



Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Victoria Church of England Infant and Nursery School

Address Prince Edward Street, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, HP4 3HA

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

Our vision is for everyone to be flourishing in learning and love within a happy, Christian family. *'Do everything in love'* (1 Corinthians 16:14) underpins this. Christian values are at the heart of our vision, with our core values being Friendship, Respect and Perseverance.

Key findings

- The school's Christian vision of doing 'everything in love' is well-established, promoted by leaders and embraced by all members of the community including children. It is a key driver for improvement across the school.
- All staff show love and care for children and parents ensuring that everyone sees themselves as a valued part of the school family.
- Leaders at all levels engage in regular and effective monitoring of the impact of the school's Christian vision leading to improvements in practice and provision.
- Planning for collective worship takes some account of pupil voice and includes pupil participation but they have few opportunities to lead or plan. This reduces opportunities for spiritual development, both in worship and across the wider curriculum.
- Religious education (RE) introduces pupils to a range of religions through the planned curriculum. However, recording of work does not always enable pupils to demonstrate their learning or progress to best effect.

Areas for development

- Embed further opportunities for spiritual development across the wider curriculum in order to deepen pupils' experience.
- Increase opportunities for pupil involvement in the planning, leading and evaluation of collective worship in order to give them greater ownership, a sense of involvement and opportunities for spiritual development.
- Develop and promote ways to capture and record learning in RE which better demonstrate pupil progress.

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

'Flourishing and learning in love' underpins decisions made by leaders including governors. Frequent monitoring of the vision has led to sustained improvement since the creation of the Castle Federation in 2018. The theological reference 'do everything in love' is understood as a shared human concept, inclusive of all backgrounds. Love encourages leaders to take bold decisions in difficult circumstances, for example around admissions. The school is welcoming to all and readily adapts its provision to meet the needs of individual pupils. Spending is directed to ensure support for vulnerable pupils.

The vision drives action and reflective practice is adopted by all leaders. This contributes to improvements as evidenced by the review carried out at the end of the first period of Covid closures. They prioritised the flourishing of all by introducing two check-in times each day. This provided much needed routine and structure for pupils, parents and staff. The allocation of school places during closures was sensitively managed, as was the provision of technology. Teachers make effective use of online learning to support all learners.

Leaders work hard to identify areas in which pupils can benefit from richer experiences. This leads to bold and ambitious curriculum plans in Nursery and Reception. A buddy system gives Year 2 pupils a sense of responsibility and helps to integrate Reception children into the community. This builds family at a time when pupils are struggling to be away from home. Pupils treat each other with respect across the year groups as a result and look out for the needs of others.

Being a happy, Christian family is further enhanced by whole school themed days. Pupils from Nursery to Year 2 talk enthusiastically about these events which regularly enrich the creative curriculum. As a result, pupils achieve well and are engaged in learning that extends their experiences. Within RE and PSHE there are planned opportunities for spiritual development. Pupils' sense of self and others is evident, but rarely seems to go deeper, making few references to the big questions of life.

Every pupil contributes to collective displays of work, particularly in the hall, for example a colourful display based on a book about diversity. Such age-appropriate expressions of acceptance of difference show that leaders take inclusion seriously. Consequently, pupils celebrate difference and rejoice in the success of others. They engage with big ideas such as forgiveness and peace and are encouraged to ask questions. They talk about the love, kindness and friendship they experience, and know they are expected to make positive choices. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the therapeutic behaviour policy and positive language used by adults, which leads to very good behaviour.

Leaders work intentionally to secure pupil and staff wellbeing. Many staff engage with professional development opportunities, feeling loved and valued as a consequence. Although still at an early stage, the recent appointment of a member of the local clergy as chaplain across the federation contributes to this. This role also provides continuity for pupils as they transition to junior school.

Strong links with the local church extend the family into the community. Christian festivals are frequently celebrated at the church and when possible, include the junior school from the Castle Federation. Clergy lead school worship weekly and school and church exchange news frequently. This deepens their connections.

The school is careful to ensure that collective worship is inclusive and invitational. It inspires some pupils to engage with issues of social justice. Pupils see the connection between the choices they make and the values at the heart of worship. Worship explores the school's vision, offering a time for reflection, and celebrations such as in the Friday whole school sessions. Planning for worship is intentional, making links to Anglican traditions and the seasons of the church year. Members of clergy meet to plan which ensures consistency across federation. Children prefer worship that involves them actively, such as singing or acting. In a survey pupils expressed a dislike for listening passively to a story and the school made changes. However, pupils are not involved in planning for, or evaluating worship regularly. This limits the impact of worship on spiritual development.

Pupils' sense of the physical world beyond the school gate is encouraged. The school is rightly proud of its Green Flag Eco Award and children take an active part in recycling and litter picking. Advocacy for the wellbeing of the planet is encouraged from the early years of education onwards. Nursery and Reception children care for two rabbits, learning about growing food for them on the allotment. They are also taught explicitly to recycle independently.

Both the eco council and school council members engage in some decision making which develops their sense of agency. They suggest and evaluate initiatives to raise funds for charities and gain confidence when proposals are implemented. Their enthusiasm encourages others to engage similarly. This often has an impact outside the school gates as families participate as well.

The enthusiastic RE leader engages with diocesan and national training and staff expertise is developed as a result. Teachers support each other and share good practice. Staff and pupil voice surveys show that RE is valued by the community. Therefore, most pupils continued to engage with RE during home learning.

Pupils demonstrate a respectful understanding of Christianity and talk confidently about how Christians describe Jesus as the Light of the World. The curriculum focuses heavily on Christianity, with some learning about Judaism. Additional faiths are covered in special focus days. This limits pupils' progress in learning about these faith traditions. Pupils engage with some of the diversity within Christianity as they learn about Advent around the world, for example, but this is not well-developed. Creative activities are included as a matter of course. Teachers use the outcomes from the planned scheme of work to describe what pupils know and can do. Pupils receive feedback on their work, though they do not always know how to improve it. Pupil work in books does not always reflect the quality of the planned activities. Pupils see RE as a safe space and are confident to share their opinions.

This is a good church school where the vision, embraced by the head of school and executive headteacher is enabling pupils, staff, governors and families to learn well together and flourish.



The effectiveness of RE is Good

Regular monitoring leads to effective teaching and pupils demonstrate an enthusiasm for the subject. The planned curriculum focuses on Christianity and Judaism but is enriched with enhancement days such as the recent Diwali day to give greater depth. Pupils' progress in understanding and knowledge of Christianity is evident but this is less so in relation to Judaism. Planning shows engagement with text and varied activities, but recording in books does not offer the same breadth of evidence.

Contextual information about the school

Date of inspection	02 December 2021	URN	117423
Date of previous inspection	10 February 2015		
School status	VA Infant and Nursery	NOR	174
Name of Federation	Castle Church of England Federation		
Diocese	St Albans		
Head of School	Caroline Crozier		
Pupil profile	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.		
Additional significant information (if needed)	After a period of instability prior to the creation of the federation in 2018, staffing is more stable and a new assistant head will be joining the team in January.		
Inspector's name	Anne Andrews	No.	973