

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

### St Alphege Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

Widney Manor Road, Solihull, Birmingham. B91 3JG

**Current SIAMS inspection grade**

**Outstanding**

**Diocese**

**Birmingham**

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Solihull

Name of federation

St Alphege Schools

Date of inspection

22 June 2018

Date of last inspection

12 December 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided Junior 103399

Executive Headteacher

Rob Morrissey

Inspector's name and number

Marianne Phillips 586

#### School context

St Alphege Junior school is an average sized primary with 278 pupils. The numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals is below national average. Most pupils are of white British heritage. There are a small number of pupils from families of faith other than Christianity. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are below national average. Pupils in receipt of a statement or educational health care plan and those with special educational needs are also below national levels. The executive headteacher has been in post for one year. He is also the headteacher of St Alphege Infant school, situated half a mile away.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Alphege VA Junior as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The commitment and attitude of pupils as ambassadors and their desire to support worship and the daily life of the school is effectively contributing to the Christian character and distinctiveness of St Alphege Junior.
- Christian values underpin the life of the school and positively influence relationships and behaviour of all members of the school family.
- The strong links with the church guide and support worship and religious education (RE) and contribute to the school's distinctive Christian character.
- The strong Christian faith and witness of the executive headteacher is driving forward distinctiveness.
- The caring relationships which exist between the school family and its community are reflective of its distinctive Christian foundations.

#### Areas to improve

- Facilitate the desire of the pupils in the worship committee to be more actively involved in planning and leading worship on a regular basis.
- Focus on the new approaches recently introduced in RE to ensure they are embedded and consistent across the federation of schools and that marking is effective and developmental.
- Utilise more regular pupil conferencing, by the executive headteacher and key governors to further drive the distinctiveness of the school.

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

St Alphege Junior is a school where pupils' well-being is central, at the heart of all that is done. Pupils thrive because they feel safe, secure and loved, supported by Christian values that underpin all relationships. Pupils of the worship committee describe them as, 'God's values that encourage us to be a community and a friend to all'. Consequently, they are keen to come to school and attendance is high. Standards in behaviour are also excellent. Parents appreciate how well their children are known and how effectively their specific needs are met. 'The executive headteacher is very approachable and excellent at targeting need through small group or individual interventions.' One example of this has been the recent employment of a counsellor who meets with individuals weekly. Another is the SEAL group meetings, that provide nurturing care in the 'Sunshine Room'. The strong, spiritual leadership of the executive headteacher is effectively driving forward the Christian distinctiveness of the school. In the year since his appointment, he has diligently strengthened the links between both schools. One very good example of this was the celebration day of St Alphege, the schools' patron saint. All the pupils, staff and parents celebrated in a combined service at the Church. As parents explain, 'Our children were buzzing with excitement throughout the day. They understood why they were celebrating and enjoyed being united with siblings and friends from the infant school.' Parents endorse the executive headteacher's actions to bring both schools more closely together through 'teams'. He and the governors are striving to build consistency across the federation. Both schools have a clear vision and focus on Christian values. They have yet to agree a common vision and set of values, which is a priority to strengthen links. Another is to embrace their common Christian foundations through more combined services each term, to further strengthen unity. Links with the church are strong and the ministry team plan and lead worship regularly. The minister of St Alphege is also chaplain to the school, supporting the spiritual and personal lives of all members. Pupils enter the school displaying skills above national levels. The executive headteacher and his leadership team have introduced systems that ensure they track the progress of each individual across all subjects. As a result, pupils progress their learning rapidly, and are well above national levels by the time they leave. The pupils of the school are very keen to accept responsibility and work diligently supporting their peers across the federation. Curricular links, such as the 'Money Friends' evidenced on the day of the inspection happen termly. These initiatives build partnerships that are supporting learning and driving standards. The curriculum is rich and exciting, challenging pupils to think deeply, during and beyond the school day. One boy recently won first prize in a local competition to design a garden to be created in a local park. Members of the worship committee and school council know their roles are important. 'We organise charity events and have supported Cancer Research, Water Aid and the World Wildlife Fund. Our discussions about play means we now have individual play equipment on a Friday instead of football. That's good.' These comments, photographic records and the findings of questionnaires evidence that leaders listen and opinion is respected and valued. RE is a popular subject. Pupils explained, 'We enjoy RE and like learning through Bible stories about Christianity and other cultures and faiths. Our lessons encourage a positive attitude helping us to understand and respect other beliefs.' These positive experiences are founded on their Christian values of love and respect. They are effectively developing an understanding of Christianity and other world faiths. Visits and visitors are a common feature to enhance their learning, such as the 'Young Voices Choir' and the visit to the Cathedral. Consequently, pupils are growing spiritually and developing as young citizens of a global community. In the words of a parent, 'This school helps our children to develop in layers, learning about Christianity and other faiths, sharing common values that provide a wonderful foundation for their future lives.'

