

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

Thurston Church of England Academy			
Address	School Lane, Thurston, Suffolk. IP31 3RY		
Date of inspection	22 November 2019	Status of school	Academy inspected as Voluntary Controlled Thedwastre Education Trust
Diocese	St Edmundsbury and Ipswich	URN	124715

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	Requires Improvement
Additional Judgement	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good

### School context

Thurston Academy is a primary school with 211 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 below national averages. The school is led by co-headteachers, one of whom was previously full time headteacher, the other previously the deputy.

### The school's Christian vision

Working together to inspire, challenge and achieve  
'.....with God all things are possible.' Matthew 19:26

### Key findings

- A wide consultation process has taken place to revisit the school's vision and associated values. However, their Christian foundation is not clear. The separate set of Christian values which shape collective worship and historic adherence to Olympic values contribute to this lack of clarity.
- Leaders, including governors, are effective in their evaluation of the effectiveness of the school as a Church of England school. However, the priorities for improvement arising from this process are not followed through systematically in subsequent plans.
- As a reflection of its inclusive Christian ethos the school welcomes all pupils, including those with additional needs. Staff have high expectations of pupils and work well together to ensure all make best possible progress.
- Collective worship and religious education (RE) are important to school life. High expectations for RE have been established. Significant improvements in collective worship secured in recent months have resulted in increased pupil engagement.
- Although the importance of prayer and reflection is recognised by all, opportunities beyond collective worship are limited. Consequently, understanding of spirituality is limited.
- The areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have not been fully addressed.

### Areas for development

- Ensure that the Christian foundation and centrality of the school's vision is understood and appreciated by all stakeholders so that its positive impact can be clearly traced through all aspects of the life of the school.
- Strengthen systems for school improvement planning so that progress against priorities arising from evaluation can be closely monitored by leaders, including governors.
- Broaden the range of opportunities for pupils to pray and reflect, enabling them to explore and flourish in the spiritual dimension of their lives.

## **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 centrality and Christian foundation of the school's vision statement in enabling pupils and adults to flourish has not been established. The vision and a series of related values have been arrived at through consultation with all members of the school community. Whilst they have considerable merit as a set of aspirations and a moral code their Christian foundation and theological underpinning are unclear. The profile of the vision is also undermined by collective worship being premised on a separate set of Christian values and by pupils and parents retaining a focus on the school's previous Olympic motto 'be the best you can be'. Pupils lack understanding of the context of the selected biblical text and struggle to explain its relevance to the vision. The impact of the vision cannot be seen in relevant policies and development planning. Support and advice available from the diocese in relation to the school's vision and values have not been utilised.

The headteachers lead an enthusiastic and cohesive staff team which is committed to enabling all pupils to make the best possible academic progress. High aspirations for pupil achievement are reflected in outcomes which are in line with or above national averages in most measures, including at greater depth. Evidence in workbooks suggests that ambitious targets set for current pupils will be achieved. The school is very effective in providing additional support for vulnerable pupils. One parent described how her child looks forward to coming to school every day, despite finding academic work a struggle. Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced creative curriculum and a range of extra-curricular activities. These create opportunities for them to flourish in all areas of school life. Practical expressions of Christian care and responsibility extend from the school to parents who are experiencing difficulty. This culture of valuing every individual has a significant impact on both pupils and adults, developing self-confidence and encouraging aspiration.

Self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness as a church school is detailed and accurate. It results in a series of 'next steps' being identified. However, several of these do not appear as priorities within the current school improvement plan. The plan also lacks the clear time scales and milestones which would enable leaders, including governors, to monitor progress against each priority. Governors, including the parish vicar, know their school well. They have carried out regular evaluation of RE and worship and provide detailed constructive feedback. Questions devised by the pupil faith committee have been used to glean the views of parents and pupils. The outcomes are largely positive and there is evidence of feedback being utilised to inform improvements in collective worship. There are positive links with the local Church community. Pupils appreciate both the vicar's leadership of collective worship and sessions led by the local 'Open the Book' team. They look forward to visits to the Church, both to celebrate festivals in the Christian calendar and as part of their RE studies.

Relationships across the school are strong and are modelled by all staff. Parents and pupils describe how the values explored within collective worship have a direct impact on pupils' behaviour and attitudes to one another. They do not readily refer to the school's vision in this respect. Pupils are polite and articulate. They work well together in groups and show respect for each other's viewpoints. Teachers draw on a range of strategies to ensure all pupils are focussed on their learning in class and feel safe and happy during breaktimes. Parents particularly value the relationships formed between older and younger pupils, through reading buddies and the new seating arrangements in worship. The importance of pupil mental health is reflected in leaders' investment in an emotional literacy support assistant. Pupils experiencing difficulties appreciate and benefit greatly from her support.

Pupils' understanding of spirituality is limited because provision and guidance are inconsistent. Prayer and reflection are an important part of collective worship. 'Pop up' areas for reflection are created. An example of this was an area of remembrance, created near a local wartime trench. Forest Schools sessions are used effectively to encourage appreciation of God's world and our responsibility in caring for it. However, there is nowhere in shared areas inside school or within the grounds set aside for pupils to reflect or pray. In two classrooms attractive and engaging areas have been set aside for this purpose but this is not the case in other classes. Pupils are supported to develop a sense of social and moral responsibility and encouraged to instigate social action when they become aware of particular needs. The school supports a range of local and national charities which pupils readily link to the Christian values of compassion and generosity. Through RE pupils gain understanding of our diverse world and the need for tolerance and respect. However, their appreciation of difference and diversity within their own country is limited.

Significant improvements in collective worship have been secured in recent months. The collective worship leader has drawn on training from the diocese and feedback from questionnaires to instigate a programme of improvement. Changes in seating, the pattern of worship and additional responsibilities for pupils have resulted in pupils and staff becoming more actively involved. By systematically focussing on Christian values in rotation,

leaders ensure worship has an impact on pupils' lives in school and beyond. Home learning tasks on the theme of the current Christian value inform parents and encourage them to investigate the value further with their child. One parent described how her child was 'enthralled by the Bible story. He couldn't wait to tell me all about it'. Leadership is varied, which enables pupils to develop an appreciation of a range of styles and approaches to worship. Plans are in place to provide greater opportunities for pupils to plan, lead and evaluate worship.

RE is a strength of the school. It has high status, meets statutory requirements and reflects the Church of England's statement of entitlement for RE. It contributes effectively to the Christian ethos of the school. The subject leader has a depth of knowledge and a contagious passion for her subject. She engages with training provided by the diocese and cascades this to staff, equipping them to deliver lessons which engage and challenge pupils. As a result, pupils enjoy the subject and collaborate well, exchanging ideas whilst respecting each other's views. Assessment systems ensure that pupil achievement is at least in line with other subjects and is used well to inform teachers' planning. RE enables pupils to develop a clear understanding of Christianity and other world religions. This informs and shapes their own beliefs and equips them for their future lives.

Co-headteachers	Kathy Lambert and John Bayes
Inspector's name and number	Graham Lancaster (713)