

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Yaxham Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Norwich Road, Yaxham, Dereham. NR19 1RU

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Norwich
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Norfolk
Date of inspection	01 November 2016
Date of last inspection	08 December 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	121129
Headteacher	Cor Dekker
Inspector's name and number	Jean Johnson 608

School context

The school is a smaller than average primary school with 102 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The school serves the villages of Yaxham and Whinburgh and also attracts pupils from outside its traditional catchment area. The current headteacher has been in post since 2013. He had a significant period of continuous leave due to ill health during his first and second year as head. The school is approximately one mile from the local parish church.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Yaxham VA Primary as a Church of England school are good

- The Christian values underpinning the school's ethos are recognised and promoted by all stakeholders in a variety of ways. Pupils demonstrate their understanding of these values in their everyday lives.
- Strong and effective links between the school and the local church promote the school's Christian character and ethos.
- The head teacher provides strong leadership for collective worship and religious education (RE), ensuring that they make a positive contribution to the Christian ethos of the school

Areas to improve

- Strengthen the self-evaluation of the school as a church school by ensuring that monitoring and evaluation by all stakeholders is focused on clear improvement priorities and leads to further improvements to the Christian distinctiveness of the school.
- Establish a consistent system for assessment in RE so that pupils know their next steps in learning and their progress in all aspects of RE can be tracked.
- Involve pupils in monitoring and evaluating collective worship. Use their responses to further assess the impact of worship and plan improvements.

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

Christian values, for example courage, perseverance, love and peace, are firmly embedded in the everyday life of the school and have a significant impact on behaviour and attitudes. A large banner in the hall displays these values, and pupils talk about which one means the most to them. They say, for example, that trust is important to them and that they feel that, in their school, they can trust adults and their friends. The 'Excellent Learners' programme, with its learning ambassadors, ensures that Christian values underpin attitudes and approaches to learning. As a result, pupils make at least expected progress in mathematics and reading, with progress in writing continuing to improve within the supportive nurturing environment of the school. Parents say that collective worship helps their children to gain a practical understanding of the values as they are explained in a modern context as well as being related to Bible stories. They value the school's Christian ethos, and say that it is a friendly, welcoming place where children look after each other, staff are sensitive to individual needs and any problems are easily resolved. Pupils' comments echo these thoughts. Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported through a wide range of activities. They raise money for a variety of charities for example Water Aid and Barnardo's. The school council talks about plans to sponsor a child in Africa this year, and pupils acknowledge the difference between their situation and that of the child they plan to help. Pupils' views are sought on aspects of school life, and a children's evaluation and action plan currently sets out agreed ideas for improvements to the playground, learning environment and behaviour. A range of after school clubs and the school's 'interest table' are examples of the way in which the school values and nurtures pupils' individual talents.

RE teaching reinforces and exemplifies the school's Christian values and supports pupils' spiritual development through the opportunities they have to reflect on and discuss key questions. Symbols and displays throughout the school reinforce its status and mission as a church school, and provide a focal point for spiritual reflection. Pupils have a sound understanding of Christianity as a world faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship, with its strong emphasis on reinforcing the school's Christian values, is central to the life of the school and has a recognisable impact on the good behaviour and attitudes seen. The head teacher takes the lead in planning worship, using the Values for Life materials as well as celebrating major festivals in the Christian year. The head teacher, staff and benefice clergy lead collective worship and pupils enjoy the variety of presentations they experience. They offer thoughtful responses to questions designed to encourage them to reflect on the collective worship theme, and particularly enjoy taking part in the plays which bring stories to life. They also value and talk about Friday assemblies when they celebrate each other's achievements both social and academic. Festivals, for example Easter, are celebrated in the local church and are well attended by parents. Monitoring has identified the need for pupils to be more actively involved in leading worship and there are plans in place for this to happen. Pupils talk about the Bible stories they hear, for example David and Goliath, and how this relates to the value of courage which is being explored in collective worship this half term. They interpret this in the context of their everyday lives saying that it tells them that they shouldn't be scared of a task, and that God is always with them. Displays in the hall also remind pupils of key messages. They talk about 'God's Top Ten', a child friendly version of the 10 commandments, and say, for example, that they think before they do something and make sure that they don't hurt anyone. Pupils have a sound understanding of the purpose of prayer and reflection. They talk about how they use the quiet area outside when they need to think or talk to God about their problems. They understand that sometimes God fixes their problem for them but other times he leaves them to fix it themselves! Some pupils also talk about how they share their thoughts with God by adding prayers to the prayer tree in their classroom. They have a developing awareness of the Trinity and talk about God making the world and then sending his son, Jesus who died. A candle is lit at the start of worship and pupils see this as a symbol that reminds them that God is with them. They learn about local Anglican traditions, for example liturgical colours, during the weekly act of collective worship led by the benefice clergy.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Strong leadership by the head teacher as subject leader ensures that RE makes an important contribution to the school's Christian ethos. Staff worked together in the last academic year to re-write the curriculum and introduce an enquiry based approach to learning. They were supported in this by a representative from the diocese. They will also be involved in the roll out of new local materials to enhance their teaching.

