

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Thurlow Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Address	Little Thurlow Haverhill Suffolk CB9 7HY		
Date of inspection	13 June 2019	Status of school	VC Primary Federated with Hundon Community School
Diocese	St Edmundsbury and Ipswich	URN	124698

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

School context

Thurlow VC primary school is smaller than average, with 103 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. 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 also below average. In September 2014, Thurlow federated with a community primary school. The headteacher is executive head of both schools and has been in her substantive role since summer 2018.

The school's Christian vision

The vision statement, 'laying the foundations for a bright future', is used by both schools in the federation. At Thurlow, it has a theological basis, the parable of the wise and foolish builders: Matthew 7 v 24 -27 and Luke 6 v 46 – 49

Key findings

- Leaders are successfully reinvigorating the vision so that it impacts on all aspects of school life.
- Relationships across the school are rooted in biblical values such as trust and friendship and reflect the vision of the school. This has resulted in an inclusive community where all work together for the common good.
- The quality of RE work as taught through the BRAVE curriculum approach is impressive, but the impact of this on spiritual development is not monitored robustly.
- Policies are shared across the federation and do not always make explicit reference to Thurlow's Christian distinctiveness.
- Opportunities for pupils to be involved in collective worship are evident but not extensive.

Areas for development

- Fully involve pupils in planning, leading and evaluating collective worship so that they routinely take a more active role. Ensure that this is monitored so that strategic improvements can be made.
- Ensure all policies and other public documents, including the website, are written in a way that directly links to and supports the theological vision. All will then better understand the school's distinctive Christian character.
- Develop robust curriculum monitoring which enables leaders to evaluate the impact of the Christian vision and the school's provision for spiritual development.

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 findings

The vision statement 'laying the foundations for a brighter future' is shared with Thurlow's partner community school. Staff, pupils and parents understand and appreciate what it means and relate it to their own experience. The second part of the vision is based on the parable of the wise and foolish builder. This provides a sound theological basis. Pupils give examples of how the school helps them to build foundations for a bright future like the wise builder by working hard and treating others with dignity and respect. Expectations are high and all adults are ambitious for pupils to do well.

The school has undergone changes of leadership in recent years. The headteacher is recently appointed to her substantive post and is new to church school leadership. She has quickly made positive changes which have resulted in a welcoming and inclusive culture. She is supported by staff and governors who together have led a concerted effort to reinvigorate the Christian vision across the school community.

Outcomes are at least in line with national expectations. Vulnerable pupils and those who are not achieving for whatever reason receive bespoke support so that they are able to flourish academically and socially. Staff training is a priority, as leaders view this as an important investment in the future of the school. Leaders say that enabling everyone to be the best they can be for the benefit of all is part of their Christian purpose.

The vision statement is underpinned by Christian values such as hope, and pupils know these well. This term they are learning about trust and friendship. Pupils talk confidently about 'friendship' as illustrated by the Bible story of Jonathan and David. The values are clearly displayed around the school and in some places are linked to Bible verses. This is powerful, as pupils relate them to their everyday life. One pupil said that they were able to reflect on a Bible verse about being courageous whilst waiting at the office.

Behaviours which display values such as kindness and resilience are recognised and rewarded. Pupils' are clear that there is no bullying in the school. If there were, they are confident that it would be quickly stopped. When conflict occurs, they are encouraged to resolve it themselves in a way which reflects Christian reconciliation. They trust each other and adults to assist them with any difficulties. One said, 'Teachers work hard to help you'.

Parents are universally positive about the school. The vision and values have been shared with them and they appreciate their impact on pupils. A parent noted that their child had challenged a view put forward in a news item as a result of what they had learnt about peace. They appreciate that their children are known to staff who nurture them as individuals and have confidence in the headteacher and her team. One parent said, 'I know my child is not a statistic here'.

RE is well led by a member of the senior leadership team who monitors the quality of provision and pupil outcomes. Teachers use the Emmanuel scheme as part of the cross curricular Beliefs, Religion and Values Education (BRAVE) approach. BRAVE enables pupils to develop thinking and questioning skills. This deepens their understanding. Pupils are exploring how to make the school eco-friendly because big issues such as global warming are regularly discussed.

The school encourages pupils to see themselves as 'brave explorers of faith'. Their knowledge is impressive. They respectfully listen to the views of others while confidently discussing the differences and similarities between Islam and Christianity. One said that she felt inspired to learn how other children worship because it helped her understand why beliefs matter. This contributes to the development of a culture of acceptance where all live well together. Anyone new is welcomed regardless of who they are or what their beliefs may be.

Governors took the strategic decision to allocate additional funding to implement BRAVE. As a result, the profile of RE has increased and standards raised. However, leaders do not monitor the impact of this curriculum approach on spiritual development.

In addition to the RE curriculum there are regular Pause Days which contribute to staff and pupils' spiritual development. All are able to take a 'step back' and reflect on key Christian events or concepts. A recent exploration of Pentecost resulted in artwork, prayers and poems. Pupils know that God is a trinity and through the Pentecost Pause Day they have gained a greater understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Pupils thrive on opportunities to contribute to the life of the school. These activities articulate the school's vision and include befriending new pupils and looking after those who are unhappy or lonely. Regular fund raising and the opportunity to participate in the 'mini enterprise' day enable them to engage in social action.

Collective worship meets statutory requirements. Pupils and staff look forward to it as a time to pray and 'learn about God together' in a way that is meaningful to them. They listen intently to a Bible story and offer reflections on what they have heard, are respectful of the silences and sing enthusiastically. They understand that praying is 'sending a message to God'. Although pupils' views and involvement are actively sought in other aspects of school life, this is not yet the case for collective worship. They do not regularly participate in its planning, leading or evaluation.

Until recently, leaders chose to call collective worship 'reflection time'. This was felt by them to best describe a special time set apart from the rest of the school day. They now understand that using the term 'collective worship' is an expression of the school's Christian distinctiveness. The collective worship policy has been recently reviewed and better reflects the changes being made to current practice.

Policies and other documents are shared with the partner school. They clearly articulate the shared vision but are not always linked to the Bible values in a way that accentuates Christian distinctiveness.

School leaders, including governors, monitor the impact of the vision and collective worship, but this is not systematic. As a result, opportunities to recognise how the vision is being lived out are sometimes missed.

The local parish is currently without clergy. Links are well maintained through the foundation governors and services continue to take place at the church. This is valued by all.

Executive headteacher	Sharon FitzGerald
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