

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Weare Academy Church of England First School	
Notting Hill Way, Weare, Somerset, BS26 2JS	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Bath and Wells
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	September 2016
Name of multi-academy trust	Wessex Learning Trust
Date of inspection	30 January 2018
Date of last inspection	28 January 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Academy 136601
Headteacher	Denise Mawdsley
Inspector's name and number	Peter Shelton 885

School context

Weare Academy CofE First School is a smaller than average school with 147 pupils on roll, teaching pupils aged 4-9 years of age. It is part of the multi-academy Wessex Learning Trust, having previously been its own Academy School. The headteacher has been in post for six years, and has recently also taken on an interim headship of another first school in the Trust. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of children with special educational needs and disabilities is average, and from disadvantaged homes is below national average. The school's recently hosted hearing-impaired resource base closed in December 2017.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Weare Academy First School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The Christian character of the school has a clear and specific impact on the lives of everyone in the school community
- The school has invested time and thought in selecting and promoting Christian values that are richly embedded in worship, teaching, and the school environment, and impact positively on the daily activity of the school
- School leaders, including the governors, are fully committed to the strong Christian ethos of the school, securing high standards of education and care, reflected in the recognition of each child as special and unique to God
- Collective worship in the school promotes the Christian identity of the school, with clear Christian values shared in story and Bible narrative, along with a positive and reflective response from pupils
- The importance of prayer is reflected in the daily life of the school and pupils enjoy frequent opportunities to contribute their own prayers, especially for services and special occasions
- Pupils benefit from the carefully planned curriculum where religious education and other learning has been linked with Christian values to achieve rich learning experiences that promote a clear understanding of the Christian faith and its impact on individuals

Areas to improve

- Further enhance the school's rich and diverse spiritual experiences by making planning for the spiritual development of pupils more explicit, providing opportunities for experiences to be fully recognised, shared and celebrated

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

The school motto, 'All Can Achieve', demonstrates the school's commitment to an inclusive, quality education for every child. This is achieved through a rich experience of the school's core Christian values of respect, forgiveness, thankfulness, responsibility, kindness and compassion. The school's ethos committee has spent considerable time developing a strong biblical basis for each value and exemplifying them with age-appropriate Bible and other stories. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of each value and can articulate them clearly, referring to the stories and practical examples of their application in school. The rich engagement that the school community has with the values is clearly evident around the building. There is a strong and positive culture of care and nurture, with each pupil regarded as special and individual. Relationships are always positive and the pupils' behaviours reflect the embedded Christian values and their daily experience of them. Year 4 pupils who buddy Reception pupils demonstrate frequent care and encouragement, acting as positive role models for Christian values and expectations, a responsibility they are proud to have. Staff are positive role models for the Christian values. One pupil expressed the views of many, 'we trust our teachers to always help us – they are kind and compassionate to us'. This is also reflected strongly in the extended care and support given to pupils and their families with particular needs, including when children have occasionally been excluded. Regular consultations with parents, pupils and other stakeholders ensure that the whole community continues to recognise the importance of the Christian values, and the promotion of a clear and distinctively Christian ethos for the school.

The school's Christian ethos is supported by interactive and engaging religious education lessons where pupils enjoy sharing positive learning experiences together. In Reception, pupils recall simple Bible and other stories, but as they get older they enjoy the challenge of thinking more deeply. Teachers encourage pupils to reflect with a more personal response to stories and learning, applying their experiences to daily lives. This includes making good links with the Christian values. For example, one child notes that 'we all make mistakes but putting it right is what really matters'. Teachers will revisit key questions over time to see how pupils' thinking and ideas are developing and changing, and this provides good opportunities to encourage deeper reflection on important issues. This contributes well to the children's wider moral and social learning.

The school provides rich and diverse experiences that help develop personal spirituality. School leaders are recognising the value in making these experiences more explicit to further enhance the awareness of spiritual development in individuals. The whole school community is less aware of that spiritual journey, and therefore achievements are not always clearly recognised and celebrated. Reflection corners in every classroom maintain a strong focus on the Christian values and pupils spiritual experiences. Pupils use these areas both formally and informally to share thoughts and reflections, showing real engagement with Christian themes.

Pupils enjoy numerous opportunities to develop their understanding of Christianity in a wider context. Close links with the local church and the diocese give good experiences, especially with special services and events. Pupils also share wider international links. Many have experienced the sharing of faith, celebrations and richer learning across European countries through the school's Comenius link. The whole school community is enjoying sharing experiences with Jolarabi, the link school in Kenya. This link is providing many opportunities to share learning experiences and put Christian values into practical activity, for example through sending school uniform and other gifts in kindness and compassion.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship inspires pupils in their understanding of the Christian faith, with a strong focus on the core Christian values. The use of appropriately selected Bible stories challenges pupils to reflect on the significance of these values and increases their awareness of practical ways to improve their daily lives. This results in clear and positive behaviours and characteristics in pupils, both as individuals and as a community working together. Pupils appreciate the community sense of gathering together for worship, for quiet reflection, and activities such as candle lighting remind them of the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pupils sing hymns and songs with enthusiasm in worship. They openly contribute to questions and challenges within worship, and thinking of practical outcomes from the theme being explored enables them to demonstrate Christian action.

