

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Bitterley Church of England Primary School Academy

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| Bitterley, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 3HF | |
| Current SIAMS inspection grade | Outstanding |
| Diocese | Diocese of Hereford |
| Previous SIAMS inspection grade | Outstanding |
| Date of academy conversion | July 2015 |
| Name of multi-academy trust | Bishop Anthony Educational Trust |
| Date of inspection | 5 July 2017 |
| Date of last inspection | 19 June 2012 |
| Type of school and unique reference number | Academy (formerly VA) 142142 |
| Headteacher | William Davies |
| Inspector's name and number | Jo Osborne |
| Quality assurance | Allyson Taylor 768 |

School context

Bitterley Church of England Primary Academy is a smaller than average primary school with 99 full-time pupils in four classes with a further 25 pupils in the newly extended nursery class for two to four year olds. Pupils come from the village, the surrounding rural area and from Ludlow, with the vast majority being of a white British heritage. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is average whilst the number with an education health care plan (EHC) is above average, as is the proportion of children in local authority care. The school converted to an academy within the Bishop Anthony Educational Trust (BAET) in July 2015. The headteacher was appointed after the last inspection and there is currently no incumbent.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Bitterley School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school's Christian vision impacts significantly on children's academic outcomes, personal development and wellbeing, enabling them to flourish.
- Christian values, made explicit through teaching in worship and religious education (RE), are deeply embedded in the daily life of the school resulting in very strong relationships.
- There is a high degree of respect for diversity and difference leading to a strong, shared determination to include and value every child.
- The whole curriculum, including RE, is informed by the distinctly Christian vision and leads to highly effective social, moral spiritual and cultural development for every child.
- Despite the recent high degree of mobility of governors and clergy, the school has looked outwards and strengthened its partnerships. Working closely with the Diocese, BAET, local churches and community has impacted very positively on children's personal development, academic progress and love of learning.

Areas to improve

- Provide regular opportunities for pupils to independently plan, lead and evaluate worship.
- Ensure that assessment in RE informs pupils' next steps in developing subject specific skills such as analysis and interpretation.
- Develop a formal system for evaluating the effectiveness of improvement plans related to the distinctive Christian character of the school.

