

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Dagnall VA Church of England School

Main Road South, Dagnall, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, HP4 1QX	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	N/A
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Date of inspection	6 July 2018
Date of last inspection	N/A
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 142323
Headteacher	Kay Gobby
Inspector's name and number	Lindsay Fraser 107

School context

Dagnall Church of England School is a very small school consisting of two classes, one Reception class and one class for pupils in Years 1 and 2. In 2015 Dagnall School was closed and Dagnall VA Church of England School was formed under the Diocese of St Albans. Governors are currently undertaking a consultation to expand the school to include Key Stage 2 pupils. The proportions of disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and pupils who speak English as an additional language are all significantly below the national average. The headteacher has been in post since September 2017. There has been substantial change in leadership and teaching staff in the last two years. A very recent Ofsted inspection graded the school as good.

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

- The headteacher has a very strong vision, rooted in strong Christian values, to create a learning environment in which the needs of all pupils are met. This has led to decisive action in the school which is impacting upon pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour.
- The school's Christian vision determines the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC), enabling pupils to develop confidence in reflecting upon and expressing their views and feelings.
- Strong links with the church enable pupils to benefit from the expertise of the vicar, generosity of the church community and the opportunity to be involved in the church community.
- The strong relationships between all members of the school community are based on their commitment to maintain and develop the strong Christian ethos of the school

Areas to improve

- Increase clarity in terms of the school's Christian vision statement enabling governors to shape and evaluate strategies for school improvement.
- Ensure that regular monitoring and evaluation of the school's distinctive Christian character, including RE and collective worship, involves the whole school community to inform future developments.
- Extend further pupils' opportunities to plan and lead worship, so that they deepen their understanding of the structure and importance of worship to Christians.
- Raise standards in religious education (RE) by agreeing assessment, tracking and marking procedures so that teachers know how pupils are performing and what further steps should be taken in school to support pupils' learning.

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

The Christian character of Dagnall School is clearly evident throughout the whole school. Relationships at all levels are excellent. Staff, pupils and governors can all articulate the school's Christian values and how these influence behaviour and relationships, attitudes and learning. Pupils know that Bible stories are the inspiration for their school values. They can relate these to many Bible stories, explaining how they have impacted upon their own lives. Pupils also explain that 'the words spoken by Jesus help us to understand our value'. Behaviour is excellent and pupils are proud of the way they play and talk to each other respectfully. Through newsletters parents know the half termly value and how this has been demonstrated by pupils through the week. Parents also report that pupils are discussing and using these values at home. Underpinned by one aspect of the school vision of 'working together in mutual love', staff seek to address every need of every pupil. Therefore, pupils make good progress academically, including those who need extra support. Attendance has risen this year because the school finds ways to help families whose children have higher than average absence. There is a simple system within the classrooms for pupils to identify to staff how they are feeling and if they have any worries. They know that an adult will help them manage these feelings or worries. This has led to happy and confident pupils. To address the needs of parents and the needs of young children at the start of a school day the headteacher and staff now run an 'early drop off' club.

The curriculum is planned imaginatively, ensuring that opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) are an integral part. For example, the whole school theme for the current term is 'our wonderful world', which underpins all aspects of the curriculum. This reflects the school vision of 'Curiosity, Creativity and Community' which encourages pupils to be curious about the world around them, their own faith and the faith of others, to show their values creatively and to work together in mutual love. Throughout the school there are visual reminders of both the school values and the school vision as demonstrated in pupils' reflections in writing and art, on creation and their perceptions of God. For example, one pupil wrote, 'God, you are fantastic because you encourage people to be nice to each other'. The vision of curiosity, creativity and community is further developed by their use of the school garden to grow vegetables and the contribution of the whole school, led by the designated 'eco-warriors', to recycle wherever they can.

A wealth of enrichment experiences from Chinese ribbon dances for the Chinese New Year, African drumming to a healthy living week further contributes to SMSC throughout the school. The school has worked hard, with the support of parents, to develop pupils' understanding of diversity. This has been achieved in part by discussions on fund-raising activities decided upon by the school council. To develop their understanding of other faiths pupils have taken part in an inter-faith week during which visitors from the Islamic, Sikh and Jewish faiths visited the school. Pupils from the older class have also visited a Buddhist monastery. As a result, even the youngest pupils are developing an awareness that people have different faiths and no faith. They can describe some differences and similarities between the different religions. Parents report that pupils make links between what they have learned about different faiths to what they see out of school. It is evident that pupils have a deep respect for what people believe or do not believe and speak confidently about their own beliefs. They also explain that they think about faith, not just in RE and collective worship, but also at other times. Pupils are also encouraged to think about those with a disability such as the performing of a song using sign language. The gift of harvest boxes enables pupils to understand the needs of older people within the village. Pupils have also seen the impact of this on the occasion when one of the recipients visited the school to express his thanks to the pupils through poetry. The school has identified the need to develop pupils' understanding of Christianity as a world faith and therefore is working with the vicar to develop links with a Christian community in Vietnam. Pupils thoroughly enjoy RE because lessons are exciting, interesting and they are encouraged to ask questions about faith and the world around them. This has led to pupils becoming extremely reflective and they are developing their understanding of the importance of faith to many people.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Christian worship is seen by pupils and staff as a vital aspect of the school day. The values-focused worship has undoubtedly had a significant impact on pupils' attitudes, behaviour and relationships. Even the youngest four year olds attend all acts of worship and participate confidently because collective worship is planned appropriately for their age and interests. Pupils from both classes know Bible stories well and can link them to the school's chosen values. Pupils describe their behaviour as good because they treat each other respectfully. They attribute this to the stories they have learned in collective worship such as Jesus' respect for Zacchaeus the tax collector and the parable of the Good Samaritan. Pupils love singing and know the words to the songs very well. Consequently, pupils can make good links between different Bible stories and with the songs they are singing. This enables them to consolidate their knowledge and understanding of key Christian concepts and the context for their values. Pupils speak confidently about the importance of Jesus to Christians and his characteristics. They know how these shaped his response to the people that he met.

