

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Tilstock Controlled Church of England Primary School and Nursery

Tilstock Lane, Tilstock, Whitchurch, Shropshire, SY13 3JL

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Lichfield
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Shropshire
Date of inspection	26 May 2017
Date of last inspection	21 June 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 123506
Headteacher (Acting)	Nicola Brayford
Inspector's name and number	Allyson Taylor 768

School context

Tilstock Church of England Primary School is a very small school serving an area of rural Shropshire. There are 34 pupils on roll, including two of nursery age. In January 2016, Ofsted placed the school in special measures. Since May 2016, an interim executive board (IEB) and an acting headteacher from a local academy trust lead the school. The school is being converted to an academy within a multi-academy trust. The proportion of pupils with additional social, learning and medical needs is higher than in other schools. Almost all children are of White British background.

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

- The current leadership team has had a dramatic impact on Tilstock as a church school; it has, as stated by the chair of the IEB 'brought back to life' the Christian character.
- Tilstock values all God's children, so that all members of the school community feel safe, know they are loved and are able to learn within an inclusive and welcoming environment.
- A relentless drive to improve children's life chances is underpinned by Christian principles; this ensures that pupils are ready for the challenges of the next stage of their lives and education.
- A renewed focus on the core Christian values has transformed behaviour and relationships in school.
- Links with Christchurch and the associate minister have sustained the school through the challenges it has faced.

Areas to improve

- Review the current vision statement so it more truly expresses the Christian character of the school.
- Extend opportunities for pupils of all ages to plan and lead acts of worship in school and church in order to enhance spiritual development across the school.
- Establish formal systems to enable leaders to more effectively monitor and develop the Christian character, religious education (RE) and collective worship.
- As the school moves forward, leaders should continue to insist that the Christian distinctiveness remains effective in meeting pupils' needs and that statutory requirements as a Church of England school are met.

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

Positivity and joy pervade Tilstock. From the moment a visitor enters the school he or she is greeted with warmth and kindness. The Christian character of this small school has given those who work and learn here the courage to face and overcome the problem of weak teaching and learning. As one member of staff said 'good comes out of bad.' Support for children and their families is excellent. Passionately held Christian principles ensure that the more vulnerable in the community are upheld and their needs met. Examples abound of how school staff cherish the children. From being a place of sanctuary, from offering a listening ear and kind word, to practical help with accessing specialist services, the school is living out its core values of respect, friendship, perseverance and positivity in an exemplary way. Tilstock is a Christian community in action.

Behaviour is good and children cooperate well across the ages, seeing all as friends and showing consideration for each other. The Christian values are understood as stemming from the Bible. Pupils can describe their favourite value and explain how this helps them with their learning. They find it more difficult to recall specific Bible stories where the values may be seen. As a result of the consistent emphasis on respect, children show understanding of the different needs within the school family and beyond. The Christian character and RE curriculum give pupils a good knowledge of different faiths and cultures.

The Christian values, so well celebrated by the system of collecting coloured cubes to represent each value, have a positive impact on academic progress. One child explained how learning about the value of positivity had boosted her self-belief when facing SATs. Another pupil talked about how perseverance has helped him with fractions in mathematics. The rapid improvements seen in assessments show the Christian ethos of the school enhancing learning. Children's attitudes to each other, to themselves and to their work have changed for the better.

The rich curriculum and range of extra-curricular activities gives pupils of all talents the opportunity to shine. After just a year, pupils and parents talk eloquently of the benefits of joining with Whixall school for special events. However, the 'Tilstock team' is now bowling other schools over in cricket! Curriculum provision reflects the inclusive nature of the school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced by the use of the beautiful grounds and village location. A favourite activity in a worship session was spending time, lying down and appreciating the cloud-filled sky. God's creation providing awe and wonder as part of spiritual nurture.

RE is well-taught by a specialist whose skill may be seen in the high quality work and creative range of tasks in class RE books.

The character of Tilstock is distinctively Christian and has, under the guidance of exceptional leadership, reinvigorated a failing school. As one member of staff commented, 'our children deserved better.' This inspection judges that is now the case.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship, known as 'assembly,' is key to affirming the strong family feel in school. Children could not help but spontaneously clap each other when receiving certificates and awards, even when asked to wait until all were standing at the front. Their delight in the achievements of others shows the impact of the Christian values of caring and friendship.

