

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ashurst Church of England Aided Primary School	
School Lane, Ashurst, Steyning, West Sussex, BN44 3AY	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chichester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	West Sussex
Date of inspection	25 & 26 April 2018
Date of last inspection	7 & 14 November 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Aided 126020
Headteacher	Janet Williams
Inspector's name and number	Richard Dyer 513

School context

Ashurst CE Aided Primary School is a small rural primary school with 67 pupils from the local community and surrounding areas taught in predominantly vertical year groups. All pupils are of White British ethnicity with English their first language. The number of children with special educational needs and entitled to Pupil Premium funding is very small. The headteacher has been in post 22 years. The school is located in a modified Victorian building with a small hard surface playground outside. A community recreation field opposite the school is used at break/lunchtimes and for outdoor activities. There are strong and close partnerships with the local church and community, the wider community of schools, and a school in The Gambia.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ashurst CE Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- The headteacher's strong leadership based on a clear Christian mission for the school solidly underpins the school's Christian character and is fully understood and supported by the whole school community.
- The school's strong and distinctive Christian character, deeply and securely embedded in all aspects of the school, impacts very positively on outcomes for pupils and all members of the school community.
- The school's extensive network of very strong and highly effective partnerships significantly contributes to the school's Christian character and distinctiveness.
- The extensive breadth of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) opportunities impacts significantly on the spiritual development of the whole school community.

Areas to improve

- Develop pupils' understanding of diversity by further establishing additional partnerships with other faith communities within the UK.
- Develop the quality religious education teaching and learning by continuing to embed new units of Understanding Christianity and associated assessment procedures as they are adopted.
- Develop succession planning by identifying and implementing further opportunities for church school leadership.

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

Ashurst CE Primary School has a strong and distinctive Christian character based on a clear Christian mission statement centred upon three Christian values. This strong Christian character is securely and deeply embedded in all aspects of school life and celebrated throughout the school in vibrant displays. The mission and values are shared and modelled by all members of the school community who confidently articulate them and their impact on school daily life and pupils' well-being. Pupils clearly talk about the link between the school's Christian values and biblical teaching and how the teachings of Jesus are the basis for how they live their lives, for example showing forgiveness. Parents talk passionately about the school being a warm, friendly, joyful place where children are loved, nurtured, cared for and respected. They also report the strength and support the school gives them in times of personal crisis, and how strongly the school's Christian ethos and values impact positively on their children long after they leave. One former pupil stated, "I may leave Ashurst but Ashurst will never leave me."

The school mission and values strongly underpin the curriculum and the high level of care and relationships across the school community enabling the school to successfully meet pupils' individual academic and pastoral needs. The impact is seen in pupils' excellent progress and achievements, outstanding relationships among all members of the school community, the exemplary behaviour and very high attendance. The curriculum includes regular opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development with high quality experiences that develop personal spirituality. For example, using their rural location to experience the wonders of nature, regularly handling live animals, and cultivation of the school garden. SMSC is also developed through visits to museums, castles and cathedrals, and through the close partnerships with the local church and community, and local schools and colleges for curricular and extra-curricular activities. Partnerships with other communities nationally are not yet as well established as the special, strong and effective international partnership with a school in Gambia which contributes significantly to pupils understanding of cultural diversity. SMSC is further promoted through religious education (RE) and collective worship, pupil responsibilities in the daily life of the school and support for local, national and international human and animal charities, including the adoption of several Rwandan silverback gorillas.

Religious Education contributes significantly to the school's Christian character through its promotion of the school's Christian values, Christian teaching in the Bible and the main festivals in the church year. Religious education also contributes to SMSC development by raising pupils' awareness and understanding of diverse faiths and cultures.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is distinctly Christian and central to school life. It strongly promotes the school's Christian mission and has a positive impact on the life of the whole school community. All staff willingly attend and describe how inclusive it makes them feel. Worship takes place at school and in the church at key times in the Christian calendar. The school also participates in a church family service once a month and other key Sunday services such as Mothering and Rogation Sundays. Parents keenly attend these and other key worship occasions at school.

