

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Thurlbear C of E Primary School

Address	Thurlbear, Taunton, TA3 5BW		
Date of inspection	03 July 2019	Status of school	VA primary
Diocese	Bath & Wells	URN	123849

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

School context

Thurlbear CE VA School is a primary school with 209 pupils on roll, situated in a rural setting on the outskirts of Taunton. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages. A significant number of families come to the school from beyond the catchment, as a school of choice, due to its popularity and success. The school is currently graded 'good' by Ofsted.

The school's Christian vision

'To create an irresistible church school, a beacon for learning experiences which leads to great life achievements', underpinned by 'Train up a child in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not depart from it' (Proverbs 22 v 6).

Key findings

- Thurlbear has a strong, passionate and committed leadership who have given the school clear direction with the drive and ambition to be an irresistible Church school. The recent change to the vision is still being embedded.
- There is a strong Christian ethos, driven by a clear vision, and nurtured daily by staff, evidenced throughout the school day and across all learning experiences.
- The very positive behaviour and conduct of pupils, demonstrates a rich experience of learning and living out Christian values; positive, supportive relationships exist with everyone striving to achieve their best.
- The school enjoys excellence in collective worship which is rich, engaging and achieves positive outcomes for pupils and adults; worship is well led and organised, with significant church involvement.
- Religious Education engages pupils with exciting and challenging learning experiences; outcomes show good understanding of Christianity and other religions, and a richness in the range of opportunities for learning. Monitoring of the quality of RE is not yet fully established.

Areas for development

- To provide a more focussed range of opportunities for spiritual development to include regular and planned opportunities to enrich the spiritual journey of all pupils.
- To ensure governors engage in more robust and focussed monitoring activities related to Church school distinctiveness, to ensure the impact of this support and challenge is more clearly defined and made explicit.
- To capture the positive work of the current groups engaging in social action activities, inspired by pupils themselves, to lead the way forward for all pupils to engage in activities at a local, national and global level

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

The biblical vision from Proverbs, found on the school's original date stone, is well known across the school community, and the school is now striving towards becoming an irresistible Church school, the modern vision. Five explicit Christian values – trust, friendship, thankfulness, wisdom and hope – help build the strong ethos of the school. Values are referenced frequently and children are frequently encouraged to reflect on them. Pupils demonstrate them throughout their daily school lives.

The school vision helps shape many of the school's inclusive policies, including admissions. These ensure that all pupils are welcomed, highly valued and treated equally, regardless of their similarities, differences, faith and background. Staff demonstrate a high level of care for every individual, and provide positive role models. They take time to understand and support children's concerns, and pupils trust adults to help them.

Governors have a good grasp of core development priorities for the church school, and work effectively with school leaders on a clear strategic direction. Some governors are frequently involved within school, sharing in many positive experiences. They engage in constructive monitoring activities, although these sometimes lack focus to be effective in providing sufficient challenge. Leaders ensure they keep up-to-date with current issues in Church school education. They and the governors engage well with diocesan training and opportunities for support and development, sharing learning and developments effectively across the wider staff team.

School leaders have worked well to ensure that previous SIAMS recommendations are achieved, as well as many other key Church school developments. However, governor monitoring in Religious Education (RE) is not yet fully effective in providing challenge for further development.

Worship in school is a key strength and is both well led and well resourced. Pupils enjoy an interesting range of worship experiences over the year, mostly related to the local Anglican traditions. Through this, pupils are inspired to develop their Christian character and future aspirations and hopes as a result. The church and school work closely together to achieve rich and diverse worship, and other experience which contribute effectively to children's spiritual experiences.

The school consistently attains high academic standards. Pupils make good progress including those from more vulnerable groups. The vibrant, balanced curriculum, including the well planned Religious Education (RE) curriculum, focuses on creativity, with rich learning experiences which children thoroughly enjoy. Children are encouraged to reflect in their learning, and this sometimes leads to spiritual reflection. Staff will sometimes take advantage of precious incidental moments for focus on spirituality. However, there are limited planned opportunities for spiritual development across the curriculum to maximise the potential for all pupils to flourish spiritually.

