

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Essendon VC Church of England Primary School			
Address	School Lane, Essendon, Hatfield AL9 6HD		
Date of inspection	7 February 2020	Status of school	Voluntary controlled primary
Diocese	St Albans	URN	URI 17393

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Good
Additional Judgement	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good

School context

Essendon VC is a primary school with 98 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, a number of whom are from Gypsy or Romany families. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is just below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above national averages. An acting headteacher has been in place since September 2019. A new headteacher has been appointed to start in April 2020.

The school's Christian vision

'Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works' (Hebrews 10:24)

Let us – everyone, to be inclusive of all, Consider – reflect and carefully think about, Stir up – challenge each other to not always remain within our comfort zone, Love – needs to be our most important value if we are to be able to challenge each other and find a way forward despite our diverse opinions, Good works – to be both moral and social as well as academic excellence.

Key findings

- The biblical inspiration for the school's vision directly shapes decision making, policies and practice in enabling all pupils and adults to flourish.
- Effective leadership at all levels ensures a strong emphasis is placed on the provision of tailored support and mental wellbeing strategies. As a result, pupils enjoy learning, grow in confidence and behave well.
- The school is extremely inclusive, and all families feel welcome. There is a respect for difference and a culture of care where everyone is treated with dignity and respect as people created in the image of God. It is a place where children, some with significant additional needs, are welcomed and cherished.
- School leaders have a good understanding of how to develop pupils' spiritual development. Interwoven throughout all aspects of the school curriculum, pupils are therefore able to reflect on themselves and the world around them.
- Pupils engage well with collective worship and religious education, but their understanding of key Christian concepts is limited.

Areas for development

- Further develop the collaborative work between the school and church to bring about mutual benefits for the school, church and community.
- Provide first-hand experience of a range of religions through visits or visitors to broaden pupils' cultural experience and understanding.
- Ensure that pupils deepen their understanding of global issues, enabling them to reflect, debate and gain a perspective of life beyond their community.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

Governors, in collaboration with the school community, have developed a Christian vision which underpins the curriculum, supports learning and enables effective relationships throughout the school. Pupils and staff continually refer to stirring up or challenging themselves and others to be the best they can be. Recruitment and on-going training ensure that all staff support and develop the school's Christian vision. The acting headteacher, supported by all staff, has ably maintained the Christian distinctiveness of the school. This has enabled the vision to be fully embedded. The school has worked hard to improve the low levels of attendance. Staff know their pupils well, understand their needs and work hard to remove any barriers to learning. School leaders base the curriculum on the needs, interests and immediate environment of the pupils. This has excited and motivated pupils to attend school and to learn. Attendance levels show some improvement, but attendance is still below the national average. Relationships at all levels within the school and with the local community are strong. The school visibly welcomes all pupils, treating each child as unique and celebrating difference through the curriculum, relationships and worship. A high level of mutual respect therefore exists between the school and the travelling community. This has led to an improvement in their children's attendance and academic attainment. It is evident that the school is engendering within their pupils a greater sense of aspiration for both themselves and each other. Academic outcomes have been variable in the past, but standards are improving. The most recent results show that progress by the time pupils leave this school are in line with national averages. The wide range of provision for pupils with additional needs and disadvantaged pupils ensures all groups are given the chance to succeed. Disadvantaged pupils are making steady progress towards matching their peers.

The school's behaviour policy is rooted in its Christian values and focuses on forgiveness and reconciliation. Pupils seek forgiveness from others and actively forgive others who have wronged, following the example of adults in the school. The school has a strong focus on valuing all God's children. All staff act on their belief that each child is unique and deserves to be well respected regardless of their individual characteristics. Pupils adhere to this because the adults in the school embrace and celebrate the unique characteristics of each pupil. Teachers explain to their classes the needs of individual pupils who have a diagnosis of a specific learning need or disability. Consequently, pupils embrace and support every pupil. This enables those with more complex needs to be loved, supported and accepted as valued members of the school community. Parents speak passionately of the school's emphasis on supporting individual children's learning, including those who thrive on greater challenge.

The curriculum is a strength of the school. Inspired by the school vision, leaders are passionate that spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) underpins all aspects of the curriculum. Pupils' needs and interests drive the curriculum content which ensures they are involved and engaged in their learning. The SMSC policy is comprehensive, enabling all staff to understand how to weave these areas into pupils' learning. Pupils' spiritual development is particularly strong. They are constantly reflective about their own beliefs. They have an interest in and respect for the beliefs, feelings and values of others. This is because the curriculum enables pupils to have a sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them. Teachers give time for pupils to reflect and guidance on how to reflect. Consequently, reflection has become a natural part of their lives. Parents remark on the positive impact of this in their children's behaviour and attitudes. In line with the school vision leaders identified the need to stir pupils into action through knowledge of the wider world. Consequently, the curriculum is enabling pupils to learn about the challenges of social injustice and environmental concerns. Pupils are beginning to identify aspects of social injustice through their daily watching of Newsround. This has, at times, determined curriculum content, support for charities and has given pupils a voice to articulate their concerns. The school recognises that greater global awareness and the ability to articulate cultural and social difference is the next step for the pupils. Pupils are also becoming more aware of environmental concerns. As a result, a newly formed eco group has begun to take action. This has led to litter picks, composting and recycling.

The partnership with the local church, a strength in the previous inspection, continues to have an important impact upon the life of the school. Members of the church are well represented on the governing body and have been active in supporting and monitoring the school vision. Despite a recent lengthy period without a vicar, members of the church continued to provide good support for the school. This has included leading worship and providing learning experiences for RE within the church. Now that a new vicar is in place there are clear plans to work together to further support the local community. The weekly 'Open the Book' worship led by church members enhances pupils' enjoyment, engagement, knowledge and involvement in worship. Pupils value the time given to worship, appreciating the time to reflect on stories from the Bible. Pupils embrace, question and explore difficult questions, the mysteries of the world and their responsibilities within it. They are confident in reflecting

upon the purpose and impact of their own actions and those of others. Worship therefore contributes well to pupils' spiritual development. Whilst reflection is a strong feature in worship less attention is given to the use of prayer. Governor monitoring had identified this as an area for development which the vicar plans to address. Few pupils can articulate a sound knowledge and understanding of key Christian beliefs and concepts, Monitoring does not yet take account of pupil voice and therefore the impact of specific teaching through worship. A small group of pupils plan and lead a weekly act of worship and the weekly school celebration. Those pupils involved refer to the school vision in explaining how their confidence has grown substantially as a result of this role. There is evidence that behavioural messages underpinned by biblical stories from this pupil-led worship have a strong impact on pupils.

New schemes of work for RE have enabled teachers to confidently deliver a consistent and engaging curriculum across the school. Pupils therefore enjoy RE and feel confident in asking questions and challenging ideas. However, they are not yet confident in explaining theological ideas appropriate to their age. Collaboration with other schools is enabling teachers to use assessment to develop their pupils' learning. Pupils enjoy learning about a range of world faiths and views and can articulate some ways in which faith impacts upon people's lives. They can also explain confidently the importance of respecting the beliefs of others. Pupils, themselves, are putting this into practice because they are learning how to disagree well with each other. The school recognises the importance of further enhancing pupils' understanding of a range of faiths through visits and visitors. A first step has been to organise a workshop within school featuring Islam and Judaism which engaged and inspired pupils in their learning. Governor monitoring has ensured that an appropriate curriculum is in place. However, they have not yet monitored the impact of teaching and learning on pupils' knowledge and understanding of key religious beliefs.

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