Pupils gain a good understanding of different Christian traditions in worship through close links with the local joint

Anglican and Methodist church. The Anglican vicar, the Methodist minister and a member of Methodist congregation all lead collective worship regularly. Members of staff lead weekly class worship which has been monitored by the headteacher to ensure consistency. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the meaning of Holy Communion, following a lesson taught by the vicar during inter-faith week. Worship is planned well, using a variety of resources. Worship is held in different places, such as the hall, the church and the classroom, but the format remains the same, enabling pupils to develop a good understanding of what worship means to Christians. Prayer is an important part of collective worship. Pupils take opportunities to write prayers in RE which they then share in collective worship. Pupils have a basic knowledge of the Trinity as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and are familiar with the Trinitarian greeting used at the beginning of worship. Pupils are keen to participate in a variety of ways. Older pupils enjoy preparing the music for collective worship and monitoring of pupils' views indicate that they wish to be more involved. As a result, pupils are beginning to be involved in planning one act of worship each week. The school has identified from parent questionnaires the desire to have more information about collective worship. It has been decided also to extend home learning tasks to worship themes so that these can be discussed at home. Governors often attend collective worship in school and in church, but do not yet monitor and evaluate the impact of collective worship on pupils so this does not inform development planning.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The headteacher has a strong commitment to raise standards in RE and therefore has taken on the leadership and teaching of the subject this year. Taking advantage of diocesan training, she has put in place cohesive plans which ensure pupils develop good subject knowledge and understanding. She has ensured the content and the way in which pupils learn is exciting and enables them to make good progress. It is clear from observations, pupils' work, quotes and photographs from both classes that pupils are excited by RE and are achieving well. In the younger class, pupils become totally involved in their learning through adult led role play and active involvement. As a result, they also use Bible stories in their own play and activities. They understand key Christian concepts appropriate to their age. They are also able to trace concepts from one story to another. For example, the younger pupils were learning how Jesus healed the paralysed man through forgiving the man's sins. One pupil was able to explain why Jesus was able to forgive the man's sins when the Pharisees said only God could do this. The pupil explained that he could do this because she remembered that the angel had told Mary she was going to have God's son and she must call him Jesus. A scrutiny of pupils' work shows pupils' good level of knowledge and understanding of Christianity with an increasing ability to reflect in depth. The use of 'big questions' to encourage pupils to think beyond themselves and about the wider world has contributed towards this. They are also developing a good age-related understanding of practices and beliefs in other religions. Pupils record their knowledge and understanding in a variety of creative ways, enabling them to reflect, interpret and show originality. This has enabled them to express their thoughts and ideas appropriate to their own interests and skills. There is evidence that pupils are making progress, but the school's assessment judgements are not yet secure. The headteacher has identified the need to work with other schools to ensure that staff have a confident and accurate knowledge of standards.

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

Building on the Christian vision of previous leadership to establish this school as a church school, the current headteacher has worked vigorously to establish the school's Christian character. On her appointment she made a thorough evaluation of the impact of the school's Christian character on the school community at that time. Consequently, she has worked with governors and stakeholders to establish a new vision, aims and Christian values. This is highly visible throughout the school, on the website and in documentation. Whilst the vision clearly underpins the curriculum, the values and well-being of pupils and staff, governors are not yet at the stage of linking outcomes to the vision. This is because the vision is not yet embedded or widely discussed at governor level. Collective worship and RE are given a high profile within the school due to the headteacher's leadership of both these areas. She has been well supported in her role as subject leader and as headteacher through her professional development and the purchase of resources. However, training in church school leadership through the diocese has been limited to the headteacher. Governors are highly active in their support of staff. Staff benefit from the attention given to their wellbeing and from the support given by governors throughout the school. Governors have worked very closely with the diocese to provide continuity and consistency for pupils through their plans to extend the age range. The school is currently awaiting the result of the planning application. Parents are very supportive of the school's Christian character and supportive of the governors' strategic plans. The excellent relationship between the school and the local vicar and Methodist minister has enabled pupils and staff to develop a greater understanding of Christian belief, Biblical knowledge and understanding. Pupils and staff also appreciate their support in developing the school's Christian character. Pupils take an active part in the life of the community, from singing at the Christmas carol service to fund-raising with the church and village. This enables pupils to contribute to their local community whilst also benefiting from the fund-raising.

