

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

### St Matthew's Church of England (Aided) Infant School

<b>Address</b>	Downside, Cobham, Surrey, KT11 3NA		
<b>Date of inspection</b>	14 June 2019	<b>Status of school</b>	Voluntary Aided Infant School
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Guildford</b>	<b>URN</b>	125178

<b>Overall Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?		
<b>Additional Judgements</b>		
<b>The impact of collective worship</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>The effectiveness of religious education (RE)</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Excellent</b>

#### School context

St Matthew's is an infant school with 81 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is well below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages. The headteacher was appointed in 2016 having previously been the assistant headteacher. Recently there has been a considerable change in staffing and a newly built classroom is used by the youngest pupils.

#### The school's Christian vision

Christ is at the centre of our school. Children are at the centre of all that we do. As Jesus said: *Let the little children come to me – start them off on the way they should go – and they will spread their wings and soar like eagles.* (Luke 18:16; Proverbs 22:6; Isaiah 40:31)

#### Key findings

- Regardless of their unique starting points, pupils make exceptional progress in all subjects because the Christian vision shapes the innovative curriculum utilised at St Matthew's.
- The behaviour of pupils is excellent. By successfully reflecting the strong Christian vision and deeply embedded associated values, leaders effectively prevent incidents of prejudicial behaviour.
- The leadership of the headteacher, who embodies the school's vision and values, is an inspiration to pupils and adults within the school community. Leaders ensure pupils engage with social action projects, but there are some missed opportunities for pupils to suggest good causes to support and learn from.
- Collective worship is valued as the heartbeat of St Matthew's. Rich experiences of worship influence and inspire the whole school community, building on strong partnerships with the local church. However, opportunities to explore the Eucharist are under-developed.
- Excellent leadership of religious education (RE), coupled with inspirational teaching, ensures that pupils have an impressive understanding of Christian theology and philosophy that is well beyond their years.

#### Areas for development

- Develop opportunities for all pupils to identify issues and good causes to support and learn from, while engaging in social action projects so that pupils' experiences of being advocates for change are enhanced.
- Enable pupils to explore and engage with age appropriate and creative opportunities to understand the central position of the Eucharist within Christianity.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

### Inspection findings

All leaders effectively articulate the Christian roots of the school's deeply embedded vision, 'We ensure children are placed in the thermals to soar high academically and socially, which is seen in the confidence children demonstrate'. The rector explains, 'the children are saturated in love from the school's Christian values'. Pupils passionately explain how, 'we demonstrate our values in everything we do, just like Jesus did'. Christ is at the centre of this excellent school and positivity spreads into all parts of the pupils' lives. Parents enthuse about how the vision is expressed by pupils in school and at home. In an example of innovative practice parents have opportunities to send certificates into school celebrating how pupils live out their values at home.

Regardless of their starting points, pupils make sustained progress across the curriculum enabling them to flourish academically. Attainment is exceptionally high. Vulnerable pupils flourish because of the learning environment that the vision steers. Soft toys are used by the youngest children to represent responsibility and wisdom, two of the Christian values. Pupils take home the wise owl or responsible bee to share their values with family members. Attendance is very high because pupils love coming to school. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare because leaders implement restorative justice policies that prevent, rather than react to, incidents of prejudicial behaviour.

Skilful local clergy provide a rich variety of worship styles. A special day in the local chapel gave pupils and adults, 'an uplifting and gentle introduction to homelessness'. Clergy regularly lead well-attended workshops for pupils and families, further strengthening links with the parish. Special days, such as the recent Pentecost Pause Day, enable pupils to develop impressive knowledge and wisdom about Christian festivals. Leaders apply the vision remarkably well to the spiritual development of pupils and adults. A clear understanding of personal spiritual journeys empowers pupils to ask and answer deep questions with confidence. Pupils are curious about God's world and their place in it. Teachers ensure that planned and spontaneous opportunities to develop pupil's spirituality are successfully harnessed.

