

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Esh Church of England Aided Primary School

Front Street, Esh Village, Durham, DH7 9QR

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Durham

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Durham

Date of inspection

19 October 2017

Date of last inspection

10 December 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided 114251

Headteacher

Christine Johnston

Inspector's name and number

Richard Goodman 889

School context

Esh Church of England Aided Primary School is a smaller than average rural, village primary school. There have been significant staffing changes since the last inspection. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2016 and the deputy headteacher in September 2015. All pupils are of white British heritage. The percentage of pupils who are in receipt of Pupil Premium and receive free school meals is well below national average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Esh as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Passionate promotion of Christian values by the Headteacher ensures they are understood and lived out by the entire school community. This has an incredibly positive impact on pupil achievement and their emotional well-being.
- Christian values are clearly mapped out across religious education (RE) curriculum and significantly contribute to pupils' understanding of them and the relevance they have to their lives.
- Pupils develop a clear understanding of Jesus and his teachings. Opportunities are given to consider how this can be translated into their own lives.
- School leaders form strong mutually beneficial partnerships with parents and the local vicar and church. As a result, a range of partners contribute to enrich the lives of learners.

Areas to improve

- Continue to develop pupils' understanding of diverse communities including other world faiths. Provide opportunities for pupils to visit diverse places of worship to enhance this understanding.
- Experiment with a range of prayer space initiatives, including indoor and outdoor spaces, to aid spiritual development.
- To develop practice take the lead in creating links with other schools in relation to the teaching of RE in early years and Reception.
- Embed Christian values within school policies so that the impact can be evaluated effectively, driving forward improvements.

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

The motto of 'Everyone Smiles Here' is clearly evident every day. This is a very loving school where securing the happiness of each child is seen as essential in realising their full God-given potential. Christian values, such as love and respect, are lived out each day and inform how the school community acts towards each other. Achievement is outstanding with many pupils, including those who are most vulnerable, achieving above their expectations.

Attendance figures are also extremely high which confirms how much pupils enjoy school. An obvious level of personalised love and support is given to each child to ensure that their needs are met. Pupils with special education needs in particular are fully included in the life of the school and are supported to achieve their full potential. Initiatives such as 'Relax Kids' highlights the importance attached to developing pupils' emotional wellbeing, contributing significantly to raising resilience and self-confidence.

Pupils experience a wealth of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities, notably within RE and collective worship. These experiences provide a framework for supporting deep spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. High quality displays show pupil participation in initiatives such as the Archbishop of York Award, highlighting the varied ways pupils live out Christian values.

The behaviour system is understood by all pupils and focuses on rewarding positive behaviour. There is a clear emphasis on the values of forgiveness, justice and respect towards others. Consequently, exceptional behaviour is evident across school. Pupils articulately link Jesus' teachings with how they should treat others. The Parable of the Good Samaritan and 'love your neighbour' are confidently expressed by pupils as a way of modelling how they should act. A buddy scheme has been developed in school providing opportunities for pupils to offer support and help to others, particularly during break and lunch times.

With all pupils being of white British heritage a conscious effort has been made to develop understanding of diverse communities. Initiatives such as 'Educate and Celebrate' have increased pupil and parents' awareness of differences in communities. The headteacher acknowledges that the school is part way through this development and understands the need to take this further. The RE curriculum, including visitors for different faiths, provide varied opportunities for pupils to learn about and from other faiths and cultures. The RE-lead clearly maps out Christian values and biblical teachings across the RE curriculum ensuring there is a significant contribution to the school's Christian character. Pupils are provided with opportunities to evaluate what they have learnt about the values, what they mean to them and how they relate to their lives.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship, held every morning, is regarded as the springboard for the day ahead. There is a strong focus on developing pupils' understanding of the Bible through a range of teachings and characters from the Old and New Testament. This is followed up within RE lessons so that pupils are given the opportunity to consider how exemplars can relate to their own lives. Consequently, worship has a clear impact on pupils' lives, especially with regards to informing their behaviour and relationships with others. Regular worships are held to celebrate 'star of the week', enthusiastically championing examples of how children live out the values.

Anglican practices are clearly evident throughout worship, including lighting of candles, responses, and the use of hymns and prayer, which are used to engage the audience's spiritual development. Emphasis is placed on worship drawing out understanding of Christian values from Bible stories and teachings particularly in relation to Jesus.

Pupils speak confidently of how Jesus' teachings should be used as a template for how they should behave towards and treat others. Festivals within the Church's year are woven into the programme for worship. Pupils work with the local vicar to plan services, such as for Harvest Festival and Christmas, which are often held in the local church. Responding to a development from the previous report, termly Eucharist services are now held. Planned cooperatively between pupils and the local vicar, the entire local community are invited to attend these services in the local church. Through responses used within worship and church services, as well as being explored further in RE, pupils have a clear understanding of the Trinity.

