

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

### St James' Church of England School

#### Vision

Our school vision and ethos is rooted in the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

Mark 4.30-32

‘In Faith, we grow and flourish’

Our rainbow promise, that we will love each other, underpins everything we do at school, which enables us to flourish and experience life in all its fullness.

St James’ Church of England School is living up to its foundation as a Church school and is enabling pupils and adults to flourish. It has the following notable strengths.

#### Strengths

- The Christian vision at St James’ results in a deeply caring school. It shapes this warm and caring community where pupils and adults feel known and important for the person they are.
- The school’s curriculum is shaped by the Christian vision. The wide range of experiences provided by the school enables pupils, including the vulnerable, to ‘grow and flourish’.
- Through the vision, relationships and the care of everyone are important for leaders. This ensures that there is a strong focus on positive mental health and wellbeing for adults and pupils.
- Well-planned collective worship emphasises the school’s vision and values. Pupils and adults welcome this daily inclusive time to come together for celebration, reflection and prayer.
- Effective leadership in religious education (RE) ensures that learning is engaging for pupils. As a result, they have a good knowledge of non-religious and religious worldviews, including Christianity.

#### Development Points

- Ensure that opportunities for spiritual flourishing are an integral part of the curriculum. This is so that these experiences will enrich the spiritual flourishing of adults and pupils.
- Develop pupils’ awareness to independently address areas of injustice. This is to enable them to become more confident agents of change for those facing adversity.



## Inspection Findings

The long-standing Christian vision of St James' has recently been refined to enable pupils and adults to flourish. It shapes every aspect of school life, ensuring that pupils and adults feel valued, supported, and celebrated. Leaders ensure that it is visibly present through displays, murals, and key moments such as collective worship. This means that pupils are able to reflect on its meaning and relevance to their daily lives. The vision of the Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust aligns seamlessly with that of the school. Trust collaboration strengthens the school's work while allowing it to maintain its unique character and serve its local community. This support enables both adults and pupils to thrive.

The school's Christian vision is reflected throughout the curriculum, ensuring that pupils can succeed in school. The broad and balanced curriculum encourages pupils to explore their interests and develop their unique skills. This fosters a sense of purpose and aspiration. A strong focus on careers helps pupils to envision their future and recognise the diverse opportunities available to them. Spiritual development is beginning to be woven into the curriculum but moments to reflect or experience awe and wonder are minimal. Leaders have introduced a framework to support a shared understanding and language. However, these opportunities are not an integral part of the curriculum. This limits the impact on the way adults and pupils flourish spiritually. Pupils consistently show kindness, respect, and a willingness to take on responsibility. Leading clubs and worship demonstrate that the school's values are deeply embedded in their daily lives. Collaboration, a core value of the trust, strengthens the curriculum by allowing leaders to share expertise and refine curriculum design. This partnership not only enhances teaching and learning within the school but also enables staff development by supporting other schools. This positive impact reflects the school's commitment to service and continuous improvement. Leaders, including governors, prioritise support for trips and residential. Their commitment to inclusion ensures that pupils, including the vulnerable, have access to enriching opportunities. Staff take a caring approach to family support. This enables the effective removal of barriers to learning and wellbeing.

Collective worship provides daily time for reflection and for coming together. The inclusive approach includes values-focused discussions, Bible exploration, and celebration. It enables adults and pupils to engage in particular and meaningful spiritual experiences within worship. By gathering as one family, leaders create a strong sense of belonging and shared purpose. Pupils actively participate by leading songs, offering prayers, and sharing their hopes and thankfulness. This fosters a sense of responsibility and spiritual awareness during this time. Pupils record and evaluate this in the whole school reflection book. Leaders use this to ensure that worship remains relevant and impactful. Even though in vacancy, the partnership with the village church enriches the life of the school. Visits for services, including Harvest and Christmas, provide pupils with occasions to engage with the community. Local churches support the school with collective worship. These links deepen pupils' understanding of worship and highlight the relevance of faith in daily life. A strength of the school is classroom worship - 'candle time'. Staff use it to encourage deep thinking about faith, nature, and world events. Self-reflection is embedded into these moments, reinforcing key values such as empathy, respect, and responsibility. By consistently providing time for personal reflection, the school nurtures pupil's ability to reflect and make thoughtful choices.

Inspired by the Christian vision, leaders create a culture of respect, inclusion, and care. This ensures that pupils and adults are treated well. The ethos of flourishing and love is woven throughout the school. It shapes interactions and fosters an environment where every individual is valued. This means that pupils constantly embrace diversity, as well as recognising and celebrating each other's uniqueness. Mental health is a high priority for leaders at St James'. They ensure that strategies are in place to support pupils and families in managing their emotional



wellbeing. This helps pupils to develop self-awareness and emotional resilience. Access to play therapists provides specialised support to those who need it. The trust and governors play an active role in ensuring that the school's vision is lived out daily. Regular visits enable them to see the school in action, validating its strong culture of care and inclusion. Leaders are well supported, knowing they can reach out to the central team at any time for guidance and advice. This collaborative approach strengthens the school community, so that pupils and adults flourish in a supportive, respectful environment.

Leaders use the school's Christian vision to drive justice and responsibility by embedding its values into daily life. This ensures that pupils and adults are empowered to make a positive difference. Pupils are given meaningful roles that encourage responsibility and advocacy. Elected pupil governors represent their peers. They meet with leaders to actively work on improving the school environment. The 'agents for change' group promotes awareness of pupils' individuality through collective worship and posters. This empowers pupils to apply their knowledge and advocate for fairness and equity within the school. This is evident with pupils writing to the local MP about graffiti in the local park, leading charity events, and organising clubs to enrich school life. However, the way this enables pupils to independently use their sense of personal responsibility to actively challenge injustice is less developed.

The RE curriculum provides pupils with a well-structured and enriching learning experience. Carefully planned, engaging activities help to make learning memorable. Assessment is embedded into the curriculum, with clear criteria used at the end of each unit to evaluate progress. The use of individual and class reflection books reinforces learning. The books enable pupils to explore and draw meaningful connections between religious and non-religious worldviews. This effective approach is supported by quality professional development, including guidance from the diocese and the trust. Staff effectively enable pupils to develop a rich and comprehensive understanding of world religions. Leaders support this by developing meaningful relationships with a variety of faith and community partners. This includes visits to places of worship. As a result, pupils progress well and look forward to their lessons. Leaders, including governors, contribute to the provision of high-quality RE through regular and effective monitoring.

## Information

Address	Main Rd, Biddenham, Bedford, MK40 4BD		
Date	13 February 2025	URN	148982
Type of school	Academy	No. of pupils	191
Diocese	St Albans		
MAT	Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust		
Headteacher	Alison Barden		
Chair of Governors	Melanie Nancekievill		
Inspector	Rob Dean		