Pupils respond to key questions, for example 'Why do some people make pilgrimages?' by writing their own questions, which illustrate their curiosity and engagement with the topic. They also talk about their visit to the shrine at Walsingham, a practical experience which extended their understanding. Older pupils engage with difficult questions such as 'Does religion cause conflict or peace?' They are able to reflect on ongoing conflicts throughout

the world and the complex reasons for them. In the lesson observed, younger pupils were thinking about whether God always keeps his promises in the context of the story of Noah's Ark. Effective questioning also enabled children to reflect on and show their understanding of some of the school's Christian values in relation to the story and their own lives. Follow up activities reinforced key aspects of the story and gave pupils the opportunity to express their thoughts.

Pupils gain an understanding of other faiths, including how they relate to Christianity, through RE teaching and visits to other places of worship, for example a Synagogue. They give examples of commonalities between religions for example they all have a 'special book'. Standards in RE are broadly in line with national expectations and those in core curriculum subjects. The school is developing assessment processes to match the new curriculum. The focus in the new curriculum on skills for learning from religion is not currently fully reflected in the success criteria used for assessment. The school has not yet systematically monitored the impact of the new curriculum although there are indications that the enquiry based approach is enabling pupils to develop higher level thinking skills in RE.

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

The head teacher and foundation governors provide strong leadership for the school as a church school and are beginning to look at this more strategically. They are aware of the vulnerability of small schools so have thought about possible future changes to the school's status and are fully committed to preserving and enhancing the school's church foundation. They have consulted parents and staff, and worked together to create a new vision for the school with the strap line 'Together4Ever' resting on the four pillars of education, values, environment and relationships. This new vision has yet to be fully communicated to pupils, although their understanding of the school's Christian values is clearly illustrated in their good behaviour and attitudes in school. The school has a productive, well-established relationship with the local church. The benefice ordained local minister is a governor and a frequent visitor to the school, providing pastoral support when needed. She runs a popular after school club with the help of a member of the local church community. Themes are linked to the current value being explored in collective worship, and pupils talk about how they enjoy hearing stories about Jesus and making things linked to those stories. These sessions extend their biblical literacy as well as giving them opportunities to reflect on what Jesus means to them. Work from the school, including prayers, is displayed in the church and members of the local church community attend celebrations and events in school, reinforcing its status as a church school in the community. Parents say that they are welcomed into the school and that attending Friday Celebration Assembly enables them to see examples of the practical out workings of the school's Christian values. The school works closely with the diocese, and the head teacher regularly attends conferences to update and extend his understanding of aspects of Christian distinctiveness. Staff have attended training to develop RE teaching within the school, however current staff capacity has meant that there have been limited opportunities to consider developing staff as future leaders of a church school. Foundation governors have attended training to give them an understanding of their role in a church school. They have undertaken some monitoring of collective worship and informal monitoring of the school's Christian ethos, but their monitoring is not yet sufficiently focused and evaluative to lead to further improvements to the school's Christian distinctiveness.

SIAMS report November 2016, Yaxham VA Primary, Norwich, Road, Yaxham, Dereham. NR19 1RU