

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Birchanger Church of England Primary School

Address	33 Birchwood, Birchanger, Bishop's Stortford CM23 5QL		
Date of inspection	6/2/2019	Status of school	VC primary
Diocese	Chelmsford	URN	115127

Overall Judgement	Grade	good
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?		
Additional Judgement		
The impact of collective worship	Grade	good

School context

Birchanger primary school is a primary school with 121 pupils on roll. The school has a very low level of religious and cultural diversity and 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. There has been a significant turnover in staff since the previous denominational inspection. The current headteacher took up her post in September 2017.

The school's Christian vision

We are committed to the pursuit of excellence in all that we do – in our work, play and relationships with each other. Everything we do is built on the Christian values of Love, Care, Courage and Truth.

Key findings

- Progress from the previous denominational inspection has been significant, especially for collective worship, which now engages pupils well and securely underpins the school's ethos.
- The new Christian vision and associated values have been developed and implemented but these are not understood as fully grounded in Christian teaching by all stakeholders.
- Effective support for pupils in their pursuit of excellence is based on a belief in the uniqueness of each individual and a desire to serve each family according to their particular needs.
- This is a school that knows itself well as a church school and which has set realistic and manageable steps in its SIAMS action planning. However, the context of the school means that changes have needed to be made at a pace at which all stakeholders are able to take ownership of the vision and associated values.
- The current headteacher has set high expectations for religious education (RE) and, as a result, some philosophical and deeper thinking is evident in pupils' responses and written work.

Areas for development

- Develop the Christian view of education which underpins the school's vision and associated values in ways that are accessible to all stakeholders.
- Ensure that the pursuit of excellence, based on the school's Christian vision, results in the best possible outcomes for all pupils by embedding practice which targets pupils for improvement.
- Increase the understanding of and opportunities for prayer for the whole of the school community.
- Strengthen the shape of worship by using appropriate Anglican prayers and liturgy with greater frequency.
- Create a broader curriculum for RE which is based on enquiry and questioning and which results in robust assessment, in order to maximise pupils' understanding of religions and of key Christian concepts.

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 finding

Since the appointment of the current headteacher in September 2017, the school has implemented a vision which has stabilised and moved the school forward. This follows a period of uncertainty and considerable changes in staffing and leadership. A focus on excellence is well expressed by pupils and school leaders in relation to all areas of school life. However, it is not clearly articulated in relation to its biblical underpinning, although this understanding is beginning to be evident in some school documentation. The pace and strategies for developing the vision theologically are well matched to the context and current needs of the school. However, this development is in its early stages. The partnerships with the incumbent and with the Diocese have grown and supported the development as a church school well, particularly since the current headteacher took up her post. The chair of governors and the only foundation governor currently in place are closely involved in monitoring the school as a church school, other governors are less so. The recommendations from the previous denominational inspection have been addressed, resulting in improvements in collective worship and in the development of the school's spiritual life.

Pupils are able to talk about how the vision and associated values are helping them to maximise their efforts so that 'you always think you have done something well'. They understand that the application of their Christian values means that they can improve their work and support positive relationships throughout the school day. The school is building out of a situation of poor results historically especially in Key Stage 2. In keeping with its revised Christian vision, there is a clear focus on the pursuit of excellence across the curriculum. This means that progress in the autumn term has been good, including for those in vulnerable groups. Predictions for age related expectations are above national averages for 2019. This data has been externally ratified by the local authority and by the Diocese. Upward trends in rates of progress are, however, very recent. Swift and effective action is taken in relation to curriculum weaknesses, for example for mathematics in the school. Pupils' progress is well supported by opportunities offered for spiritual development. These times include a regular reflection day, during which 'we could tell God how we feel'. There are also increased opportunities for pupils to reflect across the curriculum and in collective worship. Understanding of the importance and purpose of prayer is less developed than that of personal reflection.

Pupils understand the importance of making the right choices in all aspects of school life. They can talk about how this might be difficult at times but that their school values regularly help them to aim for excellence 'in everything'. The introduction of regular philosophical questions each week enables pupils to explore the big questions in the world around them. This includes a growing understanding of what is fair and unfair for themselves and for others in the wider world. This approach has begun to impact thinking in the RE curriculum, meaning that there is an increasing focus on enquiry and questioning. This, in turn, challenges staff and has improved pupils' experiences.

Relationships at all levels are mutually respectful and characterised by the associated values of love, care and truth. Relationships with families in this small school community are strong. Practical love and care are provided, as soon as an issue is identified. This means that pupils' individual needs are well met by all staff members and that their uniqueness is nurtured. Thus, support is targeted at those who most need it and contributes to improvement, especially for the most vulnerable. Pastoral systems are strong and effective. Pupils understand the importance of their value of truth because this means that they can tell their teachers how they are feeling. One pupil said, 'This lifts the weight off my shoulders'. Another pupil explained how one reflection day helped her to talk about stress and helped her to feel more secure. The introduction of worry boxes means that pupils articulate anything that concerns them. These worries are followed up and this contributes to better support, including for mental health. It also contributes to pupils feeling very safe in their school. An understanding of difference and diversity is fostered well because pupils know that 'our own unique personality makes us special' whilst they demonstrate that they all respect each other.

Collective worship has supported the implementation of the school's vision and values well. For example, pupils can clearly explain the importance of Jesus' life and teaching in relation to the school's associated values. A group of pupils, mainly from Year 5, is increasingly involved in the leadership of worship, especially through acts of worship based on the 'Open the Book' Bible resources. Music, story and reflection now underpin a growing knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Jesus. Reflection time is used effectively and complements other strategies for

supporting spiritual development within the school. There is a developing understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit which pupils have taken from worship. Some elements of Anglican tradition and practice are apparent, such as the Lord's Prayer and the sharing of the Peace. However, the shape of worship is not consistent which means that there are limited opportunities to make pupils and staff familiar with more of these elements. The foundation governor, the church organist and the local incumbent have been instrumental in supporting the improvements to worship since the previous denominational inspection.

RE is well led and managed by the headteacher. She has set consistent and high expectations for RE which is evident in both written work and through discussion. Pupils enjoy the variety of opportunities offered in RE and this impacts positively on their learning. They have been particularly inspired by 'Picturing Christianity', which has encouraged them to look at paintings and photographs and ask their own questions about faith. They are challenged by RE when they are invited to use enquiry skills and look at different perspectives on religious questions. Recognising the need to continue improvements, there is a detailed plan in place to introduce approaches and resources from 'Understanding Christianity' to focus more closely on key Christian concepts. Assessment which enables pupils to identify next steps is not secure.

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Inspector's name and number	Virginia Corbyn 86