

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

St James' Primary School	
The Causeway, East Hanney, Wantage, Oxfordshire OX12 0JN	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	March 2016
Name of multi-academy trust	Vale Academy Trust
Date of inspection	9 December 2016
Date of last inspection	9 November 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary Academy 142664
Headteacher	Janice Peacock
Inspector's name and number	The Revd Dr Jason Phillips 598

## School context

St James' Primary is a popular and growing school with 118 pupils. The building plan of four additional classrooms is underway which will double the size of the school, in a village that is growing. Most pupils are White British. The percentage of pupils attracting government funding for disadvantaged pupils is well below the national average. The experienced headteacher joined the school in January 2016. In March 2016 the school became part of the Vale Academy Trust (VAT). Four teaching staff joined the school in September 2016. The chair of governors and parish priest were also new in role during 2015-2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St James' Primary as a Church of England school are good

- The commitment of the headteacher, governing body and VAT in developing the church school dimension. This is resulting in a rapidly improving school where Christian values influence positively.
- The school is highly effective at utilising links with the diocese and VAT members to progress staff and governor professional development thereby ensuring effective succession planning.
- Strong positive relationships with St James-the-Great parish church and the open-the-book team are enhancing pupils' experience of worship and their understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith.

### Areas to improve

- With the diocese and VAT, develop a clear definition of spirituality that is demonstrated in a progressive framework for pupils' spiritual development that clearly impacts the curriculum and applies the school's Christian aims and values.
- Demonstrate the impact of the school's Christian character on academic achievement by ensuring that teaching and learning consistently challenges all pupils to achieve their potential in English, mathematics and religious education (RE) so that attainment and progress are good in comparison to similar schools.
- Embed and ensure consistency in recent school developments in Christian distinctiveness and report evaluations against the SIAMS school improvement framework to each full local governors' meeting.
- With the diocese and VAT, develop a progressive framework for pupils' multicultural development that extends the school's Christian values and shapes collective worship, RE and the wider curriculum.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is satisfactory at meeting the needs of all learners. St James' Primary is rapidly developing as a church school. It is increasingly effective as a Christian community based upon its Christian values of respect, perseverance and trust. These values are starting to shape the positive relationships at the school and to influence the school's stated drive to develop lifelong learners. These values are the basis for the school's emerging theological basis for its way of working. Standards at the school are rising because teaching is now good. However, the school is not yet good through its distinctive Christian character at meeting the needs of all learners because attainment and progress for all pupils in English, mathematics and RE is not yet consistently good. The school enables spiritual, social, moral and cultural development through its wide curricular and extra-curricular activities as well as its eco and forest schools work. However, the school has not yet developed a clear understanding of spiritual development or a progressive framework to develop pupils spiritually or to prosper Christian spirituality through its values. This is a key reason the school is not yet good at meeting the needs of all learners. Similarly, the school enables some multicultural awareness through its provision such as the recent visit to Oxford synagogue but this is not structured in approach. This means pupils' multicultural awareness and cultural development is not as strong as it should be including their appreciation of Christianity as multicultural. RE contributes satisfactorily to the distinctiveness of this church school. It does this chiefly because pupils are generally positive towards RE as they are given opportunities to express their thoughts and explore puzzling ideas. Standards in RE are not yet consistently good for all pupils. However, standards are rapidly improving due to the careful use of the Oxford Diocese RE scheme of work and key questions for exploring. The school is meeting statutory requirements through mapping the school approach to the Oxfordshire locally agreed RE syllabus. Behaviour and relationships are improving at the school and are generally strong. Whilst the school's Christian values are shaping behaviour choices, pupils are not yet making conscious connections between these values, biblical example and their behaviour, as the values are not fully embedded. An example of the impact of the values upon pupils' behaviour is their clear respect for other traditions and their keenness to learn more about diverse faiths. The school through its Christian approach to exclusion and attendance has improved attendance and this is now good.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The leader for collective worship is the headteacher who ensures planning is effective. She engages others in the planning process including the parish priest and the open-the-book team. As a result, provision is coherent and progressive. Shared planning enables all leaders of collective worship to exemplify the school's Christian values through the carefully chosen themes. The headteacher and governors monitor provision and seek out evaluations to ensure collective worship continues to improve. However, the use of the school improvement framework (SIAMS) to make objective evaluations against a standard is at an early stage which means development is not as focussed as it might be. Leaders ensure collective worship is meeting statutory requirements. Pupils and staff value collective worship as a time to reflect and pause and to be together in the presence of God. They are particularly engaged with collective worship when led by the open-the-book team and popular new priest because these acts of worship are active and vibrant. These positive experiences support pupils' growing biblical knowledge and awareness of Jesus and the Trinity. They bring a relevance to these through careful application to the school's Christian values. Pupils have increasing opportunity to lead collective worship which is developing their appreciation of its purpose. Music is a growing strength of the school and supports the spiritual aspect of collective worship as well as its communal dimension. Prayer is a feature of collective worship and of the school day so children are beginning to value prayer. However, prayer opportunities lack diversity and creativity to make prayer a significant spiritual activity. The school is at an early stage of understanding how to develop collective worship to support pupils' spiritual development. This is why collective worship is not yet outstanding. Children have limited awareness of the diversity of Christianity as this is not well developed in provision. Links with the local Methodist Chapel are not utilised missing a local opportunity to broaden pupils' Christian understanding. Anglican practice is developing through the strong links with St James-the-Great parish church and the priest, which the headteacher has strengthened over the past year. The headteacher is pro-active in the use of the church for key school times such as Leavers' Day and the main Christian festivals. This is enabling pupils, parents and staff to gain a sense of the seasons of the Christian year and the place of festival and school life within that annual rhythm.

