

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Taxal and Fernilee Church of England School

Reddish Road, Whaley Bridge, High Peak, Derbyshire SK23 7DL

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Chester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Derbyshire
Date of inspection	16 June 2017
Date of last inspection	May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 112872
Headteacher	Victoria Keen
Inspector's name and number	Frank Driessen (675)

School context

Taxal and Fernilee is a smaller than the average-sized Church of England primary school. All pupils currently come from White British backgrounds, which results in the proportion of pupils for whom English is not their first language as being far below the national average. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils is well below the national average as is the percentage of pupils with a special educational need or disability. The religious education (RE) subject leader was appointed in September 2016.

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

- The highly inclusive and welcoming nature of this family-centred school is promoted by the very enthusiastic head teacher with great drive, keenness and much Christian warmth. She has the strong support of the staff, all of whom follow her example with similar enthusiasm and equal commitment.
- The excellent and innovative work of the dedicated pupils' support team ensures that the valuing of vulnerable pupils and their families remains at the heart of the school's Christian mission.
- The strong partnership between the school and parish extends the spiritual experience of pupils, strengthens the church's contact with families and provides a positive and dynamic Christian witness at the heart of the local community.

Areas to improve

- Identify the core Christian values that underpin the school's Christian vision of Community, Achievement, Respect and Environment (CARE) and how they influence the distinctive Christian nature of the school in order to provide a more obvious continuity between them both.
- Involve governors, staff, parents and pupils in a more systematic evaluation of the school's distinctive Christian character, including the impact of collective worship, in order to secure church school improvement.
- Ensure the further development of the distinctive Christian vision through more focused training on developing future church school leaders.
- Introduce to the RE programme a greater number of visits, visitors and links with other cultural communities so pupils' understanding of non-Christian faiths will be deepened.

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

This is a joyful and loving school whose core purpose and vision is to 'Give children the best start in life' utilising a framework of Christian values which include love, compassion, respect and forgiveness. Using these values, the headteacher, assistant head, staff and governors have successfully created an inclusive loving family environment within which all pupils are cherished as unique individuals. Many pupils and parents, however, do not fully articulate these values when talking about relationships or link them to the Christian vision. Nevertheless, relationships are excellent and the positive impact of the staff enhances the self-esteem of the children. Parents see the Christian ethos as a further strength of the school. One parent, whose family suffered an unexpected bereavement, commented on the level of compassion shown to her and her children. 'I cannot praise the staff enough,' she said. 'These are people who really care.' The headteacher and her staff know every child extremely well and maximise the support and learning opportunities. Pupils enjoy school very much and attendance is consistently above the national average. 'This school,' declared one pupil, 'is awesome!' There is an emphasis on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children who are nurtured and supported through Christian care and love to ensure that they succeed. Because of this, most disadvantaged children make good progress and achieve better than other pupils nationally.

Achievements across and beyond school life are celebrated, from demonstrating the current school Christian value to acknowledging good behaviour as well as academic, social and sports successes. This inclusive approach enables all pupils to develop feelings of self worth and to celebrate difference. An excellent example involves the inclusion of traditional running races and activity events at sports day so that all pupils can participate and feel valued. The school environment includes religious displays, a prayer tree, crosses, pupils' prayers, pupils' reflective responses, and Bible texts. These enhance the richness of the ethos and encourage the spiritual development of all members of the school community. Children's personal prayers are exhibited on a prayer tree and echo particular and relevant concerns such as the recent Manchester Arena bombing. These prayers, along with other opportunities for reflection and prayer, directly support the children's spiritual and moral development. The Year 6 visit to a local Christian retreat to study reflection and prayer is an outstanding example of how pupils' spiritual development is nurtured.

Exciting and challenging RE makes a very good contribution to the school's Christian character and enables pupils to think about Christian belief and practice. One parent remarked on the effect of this approach, 'Our children learn to understand themselves and the world in which they live.' Pupils' moral and social development is also exceptionally well fostered and there is a huge sense of community amongst all associated with the school. Pupils help one another and show compassion and care for others. A direct result of this is demonstrated through the support pupils give to an extensive range of charities. One child said, 'We need to help those who are less fortunate than us.' The school's annual community week also helps to support the outliving of the school's Christian values in the pupils' lives and those of their families. Pupils have an excellent appreciation of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith as well as a clear understanding of the beliefs and practices of the major faiths in the UK and worldwide. This prepares them well for life in a diverse global society. One pupil commented, 'We need to treat all people with respect so it's important to understand other religions.' The school listens to and acts upon the views of the pupils and this has resulted in beneficial change with, for example, the purchase of large items of playground equipment. They contribute enthusiastically through the buddying arrangements, school council, prefects and peer mediators.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is held daily and has a very high profile within school life, creating a very positive influence upon the school community through its promotion of a Christian values programme. This is embedded through the weekly cycle of worship that revisits the value each day. The Friday celebration worship allows the pupils to reflect upon and see how the value has affected their school and home lives across the week. Collective worship is, therefore, an integral part of the school day and is led by a variety of leaders that include clergy, staff, pupils and outside speakers. Effective planning by the headteacher ensures that all collective worship is biblically based. It reflects Anglican practice and the Church calendar and makes clear links with the school's Christian values as well as recognition of other faith communities. Pupils participate enthusiastically in collective worship, with lively and very well led singing of aptly chosen songs, sung with evident understanding. They are challenged to see the relevance of Bible stories and scripture in their lives today. 'Bible stories teach us how to be better people,' observed one child. This promotes pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development very effectively.

