



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Christchurch Street East  
Frome  
Somerset BA11 1QG

**Previous SIAS grade: Good**

**Current SIAMS grade: Good**

**Diocese: Bath & Wells**

Local authority: Somerset

Date of inspection: 13 January 2016

Date of last inspection: 20 January 2011

School's unique reference number: 123843

Headteacher: Claire Marsland

Inspector's name and number: Andrew Rickett 201

#### School context

St John's is larger than average size first school with 296 children in roll. The majority of children are of a white British heritage and there is a growing number for whom English is an additional language. The school is situated in the middle of the town and outside space is limited. The school serves a wide community with a range of socio economic backgrounds. The number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The numbers who are entitled to receive support from the pupil premium is broadly in line with the national average. Attendance is improving and is close to the national average. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2015. The school recently reviewed the structure of its senior leadership team.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's as a Church of England school are good

- Children talk with confidence and considerable maturity about their beliefs, in an environment which encourages the exploration of faith.
- Acts of worship make a considerable contribution to the children's growing appreciation of the place of Christian values in the life of the school.
- The commitment of the new headteacher, supported by senior leaders and governors, is making a significant impact on the development of the school as a church school.

#### Areas to improve

- Secure more rapid progress in religious education (RE) by developing greater consistency in the use of high quality questioning that empowers children to lead the direction of their learning.
- Ensure that there is greater consistency in the quality of opportunities in collective worship to move children forward in developing depth in their understanding of Christian values and spiritual awareness.

- Develop the effectiveness of the role of governors in monitoring and evaluation of the school's Christian ethos by ensuring that they acquire the understanding and skills to challenge the progress made as a church school.

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

A review of the school's vision and aims in September 2015 gave the school the opportunity to place Christian values more firmly and explicitly at the centre of their ethos and mission. Since then, the school has made very good progress in raising the profile of three of the six core values chosen from a list compiled by children. Respect, peace and friendship are confidently articulated by children and adults in the school community and are making an increasing impact on children's wellbeing and learning both in school and, as parents say, at home. Relationships throughout the school are based on respect for others regardless of who they are and children say that they make good friends. They say that they feel safe and secure in school. Children have a well-developed understanding of the nature of forgiveness and the need to begin afresh when things go wrong. They are developing their appreciation of others around them, both in school and further afield, and putting their needs before their own. For example, the established link with a school in India is mutually beneficial to both communities. The impact of reflection areas in each classroom has been enhanced by the greater emphasis on Christian values. Children openly reflect on the meaning of faith and belief and do so with confidence and a willingness to share their views whether they have a personal faith or not. This is a reflection of the school's inclusive ethos in which children are encouraged to be themselves. This in turn helps create the positive learning environment in which children are engaged in their learning and achieve standards that are broadly in line with national expectations. Religious education makes an important contribution to the children's growing awareness of moral and social education and an appreciation of the need to respect the diversity of faiths and cultures that make up British society.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

The review in September 2015 of how worship themes are delivered has made a significant impact on how the whole school community understands the role of explicit Christian values in the life of the school. The change towards exploring values over a longer period, instead of on a weekly basis, means that there are now opportunities to explore them in greater depth and to link them more effectively to other areas of school life. This has also brought clarity to the planning of worship because there is greater continuity to the way that themes build from one week to the next. It also means that there are more opportunities for themes to be explored across the curriculum. An excellent example is the way that understanding of a theme such as friendship has been enhanced through personal, social and health education (PSHE). Because themes are based on core values, collective worship is making a more significant contribution to the promotion of an explicitly Christian ethos based on Bible teaching. As yet, only three of the core values have been explored. The headteacher has introduced an excellent procedure to evaluate the impact of worship themes gathered through whole school, class and Key Stage worship which have accurately identified areas for improvement. For example, it has highlighted the need to ensure that all class and Key Stage acts of worship are of a consistently good quality. Acts of worship are distinctly Christian in nature with elements that make them explicitly Anglican. The lighting of a candle to represent Jesus as light is clearly understood by children. They also articulate how Bible stories give examples of lessons that Jesus taught about how to lead better lives. Children are able to explain how this helps them in their own lives by, for example, helping those in need whether they are a friend or not. Children have a very good understanding of the purpose of prayer and the different ways that it can support someone in trouble or provide comfort. They talk with confidence about God as Father and Jesus, His Son. They are developing an appreciation that the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity and enjoy the opportunity to explore further what this means. Children participate in acts of worship in a variety of ways but have less regular opportunity to lead them.

### **The effectiveness of religious education is good**

Standards in RE are broadly in line with national expectations for the majority of children by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 4. Overall attainment is close to other core subjects in the school curriculum but varies for some groups of children. There is some variation in performance between children's knowledge of RE and their understanding of what they learn from this knowledge. Latest data indicates that this gap between knowledge and understanding is closing. Improvement in the children's ability to learn from their knowledge, and apply it to their understanding of RE, is reflected in the quality of the language they use to express their opinions with confidence and with considerable reflection. The best teaching provides opportunities for children to explore in depth their understanding of RE concepts from the very start of the lesson. In these lessons, children are encouraged to ask questions that they want to explore which empowers them to take a lead in the direction of what they are learning. The effective use of high quality questions is a key element of these lessons. Children respond with excitement to these opportunities and are fully engaged in their learning. Progress in these lessons is rapid. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and the confidence to be creative and innovative in how it is delivered. This approach to learning contributes to the positive attitudes children have towards RE and their engagement in learning. The school recognises the need to ensure that there is greater consistency to the use of high quality of questioning to challenge children and lead to even more progress. Procedures to assess children's achievement are effective. The school has recently improved expectations for assessment and how to use data to track children's progress as they move through the school. This is still at an early stage. Subject leadership of RE is good. The subject leader has a good understanding of RE and what needs to be done to continue to improve it. The recent whole school training for expectations of subject leaders is making a positive impact on the quality of leadership in RE. Work scrutiny, some lesson observations and staff training on RE have all contributed to the high profile that the subject has in the school.

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

The new headteacher has ensured that, in a relatively short time, the school's Christian ethos has made significant developments so that they meet the raised expectations of the current inspection criteria. She has a very good grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement as a church school. She has quickly established some excellent procedures for gathering high quality evidence of impact which has identified further areas for development. The headteacher is well supported by the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders as well as the governing body. Governors clearly articulate the school's distinctive Christian ethos and have a good awareness of its place in the life of the school. Self-evaluation as a church school is accurate but there is a need for governors to develop their skills to monitor and evaluate and to be able to challenge the impact of recent improvements as a church school. The overall leadership and management have a good capacity to continue to develop the school as a church school. The school has good links with the local church through the involvement of the lay reader, who along with the vicar lead acts of worship and, until recently the involvement of the vicar in school governance. The use of the church to celebrate major Christian festivals and to enhance the delivery of RE is regarded by children and their parents as an important aspect of what makes the school a church school. Parents agree that the school's Christian ethos provides opportunities for their children to ask questions about faith and belief and does so in an inclusive way. They feel that the school's approach to promoting a distinctive Christian ethos is one that they support and appreciate how the core values help their children to grow as individuals. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.

SIAMS report January 2016 St John's CE VA First School Frome, BA11 1QG