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

The strong leadership of the headteacher ensures that the school is making rapid progress in developing its distinctive Christian character through re-articulating its Christian values. Her drive and compassionate commitment is commendable and results in positive relations at many levels despite rapid change. Leadership and management are good because the headteacher is successful in leading the whole school community in creating a Christian ethos that has meaning and purpose for everyone. It secures the wellbeing of all its members. Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because recent developments are not yet embedded and consistent. Furthermore, the school's emergent understanding of spiritual and multicultural development is not sufficiently articulated in a progressive framework of entitlement that prospers its Christian values. The headteacher's leadership and the determination of the relatively new governing body means the church school dimension has value and influence in this school. The VAT has amongst its establishing articles a commitment to supporting the church school distinctiveness. It does this well, primarily by helping the school staff and governors to excel through effective professional development. This is a key dimension of effective succession planning and a strength of the school and the

VAT. As the school is rapidly improving, it has not yet had opportunity to sufficiently map the overarching VAT aims with its own Christian values and distinctiveness to establish a coherent way of working. This means public facing documentation and also the Christian foundations of some decision making are not always clear. The headteacher is fully supported by her staff and governors in constantly working to raise standards in pupil achievement. The support of the VAT is having a significant impact upon improving pupil progress and the standards attained at the school. Effective support from the diocese utilised by the school is helping leaders shape the direction for the continued development of St James' as a church school because it has been well received by the school. Governors are competent and so hold the school to account through link governors working with school leaders and monitoring provision and outcomes. Governors are aware of the church school improvement framework (SIAMS) but are still to use this strategically to nuance evaluations and decision making. This sometimes limits a focussed approach to development. The school supports the leaders of collective worship and RE effectively, demonstrating the significance of RE and collective worship to school life. Although new in role, each coordinator has a clear assessment of their area of responsibility. They have a vision and enthusiasm for improvement and are already bringing about positive change. Their leadership ensures the school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship. Parents rightly speak well of the school resulting in part from improved communications with them since the appointment of the new headteacher. The links with St James-the-Great church are mutually supportive. Together school and church are having a significant impact upon community cohesion. They are creating community in a rapidly growing and changing village context.

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