

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Houghton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Jackson Road, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0PA	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Carlisle
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Cumbria
Date of inspection	28 June 2018
Date of last inspection	February 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 112250
Headteacher	Lindsey Slater
Inspector's name and number	Anne B. Woodcock 445

School context

The school serves the village of Houghton, near Carlisle. Although slightly below average in size, pupil numbers are increasing rapidly. A recently completed extension providing new classrooms and teaching spaces, an enlarged hall and kitchen, facilitate the expansion of the school. The majority of the 172 pupils are of White British heritage and they come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. Approximately 23% are of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage. The school supports an average proportion of pupils with special needs and disabilities. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding for social disadvantage is lower than average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Houghton as a Church of England school are good

- The strong, purposeful Christian vision and leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by dedicated staff and skilled governors, has inspired all aspects of church school improvement. This has created a distinctively Christian learning environment in which every member of the school community can flourish and achieve.
- Very well-established, explicitly expressed Christian values make a strong impact on pupils' excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to life and learning.
- Strong links with the church and local community contribute significantly to the school's distinctive Christian character and support pupils' understanding of the Christian value of service.
- Pupils' very good spiritual growth and personal development are extremely well-supported by the creative curriculum, religious education (RE) and collective worship.

Areas to improve

- Involve parents in the cycle of church school self-evaluation so that they fully understand, share and influence the school's core Christian vision and values.
- Extend the evaluation of collective worship so that it provides more immediate insight as to the impact worship has on all members of the school community.

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

Deeply embedded Christian values are thoroughly understood and lived by all members of the school community. They impact strongly on all aspects of school life. A Year 5 pupil explained, 'Christian values teach us how to live. They come from Jesus to show how God wants us to treat everyone.' Parents confirm that their children talk about and use Christian values. 'It makes a difference because they talk about God and their values every day.' Behaviour is excellent because pupils consistently strive to apply their knowledge and understanding of the Christian values of trust, friendship and forgiveness.

The school's caring Christian ethos, epitomised by the tag line 'learning together in a caring Christian community', is immediately felt by visitors and highly conducive to learning. Relationships across the school are nurturing and supportive, reflecting the 'God-centred' nature of the school. It is highly inclusive, so everyone feels supported and valued. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning. They strive to achieve the targets set for them by teachers whom they trust and admire. Their attitudes are extremely positive and they show resilience, persevering to meet challenges. The vast majority make good, sometimes rapid progress from their starting points. Standards of attainment are generally above national averages, as demonstrated by the school's position in the top fifty small schools. Those with special needs and disabilities are supported extremely well. The support provided for pupils of Gypsy/Roma/Traveller heritage is particularly effective. As a result, any barriers to learning are reduced, so that all can flourish and achieve. As one parent stated, 'Every child matters to God and to this school.'

Provision for pupils' spiritual and personal development is extremely good. The creative, topic-based curriculum provides frequent experiential learning experiences through which pupils explore God's world. Outdoor learning and frequent farm visits ensure that pupils appreciate the awe and wonder of creation. As a result, pupils talk knowledgeably about the need to protect natural resources and reduce the amount of plastic they use. Special themed weeks, such as the RE week based on prayer and art, enhance opportunities for creative expression. Reflection is built into every stage of the curriculum. As a result, pupils are confident, thoughtful and mature thinkers. They express their ideas through art, design, music and drama. Displays across the school demonstrate the high quality of their work and the depth of their thinking. Their involvement in sport, music and other extra-curricular activities develops their self-confidence and esteem.

RE makes a substantial contribution to the school's distinctive Christian character. It is a valued core subject which is enjoyed by the vast majority of pupils. It is creatively taught, using a wide range of activities through which pupils investigate faith and belief. 'RE helps you to have information so that you can make a choice about what you think and believe,' explained a Year 6 pupil. They have some understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural faith. Through the study of aspect of Islam and Judaism, pupils come to understand similarities as well as differences. For example, a Year 6 pupil explained that Muslims, Christians and Jews all worship God, but they have a different view on Jesus as the Son of God.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is a much valued and integral feature of school life. The majority of pupils enjoy worship because they feel included and involved. Pupils often participate, helping to act out stories or read. A Year 2 pupil stated, 'It is good to talk about God, pray and be peaceful.' Older pupils recognise that their worship experiences help them to make choices. 'Not everyone believes in God but they still feel included. Worship makes you think about things.'

