

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

### Ashlands Church of England First School

North Street, Crewkerne, Somerset TA18 7AL

<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Bath and Wells</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Somerset
Name of federation	The Ashlands and Misterton Federation
Date of inspection	15 May 2017
Date of last inspection	19 April 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 123749
Executive Headteacher	Nicola Ball
Inspector's name and number	Alison Appleyard 877

#### School context

Ashlands Church of England First school serves the market town of Crewkerne. There are 117 children on roll of whom 26% are from out of catchment. The vast majority of children are from White British heritage families and the school deprivation indicator is well below the national average. All classes are mixed age. There have been significant changes in staffing since the last inspection including the appointment of a new executive headteacher in May 2016. The school is formally federated with one other church first school. The school is recovering from a recent, local bereavement.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ashlands Church of England First School as a Church of England school are satisfactory

- The new executive headteacher is determined to drive forward the development of the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- The school is embedding Christian values into its daily life and work and this is having a positive impact upon the individual pupils' personal and spiritual development.
- There are strong partnerships between church, school and community providing a firm foundation upon which to develop the school's Christian distinctiveness.

#### Areas to improve

- Develop and agree a clear Christian vision which can be expressed through shared core values and a mission statement in order to inform the daily life of the school community.
- Develop procedures to enable governors to hold the executive headteacher to account for the effectiveness of the school as a church school.
- Use the buildings, documentation and daily language to develop a more overt expression of the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- Monitor and evaluate collective worship to measure the impact it has on the lives of the pupils, and to inform the further development of collective worship in school.

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

The headteacher has a clear vision to drive the raising of standards across the school. Staff and governors share this vision and its success was acknowledged by Ofsted in March 2017, but this vision is not yet underpinned by the school's Christian distinctiveness. However, Christian distinctiveness is increasingly important to the school and Christian values are being encouraged in its day to day life. Children learn from Bible and other religious stories in both religious education (RE) and collective worship and apply what they learn to their own lives. Children care about each other and relationships between staff and pupils is good. The buddy stop in the playground is where children know to look for anyone who wants to play but has no-one to play with. Children said that, "being nice to each other is what Jesus wants us to do and we have to listen to what he says". They compared this with the story of Jonah who finally listened to God and did what he wanted. Children say that they enjoy school and parents confirm this. As a result, attendance is above the national average and behaviour is good. Children feel safe and able to speak to any member of staff if they have any concerns.

The well-being of all pupils is a priority for all staff. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is important as demonstrated by the broad and varied curriculum designed to suit the needs of all pupils. For example, it includes forest school and outdoor learning opportunities which develop different styles of personal expression. However, opportunities for personal spiritual development are not always maximised. Children make use of peaceful areas in the school, especially in the grounds, where they have 'space to think' but there is little evidence that pupils are encouraged or supported to do this in curriculum time. Through RE and collective worship, children are developing their understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith and are showing respect for other faiths. One class acted out a pilgrimage to Mecca to understand how participating Muslims feel. Through their charitable giving children are increasingly learning about their place in the world and are supporting less fortunate children through the 'School in a Bag' charity.

RE is having a positive impact on pupils' lives by encouraging the development of enquiring minds. Use of the Understanding Christianity resource is being introduced and pupils say that they are increasingly thinking about what Jesus would do. Teaching in RE is also promoting children to ask questions in and outside lessons. A parent said that she was asked, "Why did they have to kill Jesus, Mummy?" One child took his Christingle home and explained the significance of it to his family.

Children say that they like the mixed age classes because it means that they get to work together as a team and help each other, 'which is what Jesus told us to do'. Achievement is celebrated every week in Green Leaf Assembly where children are awarded a green leaf for academic attainment, personal achievement or for an act of kindness or thoughtfulness. A strategically placed display in the school's entrance enables parents and pupils to watch a bare tree in September gradually cover with leaves marking good things done, as the academic year progresses.

A review by all stakeholders of the Christian distinctiveness of the school was conducted two years ago but resulting actions have been slower than leadership would have wished due to the process around the change of headteacher.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory**

Whole school collective worship (assembly) is held daily and is recognised as being an important part of school life. It is mainly Christian and planned around the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme. There is little evidence of this planning aiming to develop Christian themes. Children and staff enjoy worship time and participate willingly through singing and dramas and with prayer. Children are also involved in both planning and leading their class worship each year for which they write their own prayers and sometimes their own songs. Years 3 and 4 largely plan and direct their own nativity.