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

Worship is a central to daily life, involving all. It is led by all staff and the St Alphege ministry team, in school and church settings. The inclusive, respectful values, fostered through services encourage all pupils and their families to engage with and enjoy worship. Members of the pupil worship committee speak of their active involvement. 'We have important roles in worship. In the Eucharist services we carry down the candles and bread and we want to get everyone involved in the worship.' They enjoy singing, going to church and praying. 'When we pray we are talking to God and Jesus, because we know they are listening.' Pupils say prayer is important to them. There are reflection areas in each classroom and around the school supporting prayer life. Ideas to engage pupils in prayer include the 'Life Line' and 'Blessings Board'. These are two creative examples of many, which the school uses to generate personal prayers of concern and thanks. Pupils are regularly asked to share their views on worship. Their recorded comments evidence their growing faith and desire to 'live as God wants us to live to make a better world'. They are also very keen to plan and lead worship, 'to make it more fun and to engage all pupils'. School leaders have recognised this and agreed this is a priority. Also, for leaders and governors to canvass a wider audience of pupil opinion, through regular conferences with focus groups. Monitoring is thorough and undertaken regularly to ensure worship is varied and effective. The long term plan uses themes of 'thankfulness, trust, relationship and Creator God', to explore key questions as guides for life. The worship observed illustrated how Jesus and other key role models regularly provide a focus for reflection. The words of Saint Teresa of Avila were used to consider how, 'Christ has no body but yours. Yours are the hands with which He blesses the world.' Pupils were keen to share

they had chosen Saint Teresa for their 'class presentation of worship to the whole school'. Their comments confirm how worship experiences are consistently helping them to explore spirituality and faith views. The links between worship and RE, through planned themes, are raising their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) awareness. As a result, pupils are fully aware of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith. Worship is predominantly Christian, and trinitarian, celebrating Anglican traditions and the Christian calendar. Consequently, pupils are confident in sharing their growing knowledge of Christianity and their enjoyment of these experiences. However, parents and pupils of all faiths and cultures are keen to share how they appreciate the school's focus on respect for diversity. Parents explained, 'we learn about Christianity and we and our children are also able to celebrate Eid. This gives us happy faces and joy.' In many ways worship supports the spiritual life of the school and underpins its distinctiveness.

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

RE is a popular and important, high profile subject, that enables pupils to learn about Christianity. Pupils are encouraged to think and reflect on the Resurrection, Trinity, Pentecost and Incarnation through the Understanding Christianity curriculum. Guidance from the Solihull Agreed Syllabus (SACRE) shapes their learning about Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. Pupils' books evidence the variety of learning experiences explored over time that is helping to develop their understanding of world faiths. Teachers share planning across year groups and the federation. The RE team meets regularly and liaises with the Ministry team about their support for the subject. Pupils of all abilities are encouraged to discuss deep questions such as, 'What would Jesus do?' Or 'Why is Mohammed called the messenger of God?' Marking is clear and thorough. It is an area the school has prioritised for review, to develop consistent approaches that are child friendly and developmental. The RE team and other leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning across both schools. Monitoring approaches are varied and rigorous and ensure teaching and learning is consistently good or better. As a result, standards in RE are in line with other core subjects. In the best lessons pupils are creatively challenged to think deeply and to actively engage with each other and the learning. Examples observed reflected this, where pupils explored an 'artefact bag' to determine, 'where's the connection - what's the link with the story of Jacob?' Pupils displayed good knowledge and understanding and could draw on prior learning to shape their opinions. Members of the RE team have attended Understanding Christianity training and this has led to new approaches and planning. Systems to assess learning outcomes have been in place for some time, but these are also to be reviewed. School leaders, through this process of change, are building consistency and rigour across the federation. This will take time to become embedded. However, RE is effective in contributing to pupils SMSC development and its distinctive Christian character.

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

St Alphege Junior is a school that cares strongly about its pupils, families and the community it serves. The strong Christian leadership of the executive headteacher is building teams across both schools, united in purpose. Christian values strengthen relationships and inform actions. Inclusive approaches, respect and love for all, guided by the teaching of Jesus, enable pupils to develop as confident young citizens. As you enter the school Christian symbols, prayers and values proclaim its Christian foundation and the strong links with the church. The biblical text, 'Let the children come to me', taken from St Matthew's gospel emphasises that children are central. The minister confirms, 'There are many overlaps between the life of the school and the parish as many families from the school attend church.' Parents appreciate these strong links and the respect for all faiths, 'Our children are taught in a balanced way to respect and value all faiths. Consequently, their consideration of the world is something to be proud of and we thank the school for this.' Partnership with parents is strengthened through the 'Friends of the School' and the open door policies that exist. The executive headteacher is highly respected. 'He is always there and is bringing the separate schools more closely together.' Training and performance management targets underpin staff development and are effective in building capacity for the future. Governors work closely with school leaders, to regularly discuss findings from monitoring relating to school performance and distinctiveness. This ensures they know the strengths of the school and support areas that are highlighted for development. The executive headteacher is very clear about the vision he has for this school. He is sharing his vision effectively to build consistency and quality across the federation. In the year since his appointment this has impacted positively on the distinctive Christian character of the school. Team approaches to RE and worship, links with the church and the diocese are strong and supportive of the spiritual life of the school. RE and worship meet statutory requirements. The minister liaises directly with the worship committee and the RE team to share their views. This is one of the many ways worship and RE are monitored to ensure experiences are of the highest quality. The church has been used this year for a special transition service, attended by Years 2 and 3 and their parents. Year 3 pupils welcomed those from Year 2 in song and with greeting cards and messages of friendship. This was highly successful in allaying fears and concerns and ensuring transition was smooth and effective. It has also facilitated transfer of information to ensure needs are met. The development point from the previous inspection has been met.