

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Heighington Church of England Primary School

Hopelands, Heighington, County Durham. DL5 6PH	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Durham
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 August 2011
Name of multi-academy trust	BRandH Academy Ltd.
Date of inspection	7 February 2018
Date of last inspection	12 March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	137022
Executive Headteacher	Neil Parker
Inspector's name and number	Mary Cook 811

School context

Heighington is an average size primary academy in a semi-rural setting. The vast majority of children come from a white British background, many travel from a neighbouring town. The percentage of children with special educational needs is well below the national average as are the numbers eligible for free school meals. The school, which converted to become a voluntary aided school in October 2016, is federated with Bishopston Redmarshall. Relationships are well established with a private nursery provider in the village. There are close links with the parish of St Michael in the Darlington deanery.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Heighington as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school is led by a senior leadership team and academy council whose members are passionately committed to a deeply Christian ethos and promote a vision rooted in Christian values.
- The distinctive Christian character makes a significant contribution to the children's personal development, wellbeing and academic achievement.
- A well-established relationship between the church, community and the school contributes significantly to the values and practice such as worship within the school.
- Both collective worship and religious education (RE) contribute to the children's excellent understanding of regional, national and world affairs.

Areas to improve

- Build on the clear desire by the children to take an active role in leading daily collective worship by putting in place a system whereby the children can regularly and independently plan, prepare and lead worship.
- Extend the opportunities to visit places of worship from different world religions so that the children can experience first-hand the awe and wonder of various settings.
- Develop a shared language so that children, parents and staff can reflect on their own spirituality and provide evaluative feedback on the joint provision offered by the school and church.

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

Heighington Church of England Primary School's strong commitment to Christian values is clearly seen in the life of the school, notably through collective worship and RE. The school's vision is founded in the belief that 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10) is everybody's right but also everybody's responsibility in that everyone in school is part of one school family and interdependent on each other. All can learn from each other and move together in Christian fellowship in the true sense of the Christian value of 'koinonia'. This spirit of community and joint enterprise is well established and the sentiment is shared by children, staff and parents. One new member of staff sums this up by saying: 'It's wonderful to be part of such an accepting and nurturing environment.' The staff actively encourage the children to live the Christian characteristic of courage, in the belief that God is always with us, resulting in a determination to draw on inner strength and core skills to try new tasks and learning. Attainment of the children is above the national average at the end of Foundation Stage, and at the end of Key Stage Two with most children making at least good, and in some cases, outstanding progress. Overall some vulnerable groups such as pupils with special needs make outstanding progress. Attendance is higher than the national average and this demonstrates high levels of pupil enjoyment and engagement with their learning. The emphasis on the teachings of Jesus, such as the Parables, offers a moral compass for the children to live by which directly results in excellent relationships within school and so behaviour is exemplary in class. There are few instances of bullying and the pupils are confident that if they report an issue it will be dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner. The high quality discussions between staff and pupils, about God loving the world so much that he sent Jesus his son to be among us, are core to the school. This directly boosts confidence, one child convincingly argues that, 'with Jesus in our hearts, we can achieve anything.' Pupil voice is highly appreciated at Heighington, as a means to seek feedback, but also to develop values such as integrity, acting with a pure heart. God's love is manifested in confident, articulate children who show a love of learning, a love of each other and genuine compassion for those who are less fortunate. The teaching of RE makes a very positive contribution to the overall ethos of the school by exploring Christianity as a multi-cultural global religion and comparing this to other major world religions. This results in children who have a deep respect for people of any faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship makes an excellent contribution to the school's ethos, to the expression of its values such as love, service and peace and to the development of learners and adults. The children have an excellent knowledge of stories from the Bible and can relate these to everyday life as a result of the close working relationship between the school and the clergy and congregation of St Michael's Church. The vicar has a key role in determining the theological basis to worship and providing biblical sources. The children enjoy acting out the Bible stories and are able to re-tell many and relate to key characters as a result. The 'Think on Thursday' worship provides a brilliant opportunity to think more deeply about regional and world events. This fosters a greater understanding and empathy between the children and those living a completely different culture. Stories shared about children growing up in war torn Afghanistan have had a profound effect in generating both thankfulness and generosity towards others. The children are confident in talking about the concept of the Holy Trinity explaining that 'God the Father is in heaven, Jesus his son was sent to be with us here on earth and the Holy Spirit works through us to do good things.' The promotion for all to do good deeds has led to action beyond the school for example, one family undertaking environmental work outside school, removing rubbish as part of a beach clean-up. The parish priest, local congregation and school work together to celebrate major festivals such as Easter, with interactive activities that engage the children and encourage them to think more deeply about the Christian story. Children and parents alike talk animatedly about the Harvest celebration and a move away from a traditional assembly-type activity to prayer spaces being set up. These provide an opportunity to think more deeply and to reflect on God's creation, leading to thoughts of thankfulness for God's generosity. The older children readily prepare materials for the Christmas services and are keen to increase their role in Holy Communion by helping with readings and prayers. Many of the Year 6 children are confirmed before leaving school. To ensure there is provision and support put in place for them in Year 7, the church runs 'Meeting Point' a club promoted by the school. The children monitor the impact of worship and contribute their ideas for change through the school council and more recently worship group. As a result of the desire for more interactive prayer spaces, the worship group takes responsibility for furnishing the classroom with prayer resources such as prayer boxes. The prayer spaces are well used and have contributed significantly to the children's expression of spirituality as they are genuinely interested in and have respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values. There are opportunities for parents, families, members of the parish church and academy councillors to share worship: all speak appreciatively of these occasions as they are reminded that they are part of God's family. The cascading of God's love is a powerful influence in the school community and generates confident individuals who strive to achieve their best. Workshops for parents, led by the clergy have encouraged reflection on their