Behaviour across the school is excellent. Pupils enjoy demonstrating the Christian values, identifying when they witness them in each other, celebrating these within class and across the wider school. Pupils enjoy learning in a safe and nurturing environment where they can take risks, and are given encouragement to flourish as individuals. Parents note how much their children thrive at Thurlbear School, and this is clear to see in the majority of pupils. Key Christian concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation are sometimes evident in practice within school, but are not reflected in the behaviour policy.

Staff know their pupils well, and seek to nurture each one to be the best they can be. They readily support pupils with issues, which are usually dealt with swiftly and effectively so they rarely escalate. Bullying incidents are rare, and most behaviour is exemplary. Pupils are regularly encouraged to value themselves and others, celebrating their differences and uniqueness, and building self-worth, helping to minimise potential mental health concerns. Pupils are regularly inspired to have ambitions for their futures.

The school community engages in charitable activities demonstrating a practical application of the vision and values, and the recent focus has been on meeting more needs within the locality. The school's 'Climate Warriors' have set a good example of how to challenge some aspects to social injustice and engage in social action to improve recycling and care for the environment. Leaders have not yet provided similar opportunities for all pupils to engage in diverse range of social action projects, to help them challenge injustice and inequality.

Collective worship demonstrates a heartfelt passion to see pupils and adults develop their Christian character. There is a rich variety in worship experiences each week, and across the annual Christian calendar. Pupils engage positively and enthusiastically within worship, knowing when to listen and quietly reflect. They thoroughly enjoy their involvement in special worship experiences at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. This includes the support of the church with weekly Open the Book worship and other special events arranged for their spiritual benefit. Pupils readily explain the positive ways their behaviour is impacted by worship encounters, and the benefits shared across the school community, and the regular focus on Christian values helps 'keep them on track'. Pupils are more involved within weekly worship, and particularly enjoy planning and delivering Friday class-based worship. This includes developing a full worship act, with support, based on a Christian value with a bible story and simple message. Children engage regularly and thoughtfully in prayer, both daily and as a response to learning and reflection experiences. They can explain their understanding of God the Father, son and Holy Spirit with confidence.

Although the school does not make use of specific global links, there is an awareness of Christian worship experiences and the lives of Christians across the world.

Pupils enjoy RE and engage in lessons with interest and enthusiasm. They contribute ideas willingly, listening well and developing their thinking. They enjoy the challenge of exploring 'big questions' and older pupils in particular enjoy grappling with more thought provoking questions as they try to explore theological concepts more deeply.

Staff have good subject knowledge and prepare thoroughly for RE lessons, seeking to provide a balanced approach to learning. Statutory requirements are met, and the school ensure provision is in line with the Church of England Statement of Entitlement.

RE teaching is well resourced, with staff using these effectively to aid learning. There is often a creative approach so children can demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways. Recorded work in RE does not always clearly demonstrate the full learning journey and depth of learning. Staff have engaged in local professional development to support the development of their teaching for RE. Assessment is based on criteria for learning experiences, and is used well to evaluate progress.



The effectiveness of RE is Good

Teaching and learning is consistently evaluated as good by senior staff, and this was confirmed during the inspection. Staff regularly encouraged to reflect together and develop their teaching, sometimes using well-structured planning aids, but also being more creative too. Pupils engage positively with the good teaching, and they readily articulate their learning experiences and depth of understanding of Christianity and other world faiths and world views.

Pupil achievement is in line with expectations in other subjects, with children demonstrating their learning in many different ways. There is good support for more vulnerable pupils so they have good access to learning, achieve well, and enjoy their learning.

Headteacher	Mr Steve Gillan
Inspector's name and number	Mr Peter Shelton, 885