There are good links with Holy Trinity Church and St. James' Church, with parents invited to services in both. Key festivals in the church year, such as Harvest, Christmas and Easter help reinforce pupils' understanding of aspects of Anglican distinctiveness. Prayer is well-valued and its effects travel beyond the school boundaries. Parents cite examples of their children praying about difficult situations they find themselves in. Many pupils understand and

articulate the purpose and value of prayer within their daily lives and to the wider world around them. Pupils have many opportunities to be involved in acts of worship through role-play, drama, prayers and class-led worship each term but fewer times when they are able to choose and direct how worship themes are explored. Classes lead whole-school worship each term with a focus on the particular value being studied. 'Brain-builder' homework sheets focus upon the current Christian value. These deepen parents' understanding of how powerful the influence of the value is upon the school's Christian ethos. Older pupils are developing their understanding of the nature of the Trinity. They confidently share their views on God as Father and Jesus as Son but are less clear about the character of the Holy Spirit. Pupils' opinions and ideas about worship are collected but there is currently no systematic arrangement that enables the views of all to be heard.

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

The high quality of the leadership of the head teacher contributes very effectively to the success of the school. She promotes a clear Christian vision of faith in action by being an excellent role model to the whole school community. She leads by example, showing enthusiasm for all she does and displaying a caring and compassionate nature. As a consequence of this, she has secured a great team spirit among the school's staff. The school has high expectations of all pupils and their attitudes and behaviour reflect this. The school's vision and values influence the priorities and decisions made by the governing body. The emotional wellbeing of pupils and families is one such priority. For example, a dedicated team, including an art therapist, provides innovative approaches to breaking down complex barriers to learning for disadvantaged children. The use of a key worker is also proving effective through focused support for progress and learning. Both approaches are strong evidence of the governors' commitment to promote a clear Christian message of compassion and love in action.

In keeping the profile of the Christian foundation high, the school has made good progress in developing an understanding of how its Christian vision of CARE (Community, Achievement, Respect, Environment) underpins all aspects of school life. Leadership and management, however, are aware that more could still be done to identify the core Christian values that underpin this vision and how they impact upon the distinctive Christian nature of the school. The quality of the school's self evaluation is good. Governors support and challenge the headteacher through informed questioning and discussion. They are aware, however, that there is a need for greater involvement in the regular monitoring and evaluation of the direction the school is taking regarding its church school status. The school has begun to undertake a more formal approach by assessing the views of pupils and parents regarding its distinctive nature, the effects of which are still to be explored. The recently appointed RE coordinator has a great passion for the subject and an excellent understanding of its place within a church school. She has ensured that the RE syllabus is integral to the Christian ethos, maintaining its integrity as a subject within the curriculum. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship and both policies are up to date. Christian leadership is well supported by effective links with the diocese which have helped to promote the school's distinctive Christian nature. Much effective practice is shared with the local schools' cluster. These beneficial links include joint training and shared sports events such as the recent sports day for local nursery pupils hosted by the schools' reception children. Both issues for development from the previous inspection have been fully addressed.

There is strong parental support for what the school is achieving. Parents appreciate that the school provides opportunities for their children to discuss matters of faith and belief. They feel that this allows the children to make their own choices about faith in the future. In particular, parents say that the inclusive nature of the school gives their children a tolerance and respect for others. Relationships with the local churches are very strong. There is regular support through prayer. Church and school functions and services are advertised in the monthly school newsletter and parish magazine. The vicar and lay reader both make important contributions to the worshipping and pastoral life of the school. Pupils say that Reverend Margaret and Reverend Beryl talk to them about the important things of the Bible that might help them live out their lives. A wide range of local and global community links and partnerships, such as the long-established link school in Poland, enthuse pupils with a genuine sense of pride in their community. This helps them empathise and develop as compassionate, caring young people. The links between school, church and families are harmonious and create an impressive sense of Christian community.

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