

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Awliscombe Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Awliscombe, Honiton, Devon EX14 3PJ

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

Exeter

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Devon

Name of federation

FORT

Date of inspection

24 April 2018

Date of last inspection

23 April 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary 113422

Executive Headteacher

Penny Hammett

Head of School

Vicky Morris

Inspector's name and number

Revd David Hatrey 844

School context

Awliscombe Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary is a smaller than average school with 80 pupils in four classes. The majority of pupils come from a White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or a disability or who are entitled to pupil premium funding is below national averages. There have been significant changes to the leadership, governing body and an exceptionally high turnover of staff since the last inspection. The school became part of a federation with another local church school in September 2015. The school now has an executive headteacher and a head of school from the FORT federation with a joint governing body. Three new teachers were appointed in September 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Awliscombe Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary as a Church of England school are good

- Christian values are securely embedded in daily life and pupils and staff talk about the difference they make.
- Leaders are passionate about the work of a church school and following a period of considerable change have successfully re-established the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- Spirituality and collective worship are creatively woven together and provide pupils with a range of opportunities to reflect and express their ideas in a variety of ways.
- Collective worship systematically develops pupils' understanding of the Bible and enables them to talk about it in considerable detail.

Areas to improve

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning in religious education (RE) to enable more pupils to achieve the higher levels of attainment.
- Extend pupils' awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural faith through pupil-led projects and creative partnerships with other communities.
- Review the school's vision and share this effectively with all members of the school family so they develop an understanding of the difference the vision makes to their community.

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

A vision and values day in January 2016 brought the school community together to agree new Christian values of perseverance, acceptance, respect, care and honesty. This was important after substantial staff changes had significantly weakened the school's Christian distinctiveness and where an understanding of values had been lost. The language of Christian values is now well embedded and extends across the school and is used by pupils and adults. Pupils have a clear understanding of values which come from Bible stories which reflect their Christian meaning. They talk about how values support their learning. One pupil said how perseverance enables them to use mistakes, as a 'springboard for greater learning'.

A strong focus on teaching and learning has led to standards improving so they are now in line with national expectations. The provision for disadvantaged pupils is effective and enables them to make comparable progress to their peers.

Pupils talk in considerable depth about what values look like in daily life, for example, in relationships. Pupils of no faith recognise the contribution Christian values make to their caring community of which they are proud to be part. Pupils attribute the strong sense of being a family to values which they say 'shows us how to treat one another'. Pupils' behaviour is impressive, they show real care and concern for one another and consistently link this to the school's Christian character. Pupils' reflections on acceptance help them to make perceptive links with the importance of each person. They show a high degree of respect and empathy for those who hold different views to their own. Pupils have some opportunities to explore Christianity as a multi-cultural faith, but at present this is not fully developed.

Pupils say they enjoy and are challenged by RE. They understand how RE offers answers to challenging questions of meaning and purpose and how these are relevant to their everyday life. Religious education makes a significant contribution to the school's Christian character by extending pupils' understanding of Christian values. Pupils reflect on how these can be applied to different situations in daily life. Attendance is good and the school responds sensitively to individual family needs with creative plans to support them which reflects their Christian distinctiveness.

The provision for spirituality is at least good and is built upon a shared staff understanding. Themes for spirituality and collective worship are creatively woven together so they enrich one another. A key question is explored during the week which leads to pupils recording their thoughts which show a growing maturity and deeper insights. Pupils effectively use 'Windows, mirrors and doors' to help organise their thinking. They use art, modelling or writing prayers which provides different ways to express their ideas which they find helpful.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The new leaders have helped pupils to understand the purpose and relevance of worship as its importance had previously declined. Pupils and staff enjoy coming together and they talk positively about worship, celebrating as a family and sharing time with God. They explain how their thinking has been influenced and challenged by the messages worship shares. One pupil's comment was, 'It helps us to make the right choices.'

Pupils have recently begun to plan and lead worship. A new template for worship, which has an Anglican structure, helps pupils to organise their ideas. They write simple dramas which clarify the message, add readings and ask thoughtful questions. Pupils plan and lead aspects of the main Christian festivals with growing confidence. They talk about the meaning of festivals for Christians and how these are celebrated. For example, pupils recall Pentecost workshops which extended their understanding of the Holy Spirit. Pupils have a growing knowledge of the Trinity but this is not fully developed. Pupils are engaged in worship, eager to contribute and they take on additional responsibilities.

Prayer is a particular strength. Younger pupils talk about different types of prayer and use these creatively. They say, 'Prayer helps us to share ideas with God.' Staff discuss pupils' prayers with them and provide ideas which extend pupils' thinking. Prayers written by older children in response to national events show a growing maturity. Pupils say that prayer is important to them because it helps them to feel calm. Each class has a prayer space which pupils find helpful.

