



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Thurlbear Church of England VA Primary School

Thurlbear
Taunton
Somerset
TA3 5BW

Diocese:	Bath and Wells
Local Authority:	Somerset
Dates of inspection:	9 th June 2014
Date of last inspection:	10 th December 2008
School's unique reference number:	123849
Headteacher:	Mrs Heather Barraclough
Inspector's name and number:	Mrs Ruth Newton 613

School context

Thurlbear is a smaller than average primary school of 207 pupils arranged in 7 classes. It is set in a delightful rural position on the edge of Taunton within the Parish of Neroche. Pupils come from the local area and from Taunton. Since the previous inspection several new staff and a new head teacher, who is a Local Leader of Education, have been appointed.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Thurlbear VA Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

Key strengths:

- Outstanding leadership of the Head teacher
- Excellent links with the church and wider community
- Exemplary behaviour of pupils and strength of relationships within the school
- Good RE teaching including encouraging 'deeper thinking'
- Very supportive parents/carers who praise the 'family feel' and sense of belonging

Areas to improve

- To give all children opportunities to plan, lead and evaluate collective worship over the course of a year
- To establish more formal monitoring and evaluating procedures of Religious Education by the governing body, enabling them to have a greater hands-on, focussed approach through timetabled visits

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

Distinctive and explicit Christian values are deeply embedded in the daily life of the school. The whole school community of Thurlbear talk of how the Christian ethos runs through school life. Parents say that you can tell it is a church school by what their children do and say.

Indeed one Y6 pupil wrote in their poem 'God is a signpost, directing us through our lives'. The school Mission Statement, 'Achievement through working together in a Christian community' is seen being lived out in the nurturing environment created by dedicated staff who know each child and their needs individually. Parents comment on how approachable all staff are and the open door policy is much appreciated. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to reflect and to develop spiritually. The Foundation Stage class had been hatching butterflies; when the time came to release them the children were encouraged to think about all of the parts of God's wonderful world that they would be able to see as they flew off. The Golden Rules, linked to the Ten Commandments, contribute to pupils' social and moral development. The pupils have an excellent understanding of Christianity as a worldwide multi-cultural faith. The behaviour of the pupils is exemplary and parents praise the way in which their children support and care for one another.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Great value is placed on collective worship by the whole school community and parents enjoy the opportunity to join their children on Fridays and for special services held at school or church to celebrate the major Christian festivals. Staff and clergy work closely together to plan worship and themes focus on stories from the bible and the life of Jesus. This is supported by a timeline of Jesus' life that is added to across the year, giving children a broad understanding of the Bible and Christian story. Evaluation is gathered from a range of stakeholders, including governors and is monitored by the headteacher, worship co-ordinator and clergy, in order for further improvements to be made. A special table is used and an altar cloth is being made by the Art Club. An artefact with three candles, representing God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is lit at the start of worship and children have an understanding of the Trinity appropriate to their age. One child said 'God is God the Father, then there is the messenger Jesus, his son and then we are the Holy Spirit, he is in us'. Prayers and responses that reflect local Anglican practice are used including The Lord's Prayer. There is a Worship Group who assists with collective worship and children contribute in a variety of ways including operating I.T. equipment, lighting the candle, reading prayers and leading responses. They would welcome the opportunity now, to develop their skills and begin to plan and lead worship for the whole school. Children recognise and value the opportunities for personal prayer that are provided. Time for quiet and prayer is included in worship and there are reflection areas in every classroom and in public spaces both inside and outside. Children in one class had written special prayers for one of their friends in hospital and another child explained how the church's Children and Youth Worker takes their prayers to the church community to pray. This is an example of the excellent relationship between church and school.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards of achievement in Religious Education (RE) are good and in line with national expectations and higher. RE teaching is monitored and evaluated by the very effective RE co-ordinator and the Headteacher. Teaching is of a good quality. Assessment informs teaching and learning and children are given the opportunity to reflect on their work. RE is carefully planned to ensure pupils develop an understanding of Christianity and other faiths and beliefs and there is a good balance between learning about religion and learning from religion. RE teaching is both distinct and cross-curricular and good use is made of innovative learning experiences including the focus on 'deeper thinking', the wonderful special days like 'The Pentecost Experience' provided by the church community and the Churches Conservation Trust project for Y5. The school are developing their new curriculum for September 2014 and are working to ensure that their explicit Christian values permeate all areas. New RE resources have been purchased to further support learning. Children talk about how their learning in RE teaches them to respect people and to treat others as they would like to be treated.

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

The leadership of the Head teacher is exemplary and all leaders live out and promote a vision rooted in Christian values that has a very positive impact on whole school life. The areas for development from the previous inspection have all been met and have helped to enhance the Christian character of the school. Staff have a thorough understanding of the school's performance and distinctiveness and governors are working to further develop their knowledge and skills in this area. This is an area recognised and planned for by the school as part of on-going training for the dedicated and committed board of governors. An annual parental questionnaire gathers parents' views of this church school and this is used alongside further self-evaluation to enable the Headteacher to plan strategically for continued improvement. Effective use is made of professional development and training for staff and governors both locally and at the Diocese of Bath and Wells, but at present there is no particular focus on the future leadership of church schools. Links with the local church are outstanding and the ministry team support the church extremely well. The Rector is a very frequent visitor and the children enjoy his, sometimes humorous, services. Another member of the team, a past headteacher of the school, leads worship and teaches country dancing which the children perform locally. The Children and Youth Worker supports school in a variety of ways, in addition to worship, including attending residential visits. The Rector said, 'The Head actively encourages church participation in the life of the school'. The school is very much part of the church family and local community and parents really appreciate the firm foundations and fun learning that their children receive here. As one parent said, 'This is a happy place to learn'.

SIAMS report June 2014 Thurlbear Church of England Primary TA3 5BW