

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ash Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Main St, Ash, Martock TA12 6NS	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Bath and Wells
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Somerset
Date of inspection	11 July 2017
Date of last inspection	18 June 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 123814
Headteacher	Nicola Roberts
Inspector's name and number	Ed Pawson 904

School context

The school is set in the small Somerset village of Ash and serves children from the village, the surrounding areas, the village of Martock and the town of Yeovil. It currently has 150 on roll, rising to 166 in September 2017. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is about average. Most pupils are White British with a very small number from other ethnic backgrounds. Attendance at the school over recent years has consistently been above national average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ash as a Church of England school are good

- Strong leadership has developed a curriculum which is informed by a distinctively Christian understanding.
- The school's Christian distinctiveness is clearly seen in the quality of relationships between all members of the school community.
- The role of the church community team, and the incumbent in particular, is very effective in promoting Christian values.
- Collective worship promotes children's thinking leading to deeper questions being considered which develops their understanding.

Areas to improve

- School leaders and governors should examine the school's vision, with a view to developing a more focussed expression of its inclusive Christian character.
- The school needs to re-visit its monitoring processes, in order to formalise a more robust system for the evaluation of the school's effectiveness as a church school.
- The school needs to review its processes for planning collective worship, in order to make it more responsive to the specific needs of Ash school.

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

Through its inclusive Christian character, Ash school provides a caring, 'family' ethos which is embraced by the whole school community. Driven by its aspiration for children to Aim High, the school encourages and supports success for all, whether in the arena of academic achievement or personal and spiritual development. Parents value the way the school encourages strong, trusting relationships between staff and pupils, built on the school's distinctive approach to the development of Christian and shared human values. Ash school prides itself on valuing every child, preparing each individual for a 'whole life', not just for the achievement of good grades. This enables all members of the school community to flourish and instils a desire to feel positive about education and to want to make progress.

The school has identified a strong set of values, but their significance as Christian values is not always fully understood by all children. Insufficient attention is given to the way these values grow out of a clearly expressed, inclusive Christian vision statement. Teachers are skilful in working with their classes at the start of each school year to develop these values into class codes of behaviour. This sets sound guiding principles, creating strong expectations for good behaviour and positive attitudes towards living and learning well together. The spirit of Ash School is embodied in the dove symbol, which pupils recognise as representing peace, communion and the presence of the Holy Spirit. One pupil described powerfully how the ethic of 'self-worth', and the belief that 'nothing is out of reach', had helped her overcome significant obstacles to learning in maths.

The school makes a strong commitment to developing the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of pupil's lives, through the provision of a broad curriculum and by offering creative and inspiring learning environments. Significant experiences include: opportunities for thankfulness and celebration, contemplation on the beauty of the natural world, experience of awe and wonder and the appreciation of art. Staff are experienced at opening-up challenging questions, giving pupils an opportunity to explore ideas and areas of disagreement. Staff are also adept at offering their own understanding of prayer and spiritual development, which helps pupils make very personal connections with regard to their own journey of faith.

The support given to the school by the parish church, and, in particular, the involvement of the incumbent and the school chaplain, adds a powerful dimension to the provision made for pupils' well-being and spiritual development. RE makes an important contribution to the Christian character of the school in the way it helps pupils to develop their personal attitudes towards faith, prayer and moral values. One of the pupils articulated that 'RE is not difficult until you start to reflect on how it impacts on your own life'. Pupils demonstrate strong convictions about the need to embrace an ethic of fairness and value for all life. They appreciate RE for the breadth of experiences it opens them up to, learning about Hindu weddings, Diwali, Ramadan and the Five Pillars of Islam. Visits to the school that introduce children to Britain as a multi-cultural country and school trips to Europe are also valued. Pupils have a good understanding of Christianity, both as a personal life-commitment and as a multicultural world faith.

