

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Eckington Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School

School Lane, Eckington, Worcestershire, WR10 3AU

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Worcester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Worcestershire
Date/s of inspection	21 June 2017
Date of last inspection	9 July 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 116806
Headteacher	Sarah Breakwell and Gill Humphriss
Inspector's name and number	Duncan Jones 813

School context

Eckington Church of England VC First School is a smaller than average village school, serving a largely rural area. The roll has varied considerably but is now stable at 88 with children taught in four mixed age classes (Reception to Year 5). The percentage of children receiving support for special educational needs is in line national average, but below for disadvantaged children. There have been substantial staffing changes since the last inspection and the headship is currently a job share following the substantive headteacher's maternity leave. The governing body has also changed considerably in membership.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Eckington VC as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Christian values are deeply embedded in the life of the school and have a significant impact on children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- The school's Christian vision is widely and clearly shared so that the school sends out an unambiguous message about its values to parents and the wider community.
- Spirituality is well-defined and carefully planned, so that children are regularly enabled to reflect on and develop their personal sense of spirituality.
- The strong partnership between church and school ensures that children's lives and worship are enriched and the school's Christian values reinforced.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that children build on their present leadership of aspects of worship, so that they frequently plan, lead and evaluate collective worship.
- Strengthen understanding of Anglican practice by ensuring that children have a clear understanding of the Church's year and major festivals.
- Develop the good work begun by the newly appointed leader of religious education so that RE is rigorously tracked and monitored.

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

At Eckington VC First School, Christian values are deeply embedded and are consistently lived out on a daily basis by both staff and children. Values are divided into 'Eckington School Values' and 'Worship Values', but both sets have their roots firmly in Christian scripture with biblical quotations a feature of displays in the school. These core Christian values were chosen by children, staff, parents and governors, an act which indicates the inclusive nature of the school. Imaginative ways are used to reinforce these values, such as children earning a token if they display one of the values whilst in school. The number of tokens is totalled at the end of the week enabling staff to celebrate the fact that children are living out the Christian values. This also ensures that whilst a particular value may be the current focus, all values are highlighted and discussed each week. In this way the school ensures that its Christian ethos is constantly at the centre of daily life. Strong links are made, through examples from the Bible, to reinforce how the values are rooted in Christianity. The Christian values are prominently displayed in each classroom where they form the focus for discussion and reflection. The result is that children not only know their school values but can explain what they mean to them and how they can use them in their lives.

At Eckington there is a strong focus on the well-being and nurture of all children, which is a direct result of the school's Christian mission. This means that the school works hard to support all groups who consequently make excellent academic progress and attain at levels significantly above national averages. The emphasis on the well-being and nurture of all children also ensures that attendance has improved significantly and is now excellent. This is because children see their school as a community in which they are valued and where they can thrive. This sense of wellbeing extends to the staff, who describe life at Eckington as being 'like working in a large, extended family group'. Children express the same feeling. When pointing out a display, consisting of a host of butterflies, each one decorated by a child in the school, they explained that this shows how every child is unique, yet an equal member of the school family.

Excellent behaviour is a strength of the school. Approaches to managing behaviour are underpinned by the school's Christian values, in particular respect, truthfulness and forgiveness. As a result, the behaviour of all children is of the highest standard. Reflection on biblical teaching helps to reinforce this. One child reflected, after hearing the story of Zacchaeus, that whatever his actions, Zacchaeus was a good person inside. From that she had learnt that there is a good person inside all of us, whatever we may do on the outside.

Careful planning ensures that children learn about a variety of faiths and cultures through RE and collective worship. As a result, children have a real respect for others who may be different in any way or have differing beliefs from them. The school's strong Christian vision ensures that very good spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is a feature of all areas of the curriculum and one which has a significant impact on the children. The teaching of RE is highly effective because imaginative methods are used to bring the subject to life. Consequently children are inspired by the subject and enjoy their lessons which they say help them to think about their own religious beliefs. Lessons are carefully planned to make links with the school's distinctively Christian values, so RE effectively enhances the Christian life of the school.

