

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

The Wickford Church of England Infant Academy

Mount Rd, Wickford SS11 8HE	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chelmsford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	December 2011
Name of multi-academy trust	The Hearts Academy Trust
Date of inspection	8 March 2018
Date of last inspection	March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Infant – Academy – deemed VC 115089
Head of School	Louise Johnson
Executive headteacher	Debbie Rogan
Inspector's name and number	Virginia Corbyn 86

School context

The Wickford School is a small infant school with 135 pupils, who are mainly of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for funding for disadvantage is below the national average, as is the proportion who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). The school is the only church school within its multi-academy trust (MAT). Over the previous four years, the school has developed its own provision for vulnerable early years' children. Following conversion to academy status, there have been considerable changes to staffing, including a re-organisation of the senior leadership team.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness the Wickford CE School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Wholehearted and loving commitment to the school's Christian values results in excellent outcomes for all, including for the most vulnerable pupils and families.
- The school offers life in all its fullness to all pupils and this, in turn, develops in them a love of life, resilience and the ability to learn very well from both success and from failure.
- Collective worship supports the development of pupils' personal spirituality very well.
- The depth of relationships at all levels means that adults in the school community are very well supported personally and professionally and that, therefore, all pupils thrive and succeed.
- Very strong leadership flows and benefits from the living out of the HEARTS values, both within and beyond the school
- The sharing of best practice, including its Christian ethos through the HEARTS Trust, is very beneficial to the Trust's other schools and improves outcomes for many pupils beyond the Wickford CE School.

Areas to improve

- Embed the best use of the most up to date resources for the teaching of Christianity across the school in ways which most appropriately support pupils' religious understanding, spiritual development and personal spirituality.

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

The Wickford Church of England infant school is a place in which both adults and pupils encourage the HEARTS values to thrive in each other. All stakeholders are able to articulate the ways in which these values of happiness, esteem, achievement, respect and responsibility, truth, spirituality and service can be seen. They are clearly underpinned by biblical teaching. For parents, it includes the importance of their children's spiritual development, because our 'children are calm, respectful and thoughtful'. Such descriptions from a range of stakeholders, including governors and staff, show how lived out values are experienced very widely and recognised as such. Through this consistent and powerful Christian ethos, school leaders and their staff team ensure excellent outcomes for all pupils. These are well above national averages, including for those in vulnerable groups. The pupils know that, 'we have to try and live them out every day'. They know that the values direct their learning behaviours as well as the social and moral choices which determine the ways in which they treat each other. Very high quality relationships at all levels are characterised particularly by respect and service. None of the adults within the school community hesitates to go 'over and above' what is expected of them. This is based on a very deep understanding of the needs of each individual pupil and a desire to raise esteem at every opportunity. At the same time, it is evident that pupils learn through both success and failure, able to develop resilience as they face situations responsibly and truthfully. A particular concern for the most vulnerable children and their families within the locality is shown in the additional and successful pre-school provision which has been developed on site. This provision is clearly recognised as an expression of the school's Christian service to its community.

A belief in the fullness of life is evident in the very wide range of activities that are offered to all pupils. The head of school summarised this by saying, 'We have time to throw leaves', just one example of the joyful ways in which the pupils are encouraged to celebrate the world around them. The school is able to show that it is providing many opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development across the whole life of the school. This is well documented and clearly understood. Pupils respond positively to this strong and wide-ranging provision. Prayer punctuates the school day with a particular focus on stillness and quietness. This prepares pupils for learning very well and also helps them to reflect on their relationships with each other. The support of a designated spiritual adviser on the staff puts spiritual development at the heart of how the school thinks and operates. Pupils understand the importance of using all of their HEARTS values to work well together and to make good choices. The development of an enquiry approach within RE (Holy Space) means that pupils' thinking and responses are becoming deeper and more searching. The introduction of some elements of the 'Understanding Christianity' teaching materials is beginning to develop pupils' thinking about important concepts. According to parents, their children show interest in different faiths by talking about them. Visits to the local synagogue and mosque have supported this understanding very well. Diversity and difference are explored in many ways across the curriculum, including through exploring multicultural art, the Paralympics, working with Stonewall and Go Givers to support pupils' personal development. A strong link with Tanzania helps pupils to understand how other children across the world are both similar and different to themselves. Parents say that their children have 'complete respect for others' in an environment of mutual understanding and inclusion. This is based on a clearly expressed Christian vision.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