Worship in school and church gives children a secure understanding of the main Anglican traditions and beliefs. Most of worship time is devoted to exploring the Bible and to learning about and from the life and teaching of Jesus. A pupil said of Jesus: 'he heals people.' Worship is part of the healing of this school. It is well-planned to introduce the current value and provides children with opportunities to link the value with biblical examples. Children know a wide range of stories from the Bible. Their knowledge of these has grown recently as worship is planned to make the Bible links to the values more explicit. There is scope to extend this further so that children may more confidently give specific examples of the values from the Bible. Informal feedback on worship is sought and this leads to worship which is relevant to children's lives. During the week of the inspection, children were moved by events in Manchester. They were compelled to offer deeply thoughtful, spontaneous prayers for those affected.

Prayer and time for reflection feature in worship and allow for spiritual development. The use of a worship table, liturgical coloured cloths and symbols sets the scene. Thursday services in Christchurch are universally popular and pupils feel comfortable there. They see the church as an essential part of their school. When asked what difference it makes to them that Tilstock is a church school, several commented that 'it is special to us that we are so close to the church.' Occasionally, members of the community attend school worship in church and this demonstrates that the relationship between school and community is close. Special services mark the main festivals in the Christian calendar. Pupils lead aspects of these and this enables them to feel close to each other and to God. At the Christmas service the church was full, with many family members and villagers standing at the back. Parents describe feeling proud that they and their children belong to the school and wider Christian family. Reflection areas in classrooms offer space for children to be still and to think. Children may spend time there and offer their thoughts and prayers. As such, they know that God is with them throughout the day.

At this time, pupils enjoy leading prayer and aspects of worship. However, most acts of worship are adult planned and led. As there is now a positive engagement with worship, the school is aware that its children are ready to play a more active role. This indicates how far children have grown spiritually. Worship acts like glue, holding all together and helping adults and children feel part of a community built on love.

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

The acting headteacher and members of the IEB have transformed the school since accepting the challenge of turning it around. The headteacher is 'amazing,' a term used by several members of the school family. Her compassionate, yet uncompromising insistence that children have the best possible education means that the school is in a much stronger position than at the last Ofsted inspection. Rates of progress across the range of subjects have accelerated and the school's internal assessment information suggests that the majority of pupils are on track to meet national expectations for their age. This is a significant improvement and testament to the dedication of staff to close the gaps created by years of inconsistent teaching. As a direct result of the sensitive but rigorous leadership, teachers are being challenged and supported to expect more of themselves and their pupils.

Staff are true 'extra milers' showing care for the more vulnerable and supporting each other in their mission to follow the example of Christ. Staff feel valued and leaders have boosted morale. The Christian value of perseverance in particular has a profound effect on raising aspirations. There is now a consistent focus on securing good outcomes for all ages and abilities. The change in culture for learning makes it easier for children to become independent and better motivated learners. Everyone's unique and God-given talents are upheld and celebrated.

The vision statement 'where learning is fun and children want to be' does not reflect the nurturing ethos which so clearly embraces the deeply held Christian principles. Other key documents and policies, such as the school development plans, do not refer to the Christian values as fully as they might.

Leaders know the school well through frequent visits, scrutinies of work and meetings with staff. They take appropriate action to address weaknesses and the detailed action plans show that progress in raising standards is closely monitored. Leaders consider the Christian ethos as fundamental to the life of the school. Despite there being no church representation on the IEB, members show commendable commitment towards the Christian character, worship and RE. As a result, statutory requirements as a church school are met. At this time, leaders' knowledge of the church school elements is based on informal observations and discussions. Formal systems for leaders to evaluate RE and worship, and so secure improvements, are not yet in place. This prevents the grade for leadership from being higher, although there is evidence for outstanding in other aspects of the grade. Leaders know the Christian foundations were rocked by the Ofsted judgment, and subsequent changes to the school, and that these have now settled and are firm again.

Partnerships with parents, the church and village community bind the school together. Parents are warmly appreciative of the care for their children and for them. The school is blessed in the unwavering support of the associate minister. Her continuous pastoral care and spiritual leadership have sustained the school through the recent challenges. Sharing practice with colleagues at Whixall is also beneficial to staff and children at Tilstock.

As the school moves forward, leaders are aware that national policy and guidance can support them. For example, the 'Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good' Church of England vision for schools may direct the future of Tilstock on its journey to being an outstanding church school.

SIAMS report May 2017 Tilstock Church of England Primary School, Tilstock, Whitchurch, SY13 3JL