The school has made excellent progress with the focus for development from the previous SIAS report concerning teachers planning opportunities to develop pupils' spirituality, so much so that this is now a strength of the school. Spiritual experiences are embedded in the termly planning and spontaneous examples are embraced and celebrated. Collective worship contains occasions to step back from the busyness of the day and reflect. As a result, children are developing a personal sense of spirituality. For example, one child commented that she enjoys collective worship because it is an occasion when she 'can talk to God, and be quiet and listen to God'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is central to the life of the school and great importance is attached to it, inspiring both children and staff. The strong focus on the school's Christian values in collective worship has a significant impact on pupils' excellent behaviour and the warm, caring relationships which exist between all members of the school community. Children enjoy and look forward to worship due to the variety of themes which it explores and the different formats it takes. Recent provision of a worship garden, designed to celebrate God's creation, is adding to the richness of worship. A particular strength of worship at Eckington is the singing which allows children to participate and reinforces messages at the heart of the act of worship.

Biblical teaching is strong, particularly through the well-established Open the Book worship and that provided by the church youth leader. Children also learn about and understand the central role of Jesus in the Christian faith. Messages from worship relating to Christian values are further reinforced by weekly follow-up lessons where children record their thoughts and reflections, or are set a related question to consider, such as 'why do people tell lies?' This means that children are able to draw messages from Bible stories and discuss how these relate to their school Christian values and to their everyday lives. Children are also inspired to support a range of charities through the messages they receive in collective worship.

Due to frequent references to the Trinity and teaching by the parish church, children have a secure understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Although many children have an understanding of the seasons and festivals of the Christian year, they are not always clear as to how these relate to the life of Jesus.

Governors frequently attend worship and, with senior staff, monitor its delivery and the impact it has on the children. As a result, changes have been made, such as the broadening of the choice of music used. Children contribute to class prayer books and these prayers are read out at lunchtime and home time. The use of prayer corners and reflective areas around the school, combined with sensitive teaching, enables children to develop a good understanding of the value of personal prayer and reflection. Children plan and lead collective worship at the regular church services, such as Easter and Harvest, and are much involved in the worship in school in roles such as acting and reading. They also confidently contribute spontaneous prayer during collective worship, reflecting on what they have just heard. However, there is further scope for children to plan, lead and evaluate their worship on a more frequent basis, and the school have listed this as a future priority for development.

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

Leadership at Eckington is a significant strength of the school. The headteachers very effectively articulate their clear vision for Eckington as a church school, a vision firmly founded on the school's Christian values. Parents describe communication as extremely effective, and the school's Christian character has a high profile on the website and in the popular weekly newsletters. These communications reach beyond the school gates with the result that there is an excellent shared understanding of the school's Christian distinctiveness right across the local community. Ensuring that work on choosing the school's core Christian values involved parents' and children's opinions, means that parents support and encourage the teaching of Christian values at home. One parent described how her children challenge one another over whether they are living up to the school's values when they have a dispute at home.

Leaders know the school well and the effectiveness of the school's Christian distinctiveness is carefully monitored and, where appropriate, action is taken to make improvements. For example, when the school found through its internal monitoring that the values were not as embedded as they had hoped, children and staff were involved in devising animal characters to illustrate each value. This innovation has ensured that even the youngest children know the Christian values and what they represent for them. Governors know the school well and have in place effective systems for monitoring both the curriculum and the effectiveness of the school's Christian distinctiveness. There is a formal system for reporting back to the full governing body and recommendations then lead directly to improvement. This effectively addresses one of the areas for development from the previous SIAS report.

Collective worship and RE are well led and good use has been made of diocesan training to enhance these areas. The recently appointed RE leader has a good understanding of the subject and strengths in the school's provision, but does not yet have in place rigorous systems for tracking and monitoring the subject. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship. This very small school has recently experienced a significant change in both staffing and governorship, but because professional development is strong, all staff are being effectively prepared as future leaders of church schools at all levels. The partnership between school, home and church is a notable strength and parents are very supportive of the school's Christian ethos, and value the contribution both collective worship and RE make to their children's lives. The school benefits greatly from the involvement of members of the church in teaching and leading worship and are fortunate in having a church youth leader who also carries out pastoral work amongst the children. Children are familiar with the church building and the regular services held at the church are an important part of the church's outreach. One parent commented that it was difficult to know where school ended and church began. Through this close partnership, school, home and church are highly effective in ensuring that 'caring and sharing, believing and achieving together' is at the very heart of the Eckington extended family.