The last inspection identified the need to develop the Christian profile of the school whilst involving all stakeholders. Significant progress has been made to meet this requirement, but questions remain about the extent to which the school articulates its Christian vision with enough clarity.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils and staff clearly articulate the important role worship plays in the life of the school. Pupils talk freely, and with spiritual insight, about what worship means to them. They participate in collective worship with enthusiasm and energy, enjoying the opportunity to sing, think, laugh and reflect together as a school. Worship is carefully planned to emphasise the inclusive Christian nature of the school community, with the school's aims and values at the centre of the message. Biblical material is used with thought and skill to inspire and connect children to stories of faith and significance. Gospel stories are woven into role-plays relating to contemporary events and activities, giving children a powerful insight into the nature and person of Jesus. Pupils are fluent in giving a variety of accounts about the nature of the Trinity. Children enjoy the opportunity to pray to Jesus, for personal spiritual benefit and also to seek help for others in need. However, leaders understand the need to ensure that worship is always an inclusive activity, so where prayer is encouraged, other options are given to avoid any sense of compulsion.

Worship is planned in partnership with an ecumenical team, in common with a neighbouring school. This has many benefits, but does make worship plans rather distant from the school's specific context. Worship activities take place together in the hall and also in classroom settings and children find great pleasure in these occasions when they to come together for prayer and celebration. The school benefits from a diverse group of worship leaders, including the headteacher, staff members, the incumbent and members of other congregations in the locality. This diversity of voices brings vitality and the challenge of contrasting perspectives.

In response to the focus for development set by the last inspection, which called for more rigorous monitoring of collective worship, the school has instigated half-termly meetings between the incumbent and pupils. This has succeeded in gaining better feedback about how worship is perceived. Wider monitoring is also impacting on the way worship is planned and led.

Parents greatly value the school worship services held in the parish church. These normally take place in school time allowing families to feel part of the wider church school community. Especially popular are the welcome service, where children bring their pictures to stick onto the image of the cross on the school collage, the Christingle service and the leavers' service. One of the most popular features of these services is the way they give the Year 6 pupils an opportunity to accompany their buddies in Foundation Stage to the church.

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

Leaders at Ash show a strong commitment to the development of a happy and successful school. Parents express gratitude for the way it offers their children an inclusive Christian context for learning, where academic progress is rewarded, whilst also nurturing the emotional and spiritual needs of learners. However, leaders seem to lack the confidence to express the school's vision with clarity, in a way that emphasises its inclusive Christian ethos. Older pupils are fluent in their expression of the schools' governing principles in terms of both Christian values, deriving from Biblical teachings, and also as shared human values. They see no contradiction in the values having both roles. The headteacher is quietly inspirational, and she and the incumbent work well together to plan and review the way the school is progressing as a church school. Weekly meetings between the headteacher and the chair of governors act to provide an important monitoring function. The governors are experienced and supportive and have a developing understanding of what it means to be a critical friend to the school. However, it is not entirely clear whether the school has a clear enough understanding of its effectiveness as a church school.

The school enjoys strong links with the parish church, with the incumbent almost being regarded as an additional member of staff. He shows a strong commitment to supporting the school leadership and his presence in, and understanding of, the school is an invaluable asset to the whole community. The way the school plans worship, with other schools and churches in an ecumenical partnership, contributes significantly to the life of the school. The school makes good use of its connections to other church schools and the headteacher benefits from regular leadership briefings.

Attention is given to the development of staff and governors as members of, and leaders in, a church school. Existing staff are encouraged to attend training sessions and access career development opportunities. However, there are questions about whether enough consideration is given to the way new staff are inducted into their roles, given that they may be unfamiliar with the expectations of working in a church school.

Pupils show confidence in the way Ash school is led, commenting that teachers are nice but strict. They appreciate this because they recognise that if there are no rules then people might get bullied, and this would be unacceptable. Leaders of RE and collective worship are well supported. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of these areas of school life and are engaged in constructive development in both areas. The RE lead is introducing the new Understanding Christianity material to strengthen the way in which the subject is taught. The last report set a development target to formalise the decisions taken concerning the school's Christian character. This has been achieved by putting it onto governors' meetings as a standing item.