

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Thomas Bullock Church of England Primary Academy

Pound Green Shipdham Thetford IP25 7LF	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Norwich
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Inadequate
Date of academy conversion	November 2014
Name of multi-academy trust	Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust [DNEAT]
Date of inspection	16 January 2018
Date of last inspection	4 March 2015
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary Academy 141192
Headteacher	Paul Madsen
Inspector's name and number	Gill Hipwell 480

School context

This primary academy has 181 pupils on roll, which is small by national standards but average for Norfolk. Proportions of pupils with additional needs are broadly average. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The senior leadership team is stable but there have been a number of changes in leadership for both RE and collective worship and a new incumbent since the previous inspection. In September 2017 the school was judged by Ofsted to require improvement.

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

- Robust plans for strategic development have led to significant improvement in all areas of weakness identified in the previous inspection.
- The extent to which the core Christian values are embedded and understood enables all individuals to meet challenges with hope and confidence.
- Investment in religious education (RE) and collective worship has resulted in high standards and positive outcomes.
- There is wholehearted commitment from staff, governors and members of the church to developing and nurturing a distinctively Christian community.

Areas to improve

- Explore the effectiveness of communication between school leaders and governors so that there is a shared understanding, including agreed timescales, of how strategies will be implemented, monitored and evaluated.
- Develop the website and other public interfaces in such a way that they express the richness of the school's Christian character and the values which underpin it.
- Focus on any inconsistencies in rates of progress, sharing good practice to ensure that every pupil is supported and challenged to be the best they can be.

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

Since the previous inspection there has been a refocusing of the school's values. Six core Christian values, together with four cultural strands, form the basis of collective worship, school policies and curriculum planning. They are displayed in every area of the school and every individual, without exception, can explain these values, their biblical roots and their impact on behaviour and learning. Pupils are given many opportunities to explore them and are very clear about their importance. 'Values teach you how to live your life'. 'Values are in your heart, rules are just at school'.

Pupils know that they are loved. Staff invest a great deal of time in ensuring that individual needs are met, and the resultant close relationships ensure that behaviour is excellent and learning is purposeful. Staff are proactive in identifying the need for intervention and there are regular pupil progress meetings. Current monitoring indicates that outcomes are positive, especially the impact of providing greater challenge for higher achievers. However, a few areas of inconsistency remain, for example boys' progress in writing in some classes.

Pupils take responsibility for themselves and others with maturity and, through collective worship, PSHE and RE, are encouraged to discuss a wide range of social and moral issues. They have a developing understanding of community beyond the school, nurtured by good relationships with village groups and a carefully planned range of visits and visitors.

The Christian character of the school is supported by an environment rich with Christian symbols and with many varied opportunities to engage in prayer and reflection. RE makes a strong contribution through good teaching of Christian concepts, exploration of Christianity in varying cultures and by providing a safe environment where faith can be discussed openly and honestly. Pupils have a well-developed sense of personal spirituality and are confident in expressing their deep thoughts and questions.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils are exceptionally enthusiastic and articulate about worship and the impact that it has on them. They 'like celebrating God' and talk about the effect it has on their mood and behaviour; 'Collective worship makes me happy all day'. Staff and pupils say that behaviour, which was already good, has improved over the last year because of changes to collective worship. It has become the norm that all classroom staff attend, enabling ongoing exploration of the messages in the curriculum and beyond.

There is regular class reflection, where pupils discuss worship and its impact on them, with findings reported back to the worship coordinator. Governors, including the incumbent, monitor regularly and feed back to the ethos committee.

Good planning and resources support staff and visitors so that delivery of worship is consistently engaging and firmly focused on the Bible and the core Christian values. Worship has a breadth of Christian content within a clear structure which is used by all staff, the incumbent and visitors. The use of 'talking partners' is a key aspect of daily worship, encouraging pupils and staff to discuss and reflect with each other; the level of respect shown in worship allows this to happen very successfully. Simple liturgy, coloured cloths and the lighting of the Trinity candles with an accompanying prayer enhance pupils' understanding of Anglican tradition. Arrangements are in place to broaden pupils' worship experiences through welcoming more worship leaders from other Christian traditions.

Singing is a strength of the school and both pupils and staff describe it as powerful. Staff say that they are often 'moved by worship', something also experienced by the inspector.

