



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Isham Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Church Street

Isham

Northamptonshire NN14 1HD

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Peterborough

Local authority: Northamptonshire

Date of inspection: 18 June 2015

Date of last inspection: April 2010

School's unique reference number: 122023

Headteacher: Kirstin Howarth

Inspector's name and number: The Revd Dr Jason Phillips 598

School context

Isham CE (VA) Primary is a smaller than average school in an affluent rural context. There are no children who qualify for the government's pupil premium money for disadvantaged pupils. The majority of the 105 pupils travel to the school from neighbouring villages and Kettering. The school is usually over-subscribed. Most children are White British with an increasing number of children from multi-ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with a special educational need is well below the national average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Isham CE (VA) Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The drive, commitment and Christian leadership of the governing body resulting in exemplary governance, succession planning and an outstanding all-round education for the pupils.
- The Christian leadership of the headteacher who models Christian values and secures high standards in religious education (RE) and an environment where children feel free to openly explore religious ideas and the mysteries of life and faith.
- The inclusion of children of all faiths, social backgrounds, abilities and social need results in an accepting Christian community where children, governors and staff demonstrate tolerance and compassion for others.
- The spiritual interconnection between music and collective worship enables an effective contemporary approach that engages adults and children in a joyful spiritual journey.
- The impact of a Christian values based curriculum results in children who can nuance judgements and decisions from an informed Christian perspective.

Areas to improve

- Extend the opportunities for all pupils to plan, lead and evaluate collective worship in a variety of ways so they become confident, enthusiastic leaders of worship and prayer.
- Ensure the school's values and vision are expressed boldly and consistently in all school documentation and planning, in publicity and in the school environment.

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

The distinctive Christian character of the school is evident in all areas of school life. It is central to the school's ethos, vision and values. Pupil and parent surveys confirm how important the Christian character is to the school. The school is effective in demonstrating a vibrant, contemporary expression of the Christian tradition. Pupils are keen to talk about how they feel their school is a very safe place where everyone's beliefs are respected, learning is fun, and all the staff care about them. As a result, academic attainment is consistently above national expectations and the progress of all groups of pupils is generally outstanding. The school fosters excellence through developing each child's talents and interests, supported by extracurricular provision. A wide range of Christian values underpins the exciting, newly designed curriculum that has resulted in a change of mind-set amongst pupils. The children are now increasingly seeing that the importance of academic learning is in becoming informed, compassionate people who use Christian values to nuance judgments and decisions. An example of this is the recent fair-trade chocolate topic. The school is distinctively Christian, yet balances this with a celebration of diversity and a respect for the inclusion of pupils of all faiths and of none. Spiritual development is promoted very well particularly in RE, collective worship and music. RE makes a strong contribution to the distinctiveness of this church school because it is central to the children's understanding of Christianity and the place faith can have in shaping lives and communities. The school's compassionate yet firm approach to attendance and behaviour results in attendance that is above the national average and behaviour that is excellent. Behaviour is strong because there are clear expectations and guidelines, based on Christian values. Children consider Christian values in relation to behaviour choices in a practical way by wearing values wristbands.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship brings cohesiveness to all aspects of school life fostering pupil self-esteem, enabling spiritual development and a sensitivity to awe and wonder. A particular strength of collective worship is the impact of music on developing the spirituality of adults and children. The interconnection between music and spirituality expresses a fresh contemporary approach to worship in Christianity that is engaging. Illustrating this is the distribution of the 'Spirit of Isham' worship songs CD that records the children's inspiring singing. One parent said, "I've always got this on the car and the songs are ever in my thoughts." Collective worship increasingly explores biblical accounts and the example of Jesus. An example of this is the recent Jonah focus in the 'Open the Book' Wednesday acts of worship and past themes such as the compassion of Jesus and Zacchaeus. There is some understanding of God-as-Trinity by the children that is developing gradually. When expressed explicitly, the ideas of Christianity, Anglicanism and the school's Christian values influence behaviour. Adults and children, speak positively of the celebration of Christian festivals such as Candlemas and Easter because they are actively involved. The school enhances children's understanding of worship and religious expression through marking some festivals of world faiths such as Holi and Hanukah and involving visitors such as a popular Christian Juggler. The school plans appropriately for collective worship supported by the parish priest. However, the planning does not involve pupils sufficiently and results in collective worship that is often adult led with limited opportunities for pupils to plan and lead. This means there is little understanding by pupils of the aspects that comprise an act of worship. Further, whilst pupils are engaged in prayer and value it, they have too few opportunities to contribute to and lead prepared or spontaneous prayers of their own construction. As a consequence, collective worship is not yet outstanding. Governors monitor collective worship strategically enabling development.

The effectiveness of religious education is outstanding

Children make very good progress as is evidenced in written work and in their oral responses. The subject leader monitors RE thoroughly using observations, book scrutiny and crosschecking of standards. This monitoring ensures that all children are experiencing challenging RE and that there is an excellent balance between learning about and learning from religion. A developing system for assessing children's achievements is used effectively to track progress and determine next steps in learning. Marking generally gives children a clear indication of how their work can be developed. However, too little opportunity is given for pupils to engage in learning conversations arising from the marking, limiting its impact. Through units of learning,

numerous visitors and occasional visits to different places of worship such as the Leicester Hindu Temple, pupils can compare and contrast Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam. They have a growing understanding of the multicultural nature of each world faith. The strong focus on Christianity ensures pupils have a secure understanding of the faith that shapes the character of this school. This gives them a deeper understanding of their own and other cultures and prepares them for life in our diverse global society. Teaching is always good and often outstanding utilizing a variety of effective teaching and learning strategies to promote learning. Challenging questions, such as 'Does God exist?' encourage children to think deeply. Through careful teaching and focused discussion over time, children develop strong analytical skills. This is evident in the ability of Year 5/6 pupils to contribute intelligently to a debate on 'the relevance of the wisdom of the Bible in 2015.' The headteacher leads the subject well ensuring teaching is responsive to new ideas and teaching methods. Governors are effective in monitoring and evaluating RE, resulting in high standards.

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

The leadership and management have a strong commitment to the ongoing development of the school's Christian ethos. The chair of governors and headteacher express a clear and compelling vision for a contemporary Christ-centred pedagogy for this school. Governors' commitment to the development of the whole child results in outcomes for pupils that are outstanding. Self-evaluation as a church school is robust with effective practice by governors in challenging the school to improve. Focused monitoring by senior staff and governors is effective in gathering evidence that feeds into priorities for development. The school fully addressed the areas for development from the previous inspection representing good progress. However, as the school has changed over time, the articulation of its vision and values is now inconsistently expressed in documentation and policies resulting in a lack of clarity and boldness. An important aspect of the effectiveness of the school leadership is an emphasis on staff and governor professional development, as well as the governors' sense of ambition for their staff. This has led to both headteacher and governors supporting the improvement of other schools and a number of previous staff being promoted as senior leaders. It also demonstrates the governors' concern for and ability to negotiate succession planning. The governors have close connections with St. Peter's church ensuring church and school support each other. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship. The headteacher leads both and gives them a high profile in the life of the school. Parents confirm the school's willingness to seek their views and to be approachable. Parents are committed to this school because of its Christian spirituality and pastoral care that results in their children having a positive self-esteem and an openness and tolerance towards others. This is a highly effective school that makes a significant contribution to the Church of England's mission to rural communities.