relationship with Jesus. Parents are energised by the experience and it is clear that individuals are exhibiting a profound personal response to the stimulus provided, resulting in a deepening of their own spirituality.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE makes an outstanding contribution to the distinctive ethos as the children have an excellent understanding of Christianity through studying Bible stories, Christian traditions, artefacts and ways of living. Children very much value and enjoy RE lessons, 'RE teaches us good morals, how to be a better person, how to love - but not physically, how to be thankful, hopeful and have good values.' Class teachers deliver RE based on the Durham diocesan syllabus. Lessons are carefully planned to ensure progression across school and all aspects of the RE curriculum are covered. The dedicated and enthusiastic subject leader ensures that staff are supported to maintain outstanding standards in teaching and learning. Children progress well in their learning and achieve high standards by the end of Key Stage 2. In the best lessons children are challenged by searching questioning to think more deeply to develop a theological understanding of Christianity. The children have an exceptional knowledge and understanding of stories from the Bible and relate the stories portrayed with their own life. They make connections between women of courage such as Jochebed, Moses' mother, and those throughout history who have made a difference such as Emily Pankhurst. This leads to stimulating debate about how each individual can make a difference to their society and become the person that God intends them to be. The teaching of RE is also providing the children with emotional support. One child reports: 'Learning about a mystical being who lives amongst us makes us feel less alone. If you are upset, it gives you hope.' Marking and feedback on RE learning is clearly understood: teachers often prompt further thought and reflection by asking additional questions to which the children respond. This results in a deeper understanding of the subject. Children have an excellent knowledge and understanding of the practices and beliefs of the six major world faiths including Judaism and Islam. They are aware of the danger of stereotyping those with a religious belief and assert that 'RE helps us to bond as a society.' The curriculum has developed respect for people of all faiths and those with none, however there are few opportunities to visit places of worship other than the local church. This means the children do not experience the atmosphere in places such as a mosque or synagogue which cannot be readily recreated in a classroom. The subject leader has identified this as an area for improvement, and is also keen to invite people representing various faiths to come in to school to share aspects of their lifestyle with the children. Assessment procedures are firmly embedded. Monitoring and evaluation of RE ensures that the teaching of Christianity, focusing on Jesus Christ, is of exceptionally high quality. Book scrutinies and lesson observations inform judgements when reporting to the academy councillors on a regular basis about the children's progress and standards in the subject.

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

The executive headteacher, and the Chair of the Academy Council are emphatic that their 'duty is to ensure that children live life in all its fullness.' Staff, clergy and academy councillors place the Christian values of love and hope at the heart of this school. They live out these values with earnest intent, ensuring robust self-evaluation and continual improvement; this extends to improving governance and strengthening the knowledge and understanding of individual academy councillors through training. There is a deeper understanding of data and as such, rigorous questioning about standards driven by a zeal for righteousness maintains the constant quest for excellence and life in all its fullness: this approach impacts on standards in the core subjects which remain above average. Academy councillors are well informed through monitoring visits and formal feedback from leaders at all levels including the RE subject leader. Prayerful reflection sustains the councillors when making longer term strategic plans. Although part of a federation, they act with a single-mindedness to ensure the deeply Christian ethos remains vibrant. Substantial levels of support from the parish clergy and the church congregation deftly support the school's Christian character. The links between school and church are of the highest quality, with strong relationships leading to a flourishing partnership. Themed events, such as 'Talking Jesus,' leave a lasting memory. Parents are very appreciative of the work undertaken to ensure spiritual development both of themselves and their children. Parents are also supportive of and involved in school life. They speak very positively of the care and support given to their children and value the Christian aspects of the school. The school meets the statutory requirements for both collective worship and RE. The decision taken to include teaching about the six major world faiths in the curriculum has helped the children develop a wider world view. They are well prepared for life in a multi-cultural, multi-faith society. Since the last inspection there has been considerable progress in addressing all development points, particularly the reflection of the school's vision in policy documents and on the website. There is a clear understanding of the need to develop future church school leaders. The executive headteacher feels it is his responsibility to nurture and mentor leaders. Heighington lives out Christian service in the local community in providing leadership for the nearby nursery school. This joint working has been hugely beneficial in terms of creating a shared vision for education in the village and preparing the children well for transition into school.

SIAMS report February 2018, Heighington CE Primary School, Hopelands, Heighington, Durham DL5 6PH