

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### Axbridge Church of England First School Academy

Moorland Street, Axbridge, Somerset BS26 2BA

<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Bath and Wells</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	September 2016
Name of multi-academy trust	Wessex Learning Trust
Date of inspection	12 July 2018
Date of last inspection	4 July 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	First School Academy 138763
Headteacher	Lorna Richardson
Inspector's name and number	Revd David Hatrey 844

#### School context

Axbridge Church of England First School Academy is a smaller than average school with 172 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of a White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who receive pupil premium funding or have special educational needs/disability (SEND) is below national averages. The school became part of the Wessex Learning Multi-Academy Trust in September 2016.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Axbridge Church of England First School Academy as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Christian values to which pupils link to their learning and thinking are deeply embedded in the daily life of the school.
- Pupils' behaviour is of a high standard. They show compassion and concern for one another as part of a caring school family and consistently attribute this to the school's Christian character.
- Pupils have an extensive knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus which they share confidently.
- The local church makes an excellent contribution to the daily life of the school, particularly through leading worship and governance.

#### Areas to improve

- Enable pupils to plan and lead worship independently so they develop their own spirituality.
- Create a robust and systematic plan so that leaders routinely evaluate all aspects of the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- Extend the school's provision for developing pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith so they understand how Christians celebrate their faith in various ways.

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

Christian values are a fundamental part of the daily life of the school. Pupils and adults talk about the values consistently which ensures that these retain a high profile across all aspects of school life. Leaders and pupils regularly review them to ensure they are relevant to the school family. Recently they agreed the values of friendship, thankfulness, forgiveness, compassion, hope and kindness are important as they support the school's vision. Pupils confidently talk about how the Christian values influence their thinking and actions. They link the values to Bible stories which help them to understand their meaning. Strong links are made by pupils between the values and their learning. They talk about how friendship and collaborating 'give us more ideas' or 'help us when we are stuck.' A pupil said, 'hope helps me to work hard, do my best and be resilient.' The half-termly values award to a pupil in each class is highly regarded and ensures all pupils appreciate that values influence all aspects of life. Pupils explain the school's symbol of a tree with leaves which helps them to understand the values. As pupils grow they develop these values for themselves. Staff make families feel welcome and valued. Pupils recognise the respect and care staff show them and seek to emulate this. They behave very well and show real care and concern for one another, feeling part of a family. Pupils of different faiths or none consistently attribute this to the Christian character of the school. Bullying is rare because everyone has respect for one another. Older pupils make deep friendships with younger peers which last beyond their time at school. Leaders have high aspirations which are seen in the individualised challenge for each pupil. Attainment across the school is consistently high and above national expectations. Pupils develop excellent attitudes towards learning and feel they can be successful, not just academically, but with regard to all of their God given talents. Disadvantaged pupils are closely monitored and make comparable progress to their peers. Imaginative additional provision effectively develops their self-esteem. Spirituality has been thoughtfully woven into RE and collective worship providing a range of opportunities for reflection. Questions of meaning and purpose challenge pupils' ideas, such as, 'What type of creator is God?' Pupils explore values in different daily situations and consider how they might respond. Their responses show a growing curiosity to pose more questions, whilst their thoughts show a growing maturity. They often use art to express their ideas and are confident to explain the symbols they use. High quality experiences, such as visits to places of worship and talks from a wide-range of speakers stimulate their thinking. Teaching about other world faiths is a strength. The school sensitively involves pupils of different faiths to lead and explain the significance of their beliefs. Consequently, this deepens pupils' understanding and leads to them showing a high degree of respect and empathy for those who hold different views from their own. Pupils understand that Christians celebrate their faith in different ways. However, they are not confident to articulate this and their understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith is not fully developed. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of the local church, for example through supporting joint projects, such as the church food bank. Pupils re-enacted a Christian wedding thus developing their understanding of the journey of life and Christian celebrations which are part of this. RE makes an excellent contribution to the school's Christian character through developing pupils' understanding of values. Pupils enjoy RE as it encourages them to explore spirituality and to think.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship is inspiring because it raises themes and questions which make pupils think and about which they become passionate. They respond for example by organising fund-raising activities and raising the awareness of other people to concerns. Worship is carefully planned to include time for reflection. Pupils contribute to worship well, however, at present they do not have the opportunity to plan and lead worship independently. They enjoy sharing their ideas with a partner, learning from others and singing enthusiastically. There is a strong emphasis on visual elements in worship which engages pupils. Questions raised in worship are developed further in class which deepens pupils' understanding. Pupils recall acts of worship which made them think or influenced their actions. This demonstrates the impact of collective worship. They say worship has deepened their understanding of Christian values, helping them to feel closer to God and providing moments of calm. Worship is invitational and sensitive to those of different faiths or none. Each half term a value is progressively explored with themes securely linked to Bible stories. The worship leader plans specific lessons for each year group which extends pupils' understanding of the current value. Festivals are explored in creative ways which enables pupils to appreciate their significance for Christians, and as a result pupils talk about the main Christian festivals in considerable detail. Pupils have a number of opportunities to explore prayer and use different types of prayer to share ideas with God. Increasingly pupils feel able to respond spontaneously in prayer following a time of worship. Pupils find prayer to be helpful as it enables them to reflect on different situations. Portfolios of prayers show that older pupils have a greater depth of maturity, praying for others and responding to national events. Pupils' suggestions have shaped class prayer spaces and there are daily opportunities for reflection which they find valuable. Pupils' knowledge of Jesus' life and teaching is a particular strength. They provide numerous examples and recount these in some detail. The introduction of story