Class based worship is a more intimate time so pupils reflect and share more deeply, thoughtfully and personally. Pupils talk confidently about these times of reflection and how they impact their life choices. 'Sometimes we read Bible stories that really make us think' and 'We learn from others who can teach us to live better' (Year 1 pupils). Many of the stories remind pupils of the importance of Jesus Christ to the Christian faith, and many things he taught and demonstrated to his disciples. Children enjoy sharing in positive response to worship, as individuals within the school but also more collectively. Year 4 children demonstrate their understanding of kindness by organising various local community acts such as leaf clearing and church cleaning, building a sense of community value. The whole school enjoys showing kindness by sharing harvest gifts with the local foodbank. The impact of worship is strongly experienced across the school, but also extends further. Children enjoy sharing their experiences at home with parents. One child created a list of golden rules for the family over Christmas to ensure everyone stayed happy, applying his understanding of Christian values in the home environment. Other parents enjoy their children sharing what they are learning about faith at home.

Prayer is a rich feature of the school. It includes formal prayers during the day, including grace before lunch and the Lord's Prayer in services. Pupils also have regular opportunities to write personal prayers in their work, to contribute to class prayer books or when helping to plan services as part of their spiritual journey. They also enjoy writing their own thank you prayers for the school prayer box, with these sometimes being shared as prayers spoken to God on behalf of each other.

The planning of worship has been carefully developed to include a variety of age appropriate Bible stories, and other resources, to demonstrate the Christian values and other themes. Many of the children's worship experiences reflect the school's Anglican foundation, but they also enjoy a wider variety of approaches that remind them of the richness of the Christian faith. This has included special experiences such as the Singing Choir of Kenya visiting, enriching their understanding of Christianity as a global faith.

Pupils enjoy their frequent involvement in planning and leading worship. Class groups enjoy leading worship on a chosen Christian value and one of the celebrations, sharing their learning and responses. For example, Year 1 pupils lead the harvest worship based on their 'taste the harvest' experience through the diocese. The school council also prepare and lead worship. They also wrote a collective prayer bringing the Christian values together, and this has become the school prayer shared by the whole school community.

The ethos committee periodically evaluates worship, with feedback always discussed and thoughtful variations made in response to further enhance provision. This ensures the core focus on Christian faith remains at the heart of worship, with a clear expectation that the impact is demonstrated and shared across the whole school community.

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

School leaders have been involved in the development of the strong Christian identity of the school, and confidently demonstrate and express the significance of the Christian values across the school community. Leaders are fully aware of the strengths of the school and have an open, reflective attitude to school

improvement which includes frequent consultation to evaluate the wider impact of changes and developments. Their focus on all pupils achieving clearly lives out the school's motto.

Religious education has been thoughtfully linked with curriculum themes and the Christian values to develop a well balanced approach to maximising experiences of faith and belief, and promoting a practical understanding of Christianity. This contributes effectively to the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils. Other learning experiences also extend the development of a wider cultural understanding. The ethos committee keeps a sharp focus on keeping the Christian character at the heart of school life. They ensure the rich embedding of the Christian values within the school activity and in the school environment. Their frequent presence around school includes learning walks and other monitoring to ensure standards remain high and challenge is given. The school engages with its community for mutual benefit. 'The pupils bring enthusiasm and zest for life and the church brings wisdom and experience' reflected the rector. School, church and community participation in events reinforces the Christian identity and the significance of the school in the locality, especially through church services and local community action.

Leaders enjoy developing worship and religious education across the school, and there is a clear commitment to resourcing these well and maintaining high quality in provision. The statutory requirements are clearly met. Staff and governors make good use of diocese opportunities for training, guidance and support, keeping a focus on always developing the school's Christian character. This includes making good use of opportunities for pupils to engage with diocesan activities such as Year 4 exploring pilgrimage in Wells cathedral, as well as leadership training events. Planning for secure leadership, both now and in the future, is reflected in the confidence of the governors to allow the headteacher to support another school in the Wessex Learning Trust on an interim basis. This is also achieving further development of the current strong senior leadership team. The Trust is actively protecting and promoting the Christian character of its schools, supporting collaboration and mutual support, including helping to nurture future leadership potential in staff.

SIAMS report January 2018 Weare Academy Church of England First School, Somerset, BS26 2JS