

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Danesfield Church of England VC Community Middle School

Address North Road, Williton, Taunton, Somerset, TA4 4SW

Christian vision

Danesfield applies the Bible teachings of Mark 12:41-44, especially the story of ‘The Widow’s Gift’ throughout its ‘Every Child Will...’ culture and community.

‘She, out of her poverty, has put in everything she has.’ (Mark 12:44)

This means that for all members of Danesfield, every contribution, no matter how large or small, is powerful. The vision is practically explored through the key values of truthfulness, respect, friendship, compassion, courage and perseverance.

School strengths

- Inspired by the vision, staff welcome and nurture pupils as gifts to the school. This results in a focused and cohesive community.
- Pupils, including the disadvantaged, seize the many enrichment opportunities offered to them in and beyond lessons. This contributes significantly to their flourishing.
- Vibrant collective worship is inclusive and inspiring. The leaders of collective worship are skilled and make a discernible impact on the spiritual life of the school.
- In line with their vision, Beacon Education Trust leaders provide well-informed, sensitive support to the school. They enhance teaching, learning and resources. This contributes notably to pupils and adults thriving.
- Pupil flourish by taking advantage of the many leadership opportunities offered to them. They appreciate that school leaders pay genuine attention to their voice.

Areas for development

- Continue to broaden the religious education (RE) curriculum offer by providing more opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and others’ views on identity, meaning and purpose.
- Develop a shared understanding of spirituality across the school so that opportunities for age-appropriate spiritual development are identified and planned for.
- Develop the role of pupils within the existing monitoring systems of Christian distinctiveness. This is so pupils contribute further to improving the life of the school.

Inspection findings

Pupils and adults are proud to belong to Danesfield School. A principal reason is that due to the school's Christian vision, they recognise that they all have something to contribute. Leaders imaginatively use the Bible story of the widow's gift, Mark 12:41-44, to reinforce that every single person is needed to help build up a strong community. Likewise, pupils and adults readily understand that they need the gifts of others in the school to flourish themselves. Leaders have facilitated whole community discussions to determine the key values that drive the implementation of the vision. Collective worship and the curriculum contain planned opportunities so that these values can be appreciated more deeply. A song in collective worship, for example, contained words about being true to oneself, one aspect of exploring truthfulness. Pupils and adults thought about the words and sang movingly. Leaders are determining biblical passages to support each of the values. They, and members of the trust, have initiated many processes to monitor Church school distinctiveness. Pupils say that they like to be more involved in such processes.

Aspiration to be their best and inclusion are hallmarks of the school. Leaders understand that these are attributes inspired by the vision. There is a common language and expectation around 'every child will...'. The younger pupils have more independence and more specialist areas of teaching. They respond well, appreciating their growing responsibility. Pupils flourish through the many opportunities they have to take on leadership roles. There are, for example, wellbeing champions and prefects. The staff form a very tight team, united by the desire to serve pupils and by their support for each other. Pupils with additional needs are fully included as their gifts are recognised and nurtured. Effective improvement strategies for them are shared with staff and parents. There are a notable number of enrichment opportunities for all pupils. They benefit through, for instance, performing arts, outdoor education and sport.

Leaders and pupils identify that spirituality is a key feature of school life. They recognise that exploring the story of the 'widow's gift' raises questions around the values people hold. Collective worship and RE deliberately expose pupils to different approaches to spirituality. However, a shared understanding about spiritual development is underdeveloped. Age-appropriate, planned opportunities for spiritual development are not included in the curriculum. Pupils enjoy questions and questioning and this helps them think about their own worldviews. Pupils and adults appreciate the reflection that often comes after lively debate. This is most common in lessons and in collective worship. Recently, however, pupils from the gardening club took the initiative by renewing a piece of waste ground. They developed a wellbeing garden that offers a quiet space for reflection on nature. Leaders deem this as particularly appropriate for a school that predominantly serves a rural and coastal area.

Skilled church leaders, including the chaplain, lead invitational collective worship. Pupils like the dramatic retelling of Bible stories and the challenge of thinking about the relevance of Jesus' teaching today. They respond well through enthusiastic singing and in reverential times of prayer and reflection. There is a very strong partnership with local churches. Pupils attend church on important festivals. The atmosphere and the liturgy contribute to pupils growing an understanding of the significance of church. An ethos group, consisting of local church members and staff, plan activities that explore the relevance of faith today. They are currently highlighting prayer, care for God's creation and how to make a difference on issues of injustice. The group facilitated the production of a school prayer that picks up on the themes of the school vision. Pupils say that using the prayer helps to unite the school and inspires them to live better day by day.

School and trust leaders are absolutely determined to see the school and the local area thrive. The trust comprises some Church schools and some community schools but their vision enhances that of Danesfield's. Ambition, respect and excellence are the trust's watchwords and describe how it both supports and challenges schools. The trust assists the school generously, especially in the skills and gifts of its staff. The school benefits as it realises it is part of a larger enterprise focussed on a geographical community. Staff welcome the chance to lead professional development throughout the trust and to share their skills. The trust encourages Church school professional development and staff are currently undertaking courses that will give further impetus to developing the Christian vision at Danesfield.

Leaders define success not just in academic terms but, in following the vision, in personal and community enlarging of 'gifts'. Tutors play a key role in the personal development programme. They foster strong relationships as the basis of all learning and pupils, including those with additional needs, respond well. There is a tangible sense of collaboration between adults and pupils in classrooms and across the school as a whole. The behaviour code is appropriately linked to the vision with its emphasis on showing kindness and taking responsibility. Pupils understand that celebrating the successes of others is as important as celebrating their own successes. This is part of their understanding about how they fulfil the vision.

Pupil voice is a key indicator of how the school responds to its vision. The school council is effective over a wide range of issues. Pupils appreciate how well leaders pay attention to its ideas and act on them. The school council is beginning to be concerned about issues of justice beyond the immediate area. Following input across the curriculum, pupils are increasingly wanting to make a difference to their world. Recent campaigns concern sewage in waters, refugees from Ukraine and how, after using the candle as a focus in collective worship, light can dispel darkness.

The RE curriculum is inspired by the vision and guided by the locally agreed syllabus and the Understanding Christianity resource. It covers a wide range of religions and worldviews. Consequently, it broadens pupils' horizons. Lessons benefit from their keen participation, through curiosity for example. Pupils often choose 'new to them' material when asked about interesting or challenging RE. There is an emphasis on knowledge and understanding. This is in line with the school's approach to the curriculum in general and its improvement schedule. Work is underway to include more opportunities for pupils to engage with questions of identity, meaning and purpose. Pupils enjoy probing church members on, for example, rituals and beliefs around death. The trust is giving invaluable support to the curriculum review by providing input from another trust school.

The inspection findings indicate that the school is living up to its foundation as a Church school and is enabling people to flourish.

Information

School	Danesfield Church of England VC Community Middle School				
URN	140631	Pupils on roll	361	VA/VC/Academy	VC Academy
Diocese/Circuit	Diocese of Bath and Wells				
Multi academy trust	Beacon Education MAT				
Headteacher	David McGrath				
Chair of governors	Hayley Lake				
Inspector	Simon Stevens			No.	953
Date of Inspection	14 September 2023				