

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Astbury St. Mary's Church of England Primary School

School Lane, Astbury, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 4RG	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Chester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Cheshire East
Date of inspection	8 December 2016
Date of last inspection	September 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 111333
Headteacher	Philippa Worswick
Inspector's name and number	Anne B. Woodcock 445

School context

Astbury St. Mary's serves a mixed socio-economic community near Congleton in Cheshire. The vast majority of the 126 pupils are of White British heritage. The school serves a small, settled Traveller community. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding through the pupil premium grant is lower than average. The school supports an average proportion of pupils with additional needs. There have been substantial changes in leadership and staffing since the last inspection. The school has experienced and is overcoming some challenging issues. The school was led by a part-time executive headteacher for one term prior to the appointment of the headteacher in January 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Astbury St. Mary's Primary School as a Church of England school are good

- The headteacher's resolute Christian commitment and vision has re-established the school's distinctive Christian character. This has impacted strongly on all aspects of church school improvement.
- Strong relationships, based on Christian love and hope, nurture and support all members of the school family.
- Purposeful links with the church and other local Christian faith groups contribute significantly to the school's distinctiveness and to pupils' spiritual growth.
- Pupils' good behaviour and increasingly positive attitudes to learning are based on their understanding of Christian friendship and perseverance.

Areas to improve

- Secure assessment processes in religious education (RE) so that they accurately track pupil progress and attainment, identify gaps in learning and fully inform future planning.
- Create an evaluation process for collective worship which engages pupils, staff and visitors, to provide regular information about its impact and to ensure continued improvement.
- Extend pupils' understanding of diverse faiths and cultures by providing more first-hand experience using visits and visitors.
- Engage parents in church school self-evaluation so that they can contribute more fully to the school's Christian vision.

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

The school's Christian character is immediately felt by visitors. Christian values are prominently displayed and expressed by staff, governors and pupils. They impact positively on the nurturing relationships which support all members of the school family. Even the youngest children refer to the school's motto, 'A Christian family who care, share and learn together.' A Year 1 child commented, 'If you argue or fight you're not being a good member of our Christian family.' Behaviour is good because children strive to apply the values of Christian friendship and forgiveness. One parent explained, 'The safe and nurturing family atmosphere has an undercurrent of Christian kindness. Our children know and use this in their relationships.' The school's strong focus on raising standards of attainment and improving rates of pupil progress for all groups is having a very positive impact on children's motivation and self-esteem. Children are increasingly confident learners who enjoy their learning and try hard to achieve the targets set for them. As a result, the overall rate of pupil progress is improving substantially. The school's inclusive nature is reflected in the high levels of support given to vulnerable pupils and those with additional needs. Provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is good. Children have regular opportunities to explore the natural world. They express their ideas through art and poetry and are increasingly reflective learners. Displays of pupil work demonstrate their skills and reflections, such as those completed as part of a Remembrance topic. Themed days, like the 'water day', support pupils' understanding of global issues and help them to understand how they can make a difference. 'God created the world but we are responsible for it. If we don't look after it, who will?' stated a Year 6 pupil. Pupils' spiritual growth is well-supported by the church and local faith groups. They visit regularly to present 'Open the Book' and Bible explorer activities. Children are aware of diverse faiths and cultures through their work in RE and other curricular areas. They know that Christians worship God in many different ways.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is a valued and important feature of the daily life of the school. Children's attitudes are positive because they feel included and involved. They particularly enjoy worship when they take an active part in helping to act out a story or read. Older pupils take responsibility for some aspects of worship, but they do not have regular opportunities to plan or lead worship. Planning is based on Bible teaching and Christian values. Children talk confidently about the stories they have heard and make effective links between the teaching of Jesus, Christian values and their own actions. 'Jesus said we should love our neighbours as ourselves,' explained a Year 6 pupil. 'He helped those no one else helped. Those less fortunate than us need our help, so we raise money for charities and do things for people.' The church and local faith groups, such as the New Life Church, support the worship life of the school very well. The rector leads worship each week and the school worships regularly in church. Worship is also led by two governors. As a result, children have a broad experience of different styles of Christian worship. Parents value the opportunities provided for them to share in worship. They attend monthly celebration worship in school and the services held in church at festival times. Children are familiar with traditional Anglican practices, such as opening responses and graces. They know and use the Lord's Prayer and school prayer. Children write their own prayers, some of which are displayed around the school. Prayer and reflection are key features of worship. Children value and use the interactive reflective spaces in their classrooms, as can be seen from the many personal responses displayed in these areas. They describe God as a creator who cares for everyone. They know that Jesus is God's Son and talk knowledgeably about the miracles performed and events celebrated by Christians at Christmas and Easter. However, their understanding of God as the Holy Spirit is at a very early stage. Governors monitor collective worship through regular observations and discussions. Pupils provide some informal feedback. However, at present, the evaluation process does not provide regular information as to the impact worship is having on members of the school community.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