Worship is carefully planned through themes that focus on the promotion of the school's values and Christian teachings, and includes 'Follow Up' for class worship and discussions. Worship is led by the headteacher and staff, local clergy and pupils on different days of the week. It is imaginatively conducted to engage the pupils, encourage participation and help develop spirituality. For example, being held outdoors when possible to enjoy and be inspired by nature. Pupil involvement in worship is very important and includes leading prayers, readings and the weekly class worship. The key elements of Christian worship and symbolism are present which pupils clearly understand. For example, that lighting a candle represents Jesus as the light of the world. Worship includes a strong focus on the Trinity which is imaginatively explained resulting in pupils being able to articulate an age appropriate understanding. Prayer is a significant and integral part of worship and the life of the school. They are said at the start and end of the school day and at lunchtime. Pupils write prayers in class which are collected into books for everyone to share and there is a 'Prayer Area' where pupils can write and display their own prayers. There is also an outdoor Prayer and Reflection Garden for all members of the school community to use anytime. Worship, prayer and reflection areas provide opportunities for stillness and spiritual reflection which the school uses effectively especially at times of local, national and international tragedy when the school engages in collective and personal prayer and reflection. Pupils talk easily about the range of different ways they can pray and that prayer is important to Christians because,

“It helps you ask for God’s help and forgiveness, and to thank Him when He does”. Parents report warmly about how prayer continues at home with pupils saying Grace before meals and prayers at bedtime. There are well embedded and effective systems for the monitoring and evaluation of worship. This is done on a regular basis by the school leadership and governors and shows that worship is highly effective in developing pupils’ understanding of Jesus Christ. Pupils and parents contribute to the evaluations through verbal and written feedback which show that worship is relevant, and makes a difference, to the lives of the school community. Pupils enjoy worship, describe how it makes them feel inspired and valued, and confidently recall their favourite Bible stories.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

Religious education (RE) contributes significantly to the Christian character of the school. The teaching of RE is excellent with clear differentiation and challenge, and imaginatively linked when appropriate to other curriculum areas, collective worship, and visits to the church. The RE curriculum uses the new ‘Understanding Christianity’ materials very effectively which are delivered through an enquiry approach using a variety of creative strategies such as art, drama and model making. This engages and motivates pupils who are clearly excited by RE, speak confidently about their learning in RE and say how much they enjoy it. Examples of pupils’ high quality RE can be seen in the work produced as part of the diocese ‘Year of the Bible’ and ‘Year of Prayer’. Religious education strongly contributes to the pupils SMSC development including raising their awareness and understanding of cultural diversity by learning about Judaism, Hinduism and Islam and visiting their communities and places of worship. Pupils talk confidently about these faiths and the importance of learning about them. Secure and accurate assessment procedures are in place showing pupils’ progress and attainment is very good.

The leadership of RE is strong. The RE co-ordinator is well qualified and highly committed and governors have a keen interest in RE which they regularly monitor. Very effective regular monitoring and evaluation systems are in place and RE is specifically included in the school improvement plan to ensure its effective development. The current development is the further embedding of the new Understanding Christianity materials and RE assessment as new units of the material is adopted. Effective links exist with local schools and the diocese to provide training and support to develop the RE leadership and promote effective outcomes for the RE improvement plan.

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

The headteacher has a very strong and clear Christian mission for the school that solidly underpins the school’s Christian distinctiveness and leads with passion and conviction. She is strongly supported by staff and governors who clearly articulate this vision and its impact of the school’s Christian character, daily life of the school and pupils’ academic and personal development. For example, the confident engagement of pupils with all aspects of school life; their positive achievements and well-being; exemplary behaviour and relationships; and strong SMSC development. Monitoring and evaluation is securely established and clearly linked with the school improvement plan which has a specific section on the school’s distinctive Christian character, collective worship and RE. Regular and robust governor monitoring results in them having a very good understanding of the school and its pupils. They both challenge and support the headteacher, and promote effective school improvement. Feedback from parents and pupils is regularly sought and impact on school development. For example, changed format and timings to events on sports day and at Christmas to accommodate pupils differing needs. The school takes advantage of its partnership with local schools, colleges and the diocese for sharing staff expertise and development opportunities such as in adopting the new ‘Understanding Christianity’ material. The school has identified a need to develop effective succession planning and staff share expertise to support each other’s development. However, opportunities for staff to prepare for specific future leadership in church schools, such as RE or senior leadership, are not fully established. There are close and effective partnerships with parents, the local community, and the parish church and diocese which all contribute to school life and the promotion of its values. Parents help in school, support school events and give regular feedback, the school and community join in each other’s events such as pupils entering their garden produce into local shows and contributing to the parish magazine, and the community joining the school’s Remembrance Day commemorations. Local clergy lead worship and support RE, and the school regularly attends church services and the diocese annual Leavers’ Service and ‘Quiet/Reflection Days’.

Arrangements for RE and worship meet statutory requirements and both areas are very effectively led and managed.