At the heart of these developments is a detailed plan for daily worship. Christian values are progressively explored and linked to Bible teaching. The systematic teaching of Bible stories has significantly extended pupils' knowledge of Jesus' life and teaching and enabled pupils to talk about him in some detail. All staff now lead acts of worship as well as members of the local church in the absence of a vicar. They offer different approaches to worship which pupils enjoy. Leaders' evaluations of worship are ongoing and lead to improvements. Pupils make suggestions for changes, for example, asking for more visual elements and more opportunities to lead worship. Governors contribute well to the evaluation process through visits and discussions with pupils.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

The importance of RE as a core subject has been re-emphasised by the new leadership. A strong focus on teaching and learning has led to the quality improving and this is beginning to be reflected in standards. Pupils take pride in the quality of their work. More pupils are beginning to achieve the expected levels and some the higher standards, which compares well with other core subjects. Disadvantaged pupils make comparable progress with their peers.

The quality of teaching is variable, but with some fine examples. Where teaching is good or better, teachers' questions promote pupils' deeper thinking. Challenging questions of meaning and purpose are used at the start of each module of study, which enables some pupils to use the higher order thinking skills. For example, pupils think about whether there is life after death and produce a balanced argument. Pupils' answers show a growing understanding of ideas as they draw on Bible teaching and other faiths to shape these. Teachers' use of individualised questions in marking has begun to extend pupils' thinking. Leaders have improved the quality of teaching by modelling good practice and setting focused targets. Staff have high expectations and their enthusiasm for learning is increasingly shared by pupils. The school is now using a new two-year rolling programme of study which ensures full coverage and progression of the agreed scheme of work. 'Understanding Christianity' resources have been introduced and new approaches to RE are effectively engaging pupils in their learning. The new resources enable pupils to begin to explain some of the key Christian concepts such as incarnation. Use of these resources is at an early stage of development. Pupils' understanding of Christian values is enhanced in RE by exploring biblical stories which clarify their distinctive meaning. They are inquisitive to learn about other faiths and RE enables them to understand how faith is shown in celebrations. Pupils make insightful comparisons between other faiths and their own beliefs, for example about prayer, which deepens their own understanding. Pupils confidently share their ideas in RE knowing these will be valued. They have regular opportunities to reflect on spiritual ideas and consider the importance for them. New assessment procedures are in place which staff are trialling. This has led to more accurate information about pupil progress which teachers use to help them plan. A new co-ordinator from the federation is leading training for 'Understanding Christianity' which has extended teachers' subject knowledge. She is fully supported by leaders and the diocese. Monitoring of RE is undertaken by the headteacher and governors who contribute through a work scrutiny and learning walks. These evaluations are effectively woven into new initiatives and ongoing improvements.

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

Federation with another church school has brought stability following significant staff changes and effectively re-engaged the community in the work of the school. Experienced leaders have brought a fresh vision and created a whole new staff team. Leaders, pupils and parents agreed a new vision, 'Growing together and aiming high' and the acronym 'FORT' which stands for, 'Fostering friendship, One vision, Readiness to learn, Trusting in God'. Leaders talk about the biblical principles and values in depth which underpin the work of this church school. They live out Christian values on a daily basis. Leaders talk about the uniqueness of each person as a child of God. They speak about their role of helping pupils achieve their God-given potential as well as enabling pupils to experience being part of a caring community. Leaders link their work to Jesus' great commandment to 'love one another'. Leaders are aware of the need to review the vision in light of the Church of England vision for education. Evaluations by leaders and the joint governing body identified key priorities which led to actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning and re-establish the school's Christian distinctiveness. The head of school makes continuous insightful evaluations which lead to improvements. Governors from the joint governing body bring considerable experience and effectively monitor the work of the church school through focused learning walks which link to questions about the school's Christian distinctiveness. Evaluations have led to an agreed structure for worship which all use when planning and the quality of prayer spaces in classes being improved. In some instances, evaluations are not clearly recorded so it is not always possible to see how actions have led to improvements. The school has made progress towards targets set from the previous inspection, although these have not been fully achieved. Leaders have correctly prioritised actions which have made the greatest difference for pupils. The school recognises that there are currently limited opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of global communities. Strong links with the federation enable teachers to plan and level work together which raises expectations and shares good practice. Ongoing professional training has a high priority and has led to improvements, such as the introduction of 'Understanding Christianity' resources. Strong links with the diocese have supported the school with advisers providing guidance. The executive headteacher mentors aspiring leaders across the diocese and prepares staff for leadership roles. The school is more involved than in recent years in the local community, for example in sporting events. Good relationships with parents and the community have grown and parents say they are proud of the school. Parents feel welcome and they make suggestions for improvements which the school acts upon. The school fulfils the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.