. The school was subject to an Ofsted inspection in December 2016 which judged the school to be good. The long standing headteacher is leaving at the end of the academic year and a new head has been appointed for September 2017.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Steeple Morden as a Church of England school are good

- The Christian foundation of Steeple Morden is deeply embedded. Its Christian values are understood, shared and lived out on a daily basis.
- Steeple Morden's Christian character and values are modelled by staff. They lead directly to pupils' excellent behaviour as well as having a significant impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- All members of the community greatly value collective worship because of the impact it has on individual relationships and the life of Steeple Morden as a whole.
- Governors take their responsibility for Steeple Morden very seriously and, as a consequence, play an active role in its strategic development as a church school.

Areas to improve

- Establish mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of the quiet reflection area so that the school can plan its development.
- Establish formal mechanisms that involve pupils in monitoring and evaluating worship so that the school is more aware of their views and can strategically plan further developments with them in mind.
- Provide more opportunities for all staff to engage in professional development in religious education to ensure that it continues to contribute to the school's distinctive character.

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

Steeple Morden's explicit aim is to provide "a range of learning experiences of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief". All members of the school community understand and can clearly articulate how this is a commitment towards pupils of Christian faith, other faiths and no faith because the ethos of the school is to be inclusive and welcoming.

Staff, governors and parents explicitly relate the school's 'diamond rules' with the beatitudes and highlight how they are made tangible for pupils through the rewards system so that the pupils can live them out every day. Equally pupils, parents, staff and governors make direct links between the school's Christian ethos and excellent attitudes to learning and behaviour, as demonstrated by zero fixed term or permanent exclusions in the last eleven years. One governor said that this lack of exclusion "shows our faith" and the impact of the Christian ethos upon Steeple Morden, particularly as the school has successfully taken in pupils on managed moves. The school's implicit Christian ethos also has a direct impact on pupils' achievement, with all groups of pupils making good progress in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2. Vulnerable pupils are given the confidence to succeed because every individual at Steeple Morden is important as they are "made in the image of God". For example, weaker readers were supported to read at an Easter service to an audience of parents, the whole school and the wider community.

All groups viewed Steeple Morden's Christian character as important because it has a significant impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. A range of quality experiences significantly develop personal spirituality. Challenging pupils to engage in activities such as performing the play of 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' and producing the yearly 'The Church in the Community' book for display in the parish church encourages deeper thinking and making connections between faith and life. Opportunities such as taking part in the Bishop's Lent challenge encourage reflection on a range of current social, cultural and moral issues.

Religious education is highly valued by pupils, parents and staff. It plays a key role in pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by promoting respect and understanding for diverse communities. Pupils say that they enjoy learning about a range of religions including Judaism, Buddhism and Islam. The systematic teaching of Christianity gives pupils a detailed knowledge of both the local Anglican tradition as well as diversity within the Christian faith. Opportunities to explore the school's Christian values in the context of their own lives leads to a deeper understanding of the school's Christian character. The incumbent stressed the importance of teaching 'about the dangers of religion as well as the benefits', which acknowledges the school's role in teaching about current issues around radicalisation.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is a strong feature of Steeple Morden. It is greatly valued by the whole school community because of its impact on individual relationships and interactions as a collective. Its inspirational and inclusive nature is recognised by all, with parents stating that their children not only enjoy collective worship but learn so much from it. Pupils were equally effusive about the impact of collective worship, explaining that it makes them think deeply about how they should act at school and at home. Prayer plays a key part in Steeple Morden, with pupils proudly showing examples of their own work on the prayer tree in the hall. Staff spoke about the importance of a quiet reflection area that has been developed after the last inspection, although it is less clear how the use of this area is monitored.

Collective worship at Steeple Morden is based around biblical themes linked to the liturgical calendar, with the pupils leading worship in church at harvest, Christmas and Easter. All groups noted how these pupil-led events in church are very popular. Equally weekly acts of collective worship planned and led by pupil worship leaders in school were praised by pupils and governors because of the positive impact these events had on their peers' engagement with worship.