Worship is firmly based on Christian values, the Bible and the life and teaching of Jesus. As a result, pupils have a growing knowledge of Old and New Testament stories and of the events in Jesus' life celebrated by Christians throughout the year. They have a good understanding of festivals such as Pentecost. Older pupils make effective links between Jesus' teaching, Christian values and their own behaviour and attitudes. Consequently, they talk about raising money for charities because they want to help those in need and be generous, citing the Widow's Mite as an example. Individual pupils, as well as the school community, make decisions to serve and help others, giving their time, skills and efforts.

Pupils of all ages talk confidently about their understanding of God. 'God is everywhere, looking after and protecting us,' stated a Year 4 pupil. Some have a simple understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God, explaining that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of God, sent by Jesus to help the disciples do his work on earth. Clergy lead worship each week in school. This ensures that pupils are familiar with Anglican practices and traditions and supports their spiritual growth. The church is used for services at festival times. Parents attend these services, in which pupils take a lead, in considerable numbers, valuing the opportunity they provide to share in their children's work and worship.

Prayer is a key feature of daily worship. Pupils write and use prayers confidently for public and private use. This demonstrates their understanding of the purpose of prayer. 'Give us big hearts; big enough to care for everyone, say sorry and be humble,' wrote a Year 2 pupil. They are familiar with traditional prayers and graces. Staff prayer meetings are held weekly. Time is provided for reflection and stillness. The reflection spaces around school are well-used because pupils are actively engaged in their creation.

The extent to which pupils take responsibility for planning and leading worship continues to grow. The 'Worship Crew' frequently deliver aspects of worship. One Year 4 member stated that although they try to make their worship fun, they have to make sure that they 'get the message across'. Pupils prepare the worship space, choose and play music and lead prayers. Worship is monitored effectively by governors and senior leaders. Pupils' views are collected annually and have been used to make some changes. However, as feedback is not collected frequently, valuable insight as to the impact of collective worship on the lives of all members of the school community lacks immediacy. As a result, some opportunities for using evaluation to inform future planning are missed.

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

The wise Christian leadership of the headteacher, has driven all aspects of church school distinctiveness and improvement. She is very ably supported by dedicated staff and skilled governors. She has created a united, harmonious staff team whose prime purpose is to provide the best possible learning opportunities for every pupil. As a result, outcomes for pupils continue to be good. Relationships across the school community are strong and nurturing so that everyone knows that their well-being is considered in all decision-making. Consequently, the vision, to provide an inclusive, caring, distinctly Christian environment in which every member is valued and cherished as a unique child of God, is lived out every day.

Governors have a very clear idea of their strategic role and responsibilities. They make good use of training and skills audits so that they can challenge and support the school effectively. The regular cycle of school self-evaluation ensures that church school issues are prioritised within whole school improvement planning. However, although parents are very supportive of the school, they are not engaged in the self-evaluation process. As a result they are not able to influence the school's vision and values. The current work on reviewing the school's Christian vision, in the light of the diocesan and Church of England's Vision for Education, exemplifies leaders' commitment to continuous improvement. Governors know the school well through regular visits, meetings and observations. They ensure that the needs of all pupils are met through the effective use of financial and human resources. The way in which issues such as attendance are managed reflects the school's Christian character and aspirations for all. Issues for development from the previous denominational inspection have been fully addressed. Changes continue to be evaluated to lead to continuous improvement. Governors have secured strong, capable leadership for RE and collective worship. Both are well-supported and resourced and they meet statutory requirements.

The established strong, mutually beneficial links with the church and local community continue to grow. Pupils take an active role in community events. Their charitable and other experiences support their understanding of taking action to support others and Christian value of service. Partnerships with the diocese and local school clusters support aspects of curriculum development and training for staff and governors. Succession planning is effective in preparing staff for leadership roles. This has enabled the headteacher to be seconded to other schools to assist in their development. The school is therefore very well-placed to move confidently into the future.

SIAMS report June 2018, Houghton Church of England Primary School, Houghton, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0PA