

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Walkwood Church of England Middle School

Feckenham Road, Redditch, Worcestershire B97 5AQ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Worcester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	January 2013
Name of academy trust	Walkwood Academy Trust
Date of inspection	8 March 2017
Date of last inspection	24 May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	139185
Principal	Revd Clive Leach
Inspector's name and number	Duncan Jones 813

School context

Walkwood Church of England Middle School, which is a Voluntary Controlled, larger than average 9 to 13 academy, serving a largely urban area. It includes an autism base. Although there have been threats to the three tier system locally, the school is currently well supported with a growing roll. The percentage of children receiving support for special educational needs is above national average, but below for disadvantaged children. The number of children who speak English as an additional language is below average, but growing. The principal has been in post for two years and took over following a period of turbulence for the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Walkwood Church of England Middle School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The strong and inspiring leadership of the principal and his team ensures that distinctive Christian values and a vision rooted in scripture underpin every area of school life.
- The inclusive vision of the school ensures that all children are supported in their personal well-being and academic achievement.
- Children are inspired by collective worship, with the result that messages from worship cause them to reflect on their lives and take action in support of those in need.
- The school's inclusive Christian ethos ensures that children have an outstanding understanding of and respect for difference and diversity.

Areas to improve

- Develop children's understanding of the value of personal prayer and reflection, to enable them to use prayer in their own lives and on their continuing spiritual journey.
- Build on current good practice in the monitoring of collective worship, so that findings are fed back and action taken, leading to continuous improvement in provision.

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

At Walkwood Church of England Middle School, ten Fruits of Faith – values with their roots in the Christian faith – are deeply embedded in all aspects of the school. They provide the starting point for policy-making, they form the focus for collective worship and they provide a means of living and reflecting upon life. As one pupil said, ‘The Fruits of Faith sum up Walkwood.’

Children not only know the school’s Christian values, but understand what they mean to them personally and the relevance they have to their own lives. This impact goes beyond the school and parents feel strongly that the school’s teaching of its Christian values complements their own values at home, and helps children to make informed choices in every aspect of their lives. One parent commented that when sorting out a problem at home, her son had replied, ‘I’m a member of the Walkwood Family and I wouldn’t do that.’

The Christian values also give staff and children a vocabulary to discuss important issues. For example, key values of friendship, honesty and forgiveness underpin the approach to behaviour management, and because pupils have spent time discussing and reflecting on them, they are familiar concepts which can be used effectively to resolve disputes. As a result of this, behaviour throughout the school is exemplary.

Key to the school’s vision is that every individual is created in the image of God, and from this belief springs the school’s outstanding attention to individual needs, both academic and pastoral. The result of this is that even though Year 6 SATs results are below national expectation, the vast majority of children make at least expected progress between years 5 and 8, with significantly high numbers making accelerated progress. Parents speak highly of the care which their children receive and are very supportive of the vertical tutor groups which develop a caring, family environment. Pastoral care extends to all members of the school community. Staff also talk about the school having a family feel which is welcoming to new members of staff and supportive of all.

The school approaches the development of spirituality as the expected consequence of its vision and values. So whilst it has a formal definition of spirituality, this is not so much a definition to work towards, as one which sums up the spirituality which flourishes throughout the school community because of its strong Christian ethos. This means that planning across the curriculum, which includes discussion and application of the school’s Christian values, gives pupils regular high quality experiences to develop their own personal spirituality.

Pupils are enthusiastic about religious education (taught as part of social and spiritual education), enjoying it because of the varied and interesting approaches adopted by teachers and because it is a subject in which they know they can express their own opinions. This is the result of meticulous planning by staff which links the school’s Christian values to interesting and relevant topics. Another result of the RE teaching and the school’s respect for the individual, is that pupils demonstrate a deep respect for difference and diversity. Children talk about celebrating similarities rather than looking for differences and are quick to point out that all children, whatever their differences, are treated equally at Walkwood.