Pupils enjoy the clear Christian context to collective worship, such as puppet performances of parts of the Easter story. They also enjoy the range of collective worship leaders, from local clergy to GenR8. One parent said that "my son would say that Open the Book is his favourite assembly", whilst pupils spoke openly of their enjoyment in the variety of worship. Pupils told the inspector how much they had particularly enjoyed a recent act of worship that focused on the story of the last supper. The themes raised in collective worship challenge pupils to take responsibility for themselves and others, with pupils raising money for areas ranging from a cancer charity for children to a "Hymnathon" that aimed to raise money for refurbishments in the local church.

Collective worship regularly includes biblical material and builds on pupils' understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as well as the person of Jesus Christ. The very youngest pupils were quick to explain that a candle is lit in school during collective worship to stress that "Jesus is the light of the world". Equally, older pupils were keen to explain in some detail why the crucifix is present in collective worship including making links between it and the nature of Christian discipleship. An appropriate understanding of the Trinity is also reinforced in pupils through collective worship, such as by singing "my God is a great big God" to develop an understanding of "God as a father holding them".

The pupil worship leaders at Steeple Morden confidently plan and lead weekly acts of collective worship. In the collective worship observed, one pupil confidently read from the Bible whilst another read their personal reflections on what Easter means to them. At the end of act of worship three other pupil worship leaders proudly read their own prayers on the theme of Easter. The attitude of all learners to this pupil led worship was both respectful and positive. Whilst pupils plan and deliver collective worship on a regular basis, opportunities for them to be involved in evaluating collective worship is not as strong. There is regular involvement by governors and parents in monitoring collective worship, although it was less clear how collective worship has developed as a result of the monitoring.

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

Leadership at Steeple Morden ensures that all members of the community are aware of its distinctly Christian character. Leaders clearly promote Christian love for all pupils through modelling this value in their interactions with others. As a consequence all groups in the community directly attribute the impact of this ethos to the excellent behaviour of the pupils. In particular pupils, staff, governors and parents noted how instances of unkindness at the school are rare.

Effective strategic leadership by the governors ensures that future leadership in church schools is a priority, with its Christian ethos given prominence in the recent recruitment of a new headteacher. During the inspection one governor noted that the Church ethos at Steeple Morden was very important in this recruitment process.

Good leadership ensures that there are planned opportunities throughout the curriculum to reflect and consider big questions in order to develop pupils spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. This ranges from work in art considering the meaning of the Easter story to Year 6 sports leaders giving up play times to lead sporting activities with younger pupils. Recently this involved the school challenging itself to be the happiest and kindest place it can be. One parent commented on this focus and stated that Steeple Morden is “all about the individual” and their development.

The partnership between the school and the parish is good. This has benefits for the school, with the Steeple Morden pastoral assistant keenly involved in helping pupils to plan collective worship. Equally it has benefits for the parish, with the pupils raising money to improve the facilities at the parish church. This relationship has been further developed through the active involvement of the incumbent in the recruitment of a new headteacher for September 2017. As a consequence all groups recognised the strong links between the school and the church, with pupils speaking proudly about how their art work is displayed in the church for parishioners to see. The connections with the diocese and the local authority benefits pupils when they participate in events at Ely Cathedral. Governors, parents and staff all recognise the priority given to collective worship through the head teacher taking on its leadership. Allowing the new leader for religious education to become established in the school has been a priority, with the headteacher noting that the next step is to provide more opportunities for both her and other staff to engage in professional development in religious education in order to support the Christian character of Steeple Morden.

Leadership at all levels has ensured that the development areas highlighted in the last inspection have been worked on by the school. For example the recruitment of pupils as worship leaders has led to greater engagement with collective worship, with worship leaders gaining a deeper understanding of the place and purpose of worship.

SIAMS report March 2017 Steeple Morden CofE VC Primary School Cambridgeshire SG8 0PD