sacks for pupils to take home has extended their knowledge. Pupils use a variety of images which help them to understand the nature of the Trinity, which they are confident to explain. The worship leader has considerable expertise and is passionate to provide meaningful experiences. He provides strong individual support developing staff knowledge and skills. Detailed daily planning enables staff to lead collective worship with greater confidence. Leaders provide a variety of approaches to worship which pupils appreciate. Worship in church or school led by the vicar are times of special celebration where parents are welcomed. Evaluation of worship is good and involves questionnaires, conferencing and observations by all members of the school family. It has led to significant improvements including better planning, a greater range of worship songs and the introduction of class prayer spaces.

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

Leaders are passionate and dedicated to developing Axbridge as a church school. They lead by example and enable all staff to use their talents well. Together with the staff they form a strong cohesive team which shares the school's Christian vision of 'creating a bright future.' Leaders thoughtfully explain the biblical principles underpinning the vision. They talk about God's love for each person and the care Jesus showed. Following the Christian values is part of the way the school shows this care. Prominent displays help pupils explore the belief that all God's children are valued. Pupils have a growing understanding of the school's Christian ethos and that they are special to God. They know that the school wants them to be successful and have a bright future. Leaders are determined that their vision should link to pupil achievement so that pupils flourish and achieve their God given potential. This extends to the well-being of pupils and families where the school has provided valuable support and help. Monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of leaders' work. Governors are enthusiastic and proud of the school, regularly undertaking learning walks. This has led to them being fully aware of developments needed and to take action to improve the Christian distinctiveness. For example, they reviewed the impact which the values have on pupils. They also recognised that other world faiths needed to have a higher profile. This has now been achieved. However, there is no yearly plan of review which covers all aspects of the school's Christian distinctiveness. For instance, the provision for spirituality has not been fully evaluated. The leader of RE and collective worship plays a significant role in the daily life of the school. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship. The school supports staff effectively through specific professional development opportunities. These are well focused on identified needs. Training for the introduction of 'Understanding Christianity' resources has enhanced the quality of work in RE. Future leaders are identified and given further responsibilities to enable them to take up leadership positions in church schools. The headteacher works closely with the diocese and supports new headteachers in their role. Diocesan training and support are valued and have an impact. The support of the MAT is effective in providing further help such as enabling moderation. It also enables the school to share its outstanding practice with others. The relationship with the local church is a particular strength with the monthly celebration in church being valued by the whole community. Celebrating the main Christian festivals adds to this link with pupils saying that they feel it is their church. The vicar's role is very significant as is the church's contribution to governance. He provides pastoral support for staff and actively supports parents who praise the work of the school and feel part of this church school family.

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