Festivals and special occasions are celebrated in church with members of the community attending. The annual Remembrance Day service is prepared and delivered by Year 5 pupils. There are opportunities for some classes to lead worship, supported through RE work. A small group of pupils, at their request, led an act of worship using the established structure, including 'talking partners'; the success of this has led to more requests which are being facilitated by the worship coordinator.

Pupils of all ages can explain the concept of one God in three persons, with age appropriate understanding of how each aspect contributes to the whole.

There is a good understanding of the place and purpose of collective and individual prayer, with younger pupils focusing on thankfulness. Attractive prayer trees, linked to the core values, are situated around the school and contain a mixture of reflections completed in class and personal messages from individuals. Pupils say that these are well-used. They also speak of praying in other places around the school, including the outdoor peace garden, and at home.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Since the last inspection time and resources have been invested in developing RE learning, teaching and leadership. Very good progress has been made in all areas as the result of a systematic and methodical overhaul of the curriculum. Strong leadership, combined with meticulous planning, has transformed provision for pupils, who describe their lessons as 'exciting' and 'cool'.

Excellent support from the diocesan adviser has enabled the coordinator to develop her confidence in monitoring and assessment, which has been facilitated by dedicated leadership time. Monitoring of books is regular; best practice is strong but there are some inconsistencies in the standard of marking between and within classes. Progress and assessment are measured using age-related expectations which are currently being piloted across the diocese; outcomes are good for all groups. Pupil surveys by the RE coordinator inform adjustments to planning. RE is part of a rolling programme for subject reports to the senior leadership team and governors.

Good quality training has ensured that teachers are positive and confident. Units from the Understanding Christianity resource have been carefully introduced, accompanied by appropriate training and resources; this has had a positive impact on teaching and learning. Staff have shared training with other schools which they have found helpful in developing good practice.

The curriculum is strongly focused on enquiry for learning, with an expectation that classes will have the opportunity to experience a range of learning styles within this. A move in September to teaching in blocks rather than weekly has resulted in closer cross-curricular links, better retention of information for pupils and greater depth of learning. A good range of trips and visitors extends pupils' understanding of religious diversity and helps them to explore 'where is the religion around us?'

In the RE lessons observed, pupils were focused and on task. Appropriate resources supported their enquiries and links were made with learning in other subjects. Although pupils were enjoying the activities, there was a certain lack of pace for the higher achievers.

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

All leaders are firmly committed to the school's vision for pupils to 'enquire, learn and create using Christian values to build strong foundations'. Since the previous inspection they have implemented a robust, effective and imaginative strategic plan for improvement with clear targets and success criteria. Some governors feel that communication from school leaders could be better and also that some strategies are slow to be implemented; however, they describe relationships as strong and respectful. Governors have supported and challenged school leaders to ensure that RE and collective worship have a pivotal role in the life of the school.

Christian leadership is of high quality and well-distributed. Governors ensure that there is sufficient funding for appropriate training for all who need it. Those holding specific responsibilities are well-resourced and have strong support from governors and the headteacher. A committee focused on ethos and community is monitoring all aspects of distinctiveness and reporting back to the governing body with suggested action points.

Recruitment of staff is focused on the six core Christian values which underpin all policy and practice. Staff are fully engaged in ensuring that the values are woven into the curriculum and are part of everyday vocabulary in both teaching and behaviour management. A cohesive and loyal staff team works hard to secure the best outcomes for all pupils, making good use of external partners to improve their practice. Careful analysis of the 2017 Key Stage 2 results has led to a closer focus on individual progress and challenge for every pupil, particularly the most able. The current progress data shows an improving trend for most groups although there are some inconsistencies.

There is a close relationship with the local church which goes beyond shared worship; the incumbent is a significant figure in school for both pupils and adults. The school is embraced by its wider community and was very involved in the drawing up of the village charter which supports the school's values. Pupils benefit from local activities which develop their sense of responsibility and broaden their cultural experiences. Parents understand and appreciate the Christian values of the school, saying that they feel 'welcomed and involved' and commenting on the pupils' 'amazing knowledge of Christianity'. Leaders are outward looking, working closely with other DNEAT schools and seeking out good practice. The support, advice and training provided by the diocese and DNEAT have had a significant impact on leaders' confidence to implement change which has been a major factor in the improvement since the previous inspection.

The impact and importance of the school's values-rich character are not always communicated effectively to a wider audience. Public information, for example the website, is pragmatic rather than inspiring and fails to convey the sense of joy that permeates the school.