Pupils' attitudes are increasingly positive because they enjoy and are challenged by their learning in RE. 'We usually enjoy RE. It is not dull and you get to express your own opinions. There is no right or wrong,' explained a Year 5 pupil. Very substantial improvements in the curriculum and teaching of RE are having a positive effect on standards and skills. The enquiry-based approach challenges children to investigate and explore ideas so they are beginning to develop and apply inquiry and analysis skills. Although standards of attainment are lower than average, rates of pupil progress continue to improve and gaps in learning are being filled. A good balance is achieved between learning about and learning from religion. RE is currently being led by the headteacher. She has ensured that staff are well-supported and resourced. As a result, teachers are increasingly confident and the standard of teaching and learning continues to improve. The assessment of RE is at an early stage. Marking is effective when showing pupils how to improve their work, but it is not yet consistent across the school. As a result, some pupils say they do not know

how well they are doing in RE. The recently introduced assessment process has had insufficient time to effectively reflect standards or rates of pupil progress. The profile of RE has been raised significantly over the past year. It contributes well to children's SMSC development and to the school's Christian character. Children gain some knowledge of and respect for diverse faiths and cultures through the study of Judaism and Islam. 'It's important to respect other people's beliefs,' said a Year 5 pupil. However, as they have very limited experience of visiting places of worship or meeting people from other major faith groups, their understanding is underdeveloped. Monitoring is effective. Governors visit regularly, observing and supporting lessons and scrutinising books with staff. The school is therefore well-placed to ensure that the effectiveness of RE will be sustained and developed in the future.

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

All members of the school community recognise that, although the headteacher has been in post for less than a year, the impact of her vision on the development of the school's Christian character has already been and continues to be extensive. Governors have worked hard, reviewing and analysing their work to ensure that they provide appropriate challenge and support. Staff value the strengthened support and training provided. They work together very well, united in the knowledge that their work is valued. The headteacher and governors have met some challenging issues with purpose, as they are determined that outcomes for all pupils must improve. They recognise that standards of attainment and rates of pupil progress are not yet consistently good. Significant changes in the curriculum and improved teaching and learning are having a positive influence on pupil progress and achievement, but as many initiatives are recent, the impact on standards is not yet consistent. Governors support and resource the leadership of collective worship and RE effectively. They monitor and evaluate the work of the school with increasing rigour. They ensure that the needs of all pupils are met through the effective use of additional funding and human resources. Issues from the previous inspection have been addressed, but as the changes made are very recent, their impact is yet to be evaluated. Church school self-evaluation identifies and prioritises issues within whole-school development planning. Feedback from staff, children and governors is used, but parents are not actively engaged in the process. As a result, they are not able to fully share in and influence the school's Christian vision. Partnerships with local church schools support teaching and learning and aspects of governance. Diocesan support has been instrumental in developing the RE curriculum. Staff are well-informed and supported and strategic development is well-considered. Staff are being prepared for the future leadership of church schools through an effective training programme which supports middle and senior leaders. Links with the church and local community support pupils SMSC and personal development. Wider world links support children's understanding of issues such as war and poverty. It is clear that, given time to embed and sustain the current good practice, the school is well-placed to develop as a highly effective and distinctive church school.

SIAMS report December 2016 Astbury St. Mary's CE Primary School, Astbury, Congleton, Cheshire CW12 4RG