

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Helen's Church of England School			
Address	Abbotsham, Bideford, Devon EX39 5AP		
Date of inspection	12 February 2020	Status of school	Academy inspected as VA The Alumnis multi-academy trust
Diocese	Exeter	URN	145769

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Excellent
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Excellent
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Excellent

School context

St Helen's is a primary school with 210 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above national averages. The school was a founding member of the Alumnis multi-academy trust, which formed in October 2018 when the new headteacher was appointed. The former headteacher was appointed as the CEO of the trust.

The school's Christian vision

'Learn to love, love to learn, aspire to serve'

Inspired by the Church of England Vision for Education, and underpinned by Hebrews 10:24

'Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds'

Our vision is fondly referred to as LOVE-LEARN-SERVE

Key findings

- Dedicated leadership empowers strong team work, inclusive of everyone's gifts. Modelling the importance of Love, Learn, Serve and belonging to the family of schools is securely embedded, enabling others to flourish. Articulating the biblical underpinning of the Christian vision in ongoing.
- Exceptional pastoral care and inclusion is transforming this Christian community so that the needs of all groups of pupils and their families are very well met.
- One of the hallmarks of St Helen's is a creative, courageous curriculum which explores unique talents and enables all to successfully achieve, academically and personally. St Helen's pupils are committed to be active agents of change, making a difference to the lives of all.
- Prayer and reflection is integral to the worshipping life of the school. Church services attended by pupils and their families are nourishing the spiritual journeys of all.
- The quality of teaching and learning in religious education (RE) enables pupils to grow richly in their religious understanding. As a result, all groups of pupils achieve well. However, encounters with people of diverse faith and belief are less frequent. Assessment in RE is always evolving.

Areas for development

- Embed assessment in RE to inform progress, developing deeper experiences for all pupils at St Helen's and across the multi- academy trust.
- Develop the whole community's articulation of key Bible verses which underpin the school's Christian vision and values.
- Extend encounters with people of diverse faith and worldviews and enrich pupils' understanding of the worldwide Christian Church by deepening their knowledge of St Helen, to whom their parish church is dedicated, and so nurture their spiritual and cultural development.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

St Helen's is a 'wonderfully warm and welcoming, inspiring, nurturing, love-filled inclusive, encouraging and supportive place to love, learn and serve others'. This comment from a member of staff typifies the high esteem this school is held in, which reaches beyond the shores of North Devon. This is because the dedicated leadership 'teach children to love one another, learn in a positive way and serve their communities with kindness and action'. Love influences all decisions made, driven by the school's Christian vision to spur one another on, woven together with high aspirations for all. St Helen's successfully carries out its mission to improve education and life experiences for all members of the school's partnership so all can truly flourish. This is because the school's vision is at the heart of its purpose and deeply pertinent to its community of learners. Working closely with the diocese and the schools within the trust, in a spirit of mutually respectful relationships, all share the same vision. Believing, belonging and becoming is lived out in the context of each school so church and community schools alike preserve their unique personal vision. Deepening the whole community's understanding of key Bible verses underpinning the vision is ongoing. The RE subject leader at St Helen's is helping to broaden the school's sphere of influence through membership of RE bodies, such as the local RE hub. Specialist support staff for pupils with significant and complex needs are also leading the way in the trust, aligning assessment procedures and protocols. Such leadership opportunities are a key priority to spur one another on and make a difference. Connectivity beyond the trust ensures all are included and supported to flourish, with the Alumnis Spirit Award celebrating the good work of colleagues.