Fundamental to St Matthew's success, are regular social action projects that brilliantly develop pupils' character and personal spirituality. Parents are rightly impressed at how the school helps to tackle issues such as climate change. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about ecological issues impacting on God's world. Pupils proudly took part in a climate change demonstration on the local common. Pupils are passionate about using Fairtrade products, 'We make life better for farmers by buying food that is Fairtrade'. A parent summed up the school's influence as, 'having grown the seed of activism to do the right thing for others'. While pupils develop as admirable advocates of change from social action projects instigated by adults, pupils have more limited opportunities to suggest causes to support and learn from.

The wellbeing of staff and pupils is of paramount importance to all leaders. Staff speak highly of the impact clergy have on their wellbeing, 'they are always happy to listen, which is comforting and reassuring'. The headteacher's inspirational leadership results in a united staff team which is driven by the Christian vision. Pupils are extremely well cared for and nurtured by adults. Relationships between members of the school community are highly effective. As a result, the vision is tangible between partnerships nurtured and utilised that enable everyone to flourish.

Pupils and adults enthuse about inspirational collective worship. Worship is rightly recognised as the heartbeat of the school. Rich opportunities are fully utilised to explore the teachings of Jesus through the vision and supporting values. As a result, pupils have an impressive knowledge of Bible stories which they confidently apply to their experiences. One pupil explained, 'The Bible is a library of books we can learn so much from'. The youngest children thrive in a fruitful learning environment that stimulates spiritual growth and prayer. Reflection areas are well used and developed by pupils as places of prayer and contemplation. Outside, a large wooden cross, with holes carved into it for pupils to roll up and place their handwritten prayers in, is just one exceptional example. A Year 2 pupil said, 'As I push my prayer into the cross, God can scan it and knows what I pray for'. An altar in the school hall is adorned with child-made crosses and regularly has prayers left on it to be shared in worship. Music and singing are used exceptionally well in worship as an expression of the school's vision. Meaningful worship songs, with lyrics illuminated effectively by staff, ensure pupils know what they sing so beautifully about. Pupils' opinions are sought by leaders to effectively plan and evaluate worship. The seasons of

the Church year are well understood. Pupils have an age appropriate understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Local clergy's expertise is harnessed to support planning in worship and RE. However, opportunities to explore the Eucharist at an age appropriate level are missed.

By using a resource called Understanding Christianity, teachers creatively utilise an approach to addressing key Christian concepts. As one governor explained, 'teachers are confident to deliver complicated Christian concepts and develop children's reflection skills well'. Leaders' rigorous monitoring supports this. External validation supports leaders' self-evaluation, that writing in RE is exemplary. Teachers are encouraged by the RE leader to talk together about the strengths and next steps. This approach effectively leads to continuous improvement. Training from the diocese has enhanced staff's ability to understand working within a Church school, as well as strengthening teaching in RE. For example, how assessment and feedback are used to help both pupils and staff understand how progress is made. As a result, pupils talk confidently about learning in RE and are proud of their work. The curriculum gives first-hand opportunities to learn from Christians and people of other faiths within contemporary Britain. A visiting rabbi expressed his amazement at how well the pupils understood Jewish festivals. Units of work exploring what life is like for Muslim children in Britain enables pupils to celebrate difference. Pupils love learning about cultures different from their own. Statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are well exceeded.

During their time at St Matthew's, pupils and staff are enabled to succeed because of Jesus' teachings being central. The exciting and creative environment at St Matthew's enables everyone, as a child of God, to flourish and truly soar like eagles.



**The effectiveness of RE is Excellent**

Teaching and learning in RE is consistently good with a high proportion that is excellent. As the RE subject leader, the headteacher ensures that a rigorous system of monitoring the quality of RE teaching is deployed. As a result, systems for assessment in RE are regularly used to enhance the progress of all pupils. Regular monitoring by foundation governors ensures that standards in RE are excellent. Pupils make exceptional progress in RE lessons due to high standards of teaching at St Matthew's. As a result, all groups of pupils, including the most able and vulnerable, are enabled to flourish academically in RE. Lessons skilfully infuse the Christian vision and weave the values throughout. During an inspirational RE lesson, a motivated Year 1 pupil said, 'God's plan for me is to be a police officer, as I will help people make the right choices'.

Headteacher	Katharine Hutt
Inspector's name and number	Toby Long 896