This school community knows what it is to worship together thoughtfully and reverently. The sense of stillness and level of engagement is remarkable for such young children. One child explained that worship 'helps us to be still and remember God'. Worship is closely linked to the school's Christian values and centres on the person of Jesus as the best example of someone who shows all of the values. It is carefully planned with pupils' needs and interests in mind and with a highly effective focus on developing their personal spirituality. They can articulate how their worship makes their school a special and a better place. Pupils on the worship group lead the rest of the school by lighting the candle, leading simple liturgy and prayers, acting as servers and by designing the visual resources to help the community to focus as they prepare for worship. There is a depth of Anglican practice included within worship which is very appropriate to the age of the pupils. Pupils know the Lord's Prayer, which they have been learning more about during worship recently, well. The use of the Grace is helping pupils to develop a growing understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, an understanding which is also demonstrated in RE lessons. Their own requests and those of the community, taken from a communal prayer board in school, are offered during worship. They understand why they pray. 'I like when we pray to respect God and to make God happy' was how one pupil summarised this. Singing is joyful and accompanied by actions, enabling all pupils to join in. By monitoring and evaluating worship, the worship group has brought about changes such as sitting in a circle so that they can all see each other. This means that the worship is increasingly designed by them and for them. Governors monitor and evaluate worship effectively alongside the pupils. The vicar leads worship on a weekly basis, encouraging pupils

to think theologically in ways appropriate to their age. Parents are engaged by worship for the major Christian festivals and through celebration assemblies. These are used to deepen parents' understanding of the HEARTS values by acknowledging those pupils who demonstrate the values for the good of others.

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

The head of school, very well supported by the executive headteacher, board trustees and governors, leads a highly effective staff team which is committed to 'every child being loved' in school. School leaders set very high expectations and they have created a deeply supportive environment to ensure that they are met. By living out the HEARTS values, all members of the school community ensure that pupils make very good or excellent progress from their various starting points. This is based on knowing families very well and matching the most effective support to them as soon as it is needed, including to pre-school children. Living the HEARTS values means that high quality relationships, which cause staff to go the extra mile, lie at the heart of the success of the school. One parent said, 'the extra help given to my child before school made all the difference to his learning'. In turn, staff explained that they are encouraged 'to be the best we can be'. The spiritual development of the whole school community is supported through prayer, reflection and the importance of calmness and quietness. Staff, parents and governors agree that this is the main element which makes the school distinctively Christian. It means that opportunities for personal spirituality are offered to all those who wish to access them. The Easter stillness day is an example of time set aside to grow in knowledge and understanding of Easter for those of all faiths and of none. More parents are choosing to attend on this day with their children year by year.

RE and collective worship are very well led and managed, and statutory requirements are met. There is an effective and detailed plan in place to ensure that these areas are given a high profile and that there is succession planning in place for their leadership. All members of the senior and middle leadership teams are fully included in monitoring and evaluating the school as a church school in order to ensure that succession planning is being very well addressed across the whole school. There are a number of ways in which very effective partnerships contribute to the strength of this church school, including with the Diocese for training and with the local community. In particular, there is a very strong, mutually beneficial and supportive partnership with the local church. The parish priest, together with the spiritual adviser in school, has been successful in helping to shape a reflective and prayerful life within the school. The recommendations from the previous denominational inspection have been thoroughly addressed and the school has continued to move forward rapidly in the last five years. Much of this improvement is due to the school's position within the HEARTS Academy Trust with its shared mission to serve others, especially those in most need. As the first school and the only church school within the trust, the outreach to its other schools has been rooted in the HEARTS values. This means that a strong sense of service, responsibility and accountability has driven school improvement across the trust. Staff members at all levels have been enabled to grow and flourish in working beyond their own school. This was accurately summarised by the executive headteacher of the trust who said, 'our aim is to be strong, compassionate, service-led people, who are here for the children'.

SIAMS report March 2018 The Wickford CE infant (VC) academy, Mount Rd, Wickford, Essex SS11 8HE