In all these ways, the Christian character of the school has an outstanding impact on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all its pupils.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is greatly valued by all members of the school community. A strength of collective worship is the careful planning of themes across the year, based on the school’s Christian values and monthly virtues (which are closely linked to the values). These themes enable children to relate their Christian values to biblical teaching and to their own actions at school and at home. Pupils give examples of how children have changed their behaviour as a result of messages about friendship they have heard in collective worship. Children benefit in particular from thoughtful video clips played as they enter the hall which frequently challenge their thinking. The effect of regular reflection times following collective worship is significant in enabling children to think about spiritual and moral issues and the big questions of life. Through worship and “Deep Days” children explore key festivals in the Christian calendar from a variety of perspectives and build a link with the parish church. Changing church seasons are marked by use of an altar cloth and a stole in the entrance hall. These initiatives address a focus for development from the last inspection which looked for enrichment at Key Stage 3 through planning worship to reflect church seasons. As a result of teaching during collective worship, children have a growing understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and many can talk at some depth about this.

The provision for prayer is wide-ranging, with specific prayers linked to the values provided in planning, and children writing their own prayers in tutor group worship. There is a prayer area in the entrance hall and although the school is developing a spiritual garden, there is currently no area available for quiet prayer and reflection. Children are keen for such a space, as they appreciate times of prayer during worship and the time spent reflecting in the

classroom. They would like a 'quiet, prayerful area' in which those, whether they have a faith or not, can be calm and still.

The school's involvement in supporting charities is impressive and is a direct result of themes introduced through collective worship. Children speak enthusiastically of supporting 'Send a Cow' and 'Toilet Twinning', and are keen to organise bake sales at lunchtime to raise money.

Children make an outstanding contribution to leading collective worship, doing so weekly within their tutor groups and regularly at larger gatherings. Although they are given pointers for planning, they frequently prefer to devise their own content. They reflect on their contributions informally once a month with a member of staff as a means of evaluation. This demonstrates excellent progress since the last inspection when pupil leadership of worship was highlighted as a focus for development.

Monitoring and evaluation of college and whole school collective worship by leaders has been effective in improving practice, such as linking messages to biblical sources and ensuring a variety of formats. Children are beginning to evaluate worship at these larger gatherings. For the quality of collective worship to continue to grow, the school needs to build further on the systems of evaluation which are already in place.

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

The principal and all leaders articulate a very clear vision of the school as a church school, resulting in an excellent shared understanding of Christian distinctiveness right across the school community. Although Walkwood has had a good reputation for many years, staff, governors and parents all acknowledge that the clarity of Christian vision which is now promoted has been taken to a new level under the inspiring and caring leadership of the current principal. From the first individualised welcome pack for Year 4 children to the Year 8 leavers' service, Christian values are placed at the centre and this is communicated very effectively to all. This is nowhere more evident than on the school website and in the weekly newsletter to parents.

The school has very effective systems for self-evaluation of its Christian distinctiveness. The impact of its Christian values are monitored routinely along with other aspects of teaching and learning, and governors hold discussions with teachers and children to gain a complementary view to reports from senior leadership. Parents' views are sought through the use of focus groups and discussions at parents' evenings. By means of these strategies, leaders have a keen understanding of the school's performance and they ensure that this evaluation then leads directly to strategies for improvement.

There is wide community support for the school, shown by a rising roll. Parents choose Walkwood because of its strong Christian ethos, whether or not they describe themselves as being Christian, belonging to another faith or having none. Regardless of personal belief, they strongly respect and support the ethos and the values which it promotes.

Both collective worship and RE are very effectively led. The head of spiritual and social education has made good use of training offered by the Diocese of Worcester, ensuring that the RE curriculum is rich and comprehensive and teaching is inspiring. Worship leaders similarly ensure that high quality collective worship maintains a central place in the life of the school.

The empowerment of future leaders is a significant strength of the principal's leadership style. Many staff leaders are home grown and no opportunity is missed to encourage and support those looking for opportunities to develop. Neither is leadership confined to the staff. Walkwood has created a wide range of areas in which children can develop their skills such as the pupil leadership team and school parliament. This strength comes from the school's commitment to emulate the way in which Our Lord put faith in his disciples to take risks and go out and demonstrate their leadership.

The result of the outstanding leadership at Walkwood is that, in line with the school's motto, each member of the school community is challenged, encouraged and nurtured to "love to learn, learn to live and live to love".