Following Jesus' example to treat others respectfully and 'love thy neighbour' enables all to truly be the best version of themselves. Termly themes of stewardship, social injustice and health and wellbeing help develop skills and values to improve the quality of world, self and others in the community. Pupils in the St Helen's family are always thinking of others and praising them for living out values, such as perseverance in challenging times. Residential visits to London and Dartmoor nurture the academic and spiritual needs of all. Nurture rooms provide a calm space in school for those who need it. Small steps each fresh day show love is patient and kind, giving support to pupils and their families. This is attributed to what a Church school does to support all pupils in school and includes building relationships and understanding the needs of individuals. Some pupils are real advocates for others, such as the deaf ambassadors, reaching out to other deaf pupils, developing confidence and self-esteem, supporting mental health and wellbeing. Specialist staff are unrelenting in their tireless support for needy pupils, some of whom aspire to be rock musicians or animal scientists. Unique talents are celebrated and actively supported. The culture of accelerated progress results in pupils thriving and succeeding so that pupils who have now left St Helen's are still doing well. St Helen's vision to support other schools and develop leaders extends to Exmoor and Torbay. This includes deep dives in RE to support both primary and secondary colleagues.

The Christian community of St Helen's has a thirst to serve others, stemming from its creative and courageous curriculum. Character development extends well beyond the school gate, with some pupils inspired to act, such as sleeping rough on the streets of Bideford. Not only does this show exemplary empathy and faith in action, but also raises essential funds for the local homeless. With their own foodbanks in every class to support the homeless through the Harbour project, pupils affirm, 'It is very nice to support Harbour and people with not enough food and water.' Pupils' global awareness and understanding is enriched by the well-established partnership with Edukids, supporting a school in Uganda. Parents and pupils speak highly of the impact of a Ugandan doctor singing in Cambodian in St Helen's Church. Pupils are very concerned to alleviate the plight of refugees in war-torn countries. Such activities all help to heighten awareness through the school's curriculum and its strong charity links. St Helen's pupils are 'amazing advocates' in the world so even the youngest pupils can help to sow seeds and build the kingdom of God.

Parents testify their children demonstrate values, such as perseverance, at home. Their children are absolutely convinced they can make a transformational difference to the world because of the Christian values instilled in them. Transition support in small groups, whole class dyslexia approaches to spelling as well as teaching British Sign Language across the school all make a huge difference. Staff affirm, 'A cohort is thirty lives', echoing their trustworthy support for pupils and their families with significant and complex needs.

Prayer and reflection is woven through collective worship at St Helen's, with Christian values and biblical teaching at its heart. Principal Christian celebrations are held in St Helen's Church, such as Ash Wednesday, so pupils learn about the importance of belonging to the family of the Church. The symbolism of the Eucharist is commemorated every Easter. Pupils affirm that, 'Every time we go to Church we learn more about Jesus and his stories'. Pupils' knowledge of St Helen is developing. The richness of the Christian tradition is enhanced by visitors from the local Baptist Church who lead worship regularly in school. The local 'Open the Book' team take an active part in Year 5 RE lessons, exploring Bible stories in greater depth. The ethos group help plan interactive worship. Pupils cite key Bible verses which inspire them, knowing where to find them. Confident and articulate pupils have a secure knowledge of the events of Ascension and Pentecost.

St Helen's pupils love learning and thrive through RE, achieving very well in writing and making connections all the time through different religions, constantly reflecting. They ask big questions, such as discussing who the fourth figure was in Daniel's fiery furnace. The teaching of Christianity is strong and sits well with high quality English lessons. For example, whole upper school classes might be reading Kurdish texts to help appreciate the social injustice in Syria. Younger pupils reflect and model the Fruits of the Spirit to their peers and parents, using Jesus' Golden Rule to treat one another correctly.

The essence of St Helen's is well summed up by a member of staff. They affirmed, 'I know that the school not only focuses on the learning, but the emotional and spiritual side too of every child.' This rural, coastal Christian community is 'a warm, nurturing and inclusive family, led by God's teachings'.



The effectiveness of RE is Excellent

The high quality of teaching and learning in RE is consistently very good and sometimes excellent. Monitoring and evaluation of RE is extensive. Embedding assessment in RE and extending encounters with diverse people of faith and worldviews across the trust is ongoing. At St Helen's all groups of pupils flourish in RE, including those who are vulnerable. Pupils make good progress in line with other core subjects, with some pupils achieving exceptionally well in their RE.

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