Worship is led by a range of different visitors, but is particularly well-supported by the weekly visits of the local church team and the Vine Foundation. Children enjoy these collective worships. Major Christian Festivals are celebrated with services in church to which parents are invited, and pupils also attend diocesan leavers' events at Wells Cathedral. Simple Anglican liturgy including a candle and phrase and response, 'May the light of the Lord be with you,' is now embedded within collective worship. This was a requirement of the previous SIAS inspection. The Lord's Prayer is regularly said by everyone.

Opportunities for personal prayer and reflection are being increasingly used in the children's free time around the school. Pupils say that they use the inviting quiet areas in the grounds, including a garden in memory of a former pupil, when they want to think about things on their own or with a friend. The spectacular woodlands in the school grounds are used for forest school, but also offer children and staff a place to be near to God's creation. The classroom reflection areas are well used by pupils. Teachers include such things as peace babies, rainbow promises and thought bubbles alongside junior Bibles and other picture books to help children's personal spiritual development.

Further opportunities for formal prayer are offered at different points throughout the school day. All classes say

grace before lunch and a prayer at the end of the day. Worship is also impacting upon children in their home lives. A parent said that her daughter now says grace before every meal at home and has taught her cousin to say it too. Also, the message of Christian hope from an Easter worship supported a child and his family through a family bereavement. Another child with particular special needs said that 'he wished Jesus would be alive again'. Bible stories and the teachings of Jesus are used regularly in worship and children link them with their own behaviour. A year 4 boy explained that 'Jonah must have been scared inside the whale but God rescued him. So God will help us too.' The older children have some concept of the Holy Trinity. However, monitoring and evaluation of the impact of worship is currently informal with limited analysis but it is recognised by leadership to be an urgent area for development.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is satisfactory**

The new executive headteacher is passionate about the development of Christian distinctiveness and is looking at creative ways of developing the Christian character of the school. She has raised standards of achievement across the school and has also raised the profile of RE and collective worship. For example, staff are given working party days to develop plans across the two schools in the federation. She is introducing a Christian statement to the beginning of each policy document and has introduced a 'proud wall' where she can reward good things that pupils do. All leaders agree that the Christian distinctiveness of the school is important but are unable to articulate their priorities as a church school and are not driven by a clearly developed Christian vision. Governors do not hold the headteacher to account for the effectiveness of the school as a church school though this was one of the priorities set by the previous SIAS inspection. Monitoring and evaluation is not therefore producing any analysis of impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness on anything that it does. Christian values are explicit but not fully developed or overtly displayed around the school. There are displays both of Christianity and other religions in classrooms and in shared spaces, and each classroom has a cross. However, opportunities to celebrate the school's Christian character are missed, such as in the entrance to the school, in newsletters and in the school prospectus. The leadership focus has been directed at the raising of academic standards and as yet this focus is not underpinned by the school's Christian distinctiveness.

The school enjoys excellent partnerships with the local church and other church schools with whom it plans and works closely. For example, it shares a number of documents across its federation. The local church takes an active interest in the school, delivering worship and contributing to the school newsletter. The church has also contributed to the school curriculum, for example, by the vicar being interviewed about his role as a priest. The school has developed strong links with its community. Local businesses participate in the school fayre, with Waitrose offering tours to the children and delivering talks about e-safety. Employees also come into school to hear children read. Children sing at the local old people's home, participate in the Christmas tree festival in church and in the PomPom Bombing event which runs across the whole town. The school holds open mornings for the community to drop in to see the school at work, thus demonstrating close working relationships between school and community. Parents are very supportive of the school saying that staff readily give them their time. They feel part of the school family and are well communicated with via newsletters, website and parents' evenings. They believe that there are lots of opportunities to get involved in school such as through the Friends of Ashlands School, and they appreciate invitations to visit the school and to attend church services. Parents who are not Christian feel equally as involved and cared about as those who are. To encourage Christian leadership, staff have received training from the diocese specific to leadership in church schools including in the introduction of the Understanding Christianity resource for RE and leadership conferences. Strategies for the evaluation and development of RE and collective worship are in their infancy and are not yet rigorous enough to bring about improvement. Arrangements for religious education and collective worship meet statutory requirements.

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