

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Margaret's Church of England VA Junior School, Northam

Address Seaview Road, Morwenna Park, Northam, Bideford EX39 1EL

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

Overall grade **Good**

The impact of collective worship **Good**

The effectiveness of religious education (RE) **Good**

School's vision

'To learn every day, to help each other and to be happy.'

Our vision is based upon the core Christian value of love with John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life," summarising the extent of God's love for us.

Key findings

- A clear Christian vision underpins all aspects of the school. Although pupils know the linked Bible verse well, they do not fully understand it. Inspired by the vision, the whole staff team of adults has implemented the recent behaviour policy with love, hope and consistency. This has created a highly inclusive culture where pupils know they are loved.
- The headteacher leads a strong, cohesive staff team with compassion and optimism. In line with the Christian vision, they have made it a priority to nurture wellbeing for everyone. Governors have strong systems for monitoring and further developing the school as a Church school.
- Religious education (RE) has a high profile in the school and teaching is good. Within the safe space of RE lessons in classrooms, pupils debate enthusiastically and with enjoyment. They are less confident talking about their RE learning when not in their own classrooms.
- Worship at St Margaret's provides many opportunities for pupils to be involved and to flourish. Governors and church leaders on the Ethos Group work closely with pupils to evaluate and plan future developments as well as providing training and experience for pupils in leading worship.
- Opportunities for spiritual development are planned across the curriculum. The outdoor environment is rich in spiritual potential but this aspect of the school's provision is not explicit in the plan.

Areas for development

- For leaders to ensure that the theological roots of the school's vision are more securely understood by all.
- Enable pupils to talk with confidence about their RE learning in both familiar and unfamiliar settings.
- Identify opportunities for spiritual development in the school grounds.

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

Love is visible at St Margaret's. It is a clear outworking of the school's Christian vision. Adults and pupils readily talk about it. Leaders chose the Bible verse John 3:16 as a memorable way of summarising what love means. Pupils and adults know the verse by heart. However, they are not always confident when trying to explain it or how it links to the vision. A set of well-understood Christian values such as trust, compassion and forgiveness, after which the classes are named, links closely with the vision. The headteacher explains the connection by saying, 'You can't access any of these values without love'.

The headteacher, who was previously the assistant headteacher across both schools in the federation, was appointed eight weeks before the inspection. In line with the Christian vision, they lead with compassion and hope. With a clear focus on wellbeing, they have supported staff through a season of challenges and changes and enabled St Margaret's to continue to develop as a successful Church school.

Unconditional love is particularly evident in the school's management of behaviour. Leaders have taken courageous decisions to invest time in establishing and implementing effective, consistent, whole-school systems. Posters on display remind adults to, 'Love first, teach second'. Parents describe the results of this on their individual children as 'massive'. They praise the staff for their understanding which results in positive changes in behaviour and attitudes. Behaviour in acts of worship is exemplary. Pupils manage forgiveness and reconciliation well because they see adults putting it into practice as an outworking of the vision.

Pupils flourish at St Margaret's because they know they are loved and welcomed for who they are. Parents talk about teachers managing behaviour 'without judging'. The consistent approach of teachers, support staff, kitchen and office staff has led to significantly improved behaviour. This is evident in the quality of classroom conversations, improved listening and heightened respect throughout the school. Over time, there has been a steady rise in standards. Teachers' commitment to understanding every pupil enables them to identify individual barriers to learning so that all can flourish.

The school's Christian vision drives its pastoral support for pupils and their families. This is a real strength of the school and it enables all pupils to thrive. Close working between special needs staff, nurture teachers and the pastoral liaison officer allows the school to quickly identify more vulnerable pupils. During the pandemic, relationships with families were strengthened by regular visits and phone calls from staff. Adults who work in the school describe it as 'an incredibly safe space' for them as well as for pupils. They describe how, during difficult times, the school helped them to feel cared for.

The school's values, including hope, trust and friendship are seen in action as the school community rebuilds itself following the pandemic. The vision underpins the school's commitment to inclusion. This can be seen in leaders' decision to include all pupils in whole class teaching wherever possible. Teachers are passionate about the flourishing of every pupil and so they adapt their teaching to enable pupils with additional needs to experience the same content as their peers. One parent described how their child's experience of a residential visit, supported and carefully nurtured by school staff, had been transformational. Teachers' use of dialogic teaching, which emphasises the use of talk to develop thinking, is enabling pupils better to express their reflections. As teachers explain, 'We think with words'. Opportunities for spiritual development are included in the whole school curriculum plan. The school grounds are rich in spiritual potential, but this does not feature on the plan. Teachers make good use of unplanned spiritual opportunities, such as pausing a planned lesson to allow pupils to enjoy watching wild horses on the beach.

Worship plays a central part in expressing the school's vision. Pupils and adults alike say that worship helps them to feel peaceful at the start of the day. Adults unobtrusively and respectfully support pupils according to their needs so that everyone is included. During the pandemic, pupils accessed worship virtually. They enjoy being back together and they agree that they missed all aspects of whole school collective worship. Worship leads to action. One pupil explained that, 'It helps you give people a second chance'. Pupils are inspired to make a difference. Two pupils set up the 'global gang', and others have started organising clubs for other pupils as a result.

The school has been quick to reinstate the Ethos Group following the pandemic. This group is made up of pupils along with foundation governors and the local Baptist and Methodist ministers. There is currently no Anglican vicar, but

partnership with the local churches remains strong. The Ethos Group plans acts of worship and discusses their impact. Pupil members of the Ethos Group write prayers, lead worship and suggest improvements. Staff mention how the Ethos Group has helped pupils to flourish, for example in gaining confidence to read in public. Worship offers many opportunities for all to be involved. Pupils assemble a wooden cross at the start, they sing enthusiastically and they listen well. They enjoy responding to familiar liturgy, such as 'Go in peace...' and pupil musicians play at the beginning and end of worship. One pupil said, 'If you just ask the headteacher, you can do anything in worship!'

RE has a high profile in the school and so every classteacher teaches RE. This enables them to make the most of incidental opportunities to deepen pupils' thinking which might occur during the week. Pupils listen respectfully and show deep and original thinking. The school's work on dialogic learning has supported pupils' development in RE and enabled them to flourish. Pupils are confident to disagree and debate because RE lessons provide safe spaces. However, since the pandemic, pupils have lost confidence in talking about their learning when outside the familiar setting of their own classrooms. They are enthusiastic about learning from different religions and worldviews. One pupil explained, 'We need to feel how other people feel.'



The effectiveness of RE is **Good**

RE is good because teaching is effective. There is some skilful questioning. Monitoring by the two RE leaders and the RE governor shows that pupils make good progress. The curriculum is well planned. Staff teach the locally agreed syllabus with enthusiasm. The school's focus on talk ensures that pupils with SEND as well as the most able are flourishing in their learning.

Contextual information about the school

Date of inspection	14 June 2022	URN	113453
Date of previous inspection	19 May 2015		
School status	Voluntary aided junior school	NOR	264
Name of Federation	Northam Schools' Federation		
Diocese	Exeter		
Headteacher	Sam Malyn		
Pupil profile	The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is in line with national averages.		
	The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with national averages.		
Additional significant information (if needed)	At the time of the inspection the headteacher had been in post for eight weeks. The federation joined a management partnership with a multi-academy trust in April 2022.		
Inspector's name	Penny Burnside	No.	772