Extensive opportunities, including classroom reflection areas, ensure that pupils have an excellent understanding of the nature and purpose of prayer and reflection. Prayer ambassadors have been proactive in enhancing prayer spaces across the school and in encouraging other pupils to take time to reflect. Energy has been invested in developing pupils' ability to create spontaneous prayers. Pupils are given the chance to try this out in worship further strengthening pupil involvement. There is recognition that pupil engagement with prayer can be enhanced even further, further contributing to emotional wellbeing. Ambitious plans are already in place to develop an outside, nature reflection space.

Collective worship is extremely well-led and managed. A range of worship leaders and styles are used to generate an engaging atmosphere which inspires the school community to reflect on the Christian values. Pupils are extensively involved in the planning and delivery of worship through working with the local vicar. Pupils are invited to governor meetings to feedback developments in relation to worship, contributing to a sense of pupil-ownership.

Effective processes have been put in place to evaluate worship, including governor monitoring and pupil-appropriate questionnaires.

The effectiveness of religious education on the school community is outstanding

RE is seen as an important vehicle in developing pupils' understanding of the school's Christian values. Mapping of Christian values across the RE curriculum ensures that the RE-lead has a comprehensive understanding of where this takes place. Explicit opportunities within each topic ensure pupils engage with Bible teachings, particularly in relation to Jesus, and consider how these apply to their own lives. Standards attained by pupils at the end of each key stage are high and pupils make outstanding progress in RE. The diocesan scheme of learning is used as a framework to plan the RE curriculum with teachers personalising the learning exceptionally well to suit the needs of all learners.

The quality of teaching within RE is outstanding. Pupils are given significant opportunities to learn about and from religion through evaluating the impact it has on their own lives and that of religious believers. Evidence from RE books shows a wealth of learning activities that contributes heavily to pupils' SMSC development. Visits to Durham Cathedral and to the local church also enhance this development. Pupils speak engagingly of how RE provides a safe space for them to share their beliefs and to listen to those of others. The RE curriculum also ensures that pupils develop a good understanding of other faiths. Pupils speak confidently of how RE has helped them develop respect and tolerance towards those who are different to themselves. Pupils engage with a range of concepts and festivals including pilgrimage in Islam and Diwali in Hinduism.

Planning and evaluation of RE is exceptionally well-led and managed. The RE-lead has ensured that effective assessment tasks are used allowing for teachers to develop a clear understanding of pupil progress. A conscious focus on improving the quality of marking means that pupils are clear about what they have done well and how they can improve their work. A formal programme of lesson observations and work scrutiny takes place in RE. This enables the RE-lead to facilitate the sharing of good practice and to positively address improvement needs. The link governor for RE meets regularly with the RE-lead to provide challenge in relation to pupil progress, the quality of teaching and learning and to conduct joint work scrutiny. This in turn is then reported back to the full governing body so that statutory responsibilities as a church school are fulfilled. The RE-lead makes use of networking opportunities that exist in the local area. There is potential for her to support other schools in teaching RE in early years.

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

The headteacher passionately promotes the school's Christian vision ensuring that it is understood and lived out by the entire school community. This has an incredibly positive impact in that pupils feel valued resulting in high achievement and a sense of happiness radiating from all. Pupils talk confidently about how values, such as love and forgiveness, influence how they view the world and how they should treat others. Fortnightly newsletters inform parents about the details of school life and how Christian values have been lived out.

School leaders are determined that pupils develop fully as children of God. This vision is central to the school improvement plan ensuring that it frames the direction of the school. The headteacher acknowledges that although Christian values are apparent throughout the school they could be embedded within all policies. This then allows their impact to be evaluated effectively allowing for improvements to be driven forward. Progress of pupils is closely monitored with intervention strategies reflecting improvement priorities. Strategies are continuously analysed in order to evaluate the impact they have. Governors evaluate the school's effectiveness as a church school and are relentless in their desire for all pupils to achieve their full potential. A monitoring and self-evaluation programme has been established so that governors have a clear understanding of the impact Christian values have on pupils.

Governors know the school well and constantly strive for further improvements. An annual review of the Christian vision and values is completed with all staff. Consequently, staff feel empowered and have a deep desire to live out the Christian vision. Professional development is rooted in the values of love and humility allowing staff to share their expertise and to develop their own practice. There has also been a focused approach to preparing future leaders of church schools with key staff completing nationally accredited leadership qualifications.

Strong and mutually beneficial links have been established between the school, local church and wider community. The local church is used to hold key services and for regular visits as part of RE. Pupil engagement in community activities, such as with Durham Food Bank, emphasises how pupils live out the Christian values outside of the school gates. Parents are provided with a myriad of opportunities to engage and contribute to the life of the school. Parent task days, workshops and stay and play, ensure that parents are involved the life of the school and see how values are lived out each day. The school clearly meets statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.

SIAMS report October 2017 Esh Church of England Aided Primary School, Esh Village, DH7 9QR