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

The headteacher introduced the school's Christian vision 'We don't just talk –we act' based on 1 John 3:18 'Dear children, love not with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.' His passion and commitment to live this out in daily school life has inspired staff, pupils and parents to do the same. Bitterley, in accordance with one of its Christian values, is a school that cares deeply; for each other, for those in need and for the wider world. Great care is taken in planning learning opportunities that enable children to fully experience the awe and wonder of creation and to develop, as one parent mentioned, 'enquiring minds wanting to learn.' Consistent modelling by staff, governors and visiting worship leaders of how Christian values inform behaviour and relationships has enabled pupils to develop a high degree of emotional intelligence. The teachings of Jesus Christ influence the guidance given by adults and the expectations of pupils. Consequently, they understand their part in reconciling differences and in taking responsibility for their actions. Pupils are proud to be 'Bitterley Ambassadors' when they consistently demonstrate the school's Christian values, such as forgiveness, patience, courage and compassion. These ambassadors greet visitors and take them round the school, support the staff with daily activities and taking the lead in whole school celebrations. The sense of Christian fellowship amongst the pupil body is clear in the way that current ambassadors encourage those who are yet to achieve it, reinforcing the belief that everyone can get there. Pupils and staff relate to the story of the 'Good Samaritan' in going the extra mile for anyone who needs help and can give examples of where this has been enacted. Staff have gone beyond the school gates to support vulnerable pupils and their families, including those struggling to attend school regularly. One pupil cited 'Love' as the most important skill needed in life. When asked where you could see God's love in action in school, pupils answered, 'Friendship. No one is left out here.' The school's Christian character is consistently lived out in the way that it provides an inclusive education which identifies and nurtures the unique talents of all children. This has resulted in parents of children with SEND and the Local Authority, looking for placements for children in their care, seeking places at Bitterley, confident that it is the right place for vulnerable children to thrive. Parents appreciate the focus on 'enabling' academic progress rather than 'forcing' it which characterises the staff approach to meeting individual needs. Standards are therefore strong for the majority of pupils. Where attendance, academic progress or emotional development requires improvement, the school's individual and determined approach is underpinned by the Christian values of hope, service and celebration. All pupils are nurtured and encouraged to learn well, pursue their interests and develop personally. Spiritual development is recognised by all staff as important although there is not yet a shared ability to describe what good development looks like. Regular teaching through the annual cycle of worship about UNICEF's 'Rights for Children,' British values and Christian values leads to pupils showing a high degree of respect and tolerance for those with different beliefs and opinions. Involving pupils in raising money for charities such as Christian Aid has enabled them to have some understanding of Christianity as a world-wide faith. The majority of pupils enjoy RE and understand that it gives them opportunities to reflect on their own beliefs and those of others which prepare them for life in the future. 'We learn about fairness' one pupil explained. 'We are learning to share our resources in school, just as we should in the world.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Worship is valued by the whole school community. Children and adults enjoy participating in lively worship songs and opportunities to act out stories. Prayer is a central part of school life with pupils confidently making up their own prayers at the end of collective worship or writing them to add to a class prayer tree. Children have a good understanding of different reasons for praying and are familiar with some traditional prayers such as the Lord's Prayer. The previous incumbent was developing children's familiarity with Anglican forms of worship. This has enabled pupils to begin to describe the elements that might be included, such as a special greeting, reflection, a hymn, a Bible reading and prayer. Implementing diocesan training about having consistent elements of worship, such as a candle with three wicks, is leading to pupils developing some understanding of the importance of Jesus in worship and God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some older pupils are beginning to be able to explain difficult concepts like incarnation as 'God in human form' as well as thinking of Jesus as 'God's son.' Children's reflections about worship are captured in a whole school worship book or class learning journeys, enabling some evaluation of its impact. 'If you need some help, just think about Jesus and he will help you – just like our values help us' one child records. There is a planned annual cycle of worship based on the church year and specific Christian values with evidence of pupils experiencing a wide variety of worship led by people from different Christian traditions. Although pupils are regularly encouraged to participate in worship, there are limited opportunities for them to independently plan and lead worship. The introduction of key-stage worship has enabled leaders to suit the content to the age of pupil resulting in better spiritual development. The school visits the local church for special services like at harvest and Christmas, which are well-attended and appreciated by parents. As pupils come from a wide area, there are also links with neighbouring churches which enables them to understand that there are different denominations within Christianity.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Written work and pupils' reflections, questions and opinions captured in class learning journeys show that standards in RE are at least in line with national expectations and for some older pupils, higher. The high quality of work presented shows its importance and matches the quality of work in other areas of the curriculum. Progress across the year and between year groups is good. The introduction of 'cold and hot tasks,' establishing what pupils know at the beginning of each lesson and what they understand at the end, shows pupils increasing their knowledge of different faiths. The use of assessment to inform next steps in developing subject specific skills is underdeveloped. There are, however, some examples of effective marking in Class 5 leading to pupils deepening their understanding. RE as a subject has an equal priority with core subjects in the school's monitoring cycle. Lesson observations and work scrutinies lead to the sharing and improving of good practice within the school. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the Shropshire agreed syllabus on pupil outcomes and enjoyment of RE, has led to a decision to implement the Gloucestershire agreed syllabus instead. This closely links with 'Understanding Christianity,' the Church of England's new teaching resource. Training in this has been undertaken with staff trying out some units this term resulting in some challenging discussions about the nature of wealth and poverty and pupils being able to explain that RE 'teaches us about life.' Pupils were also engaged by the idea of Sikh temples providing free food for anyone who wanted it and linked that to supporting Christian Aid's appeal to tackle famine in the developing world. These lessons in RE show that the content is relevant and engaging, enabling pupils to make good progress in their understanding of how faith can affect the way people live their lives. Pupils' current ability to analyse similarities and differences between faith practices and to use appropriate subject-specific vocabulary is variable. The school has responded to this by introducing more rigorous and challenging teaching inspired by 'Understanding Christianity.' Teaching in RE has an appropriate emphasis on the teaching of Christianity, showing children's developing understanding of God as creator, for example, with five year olds observing that 'He made everything but he didn't make houses' and one Year 6 pupil being able to discuss his own scientific opinion about how the world began compared with family beliefs that God made the world. 'God was there at the big bang and thought this was a good time to create the world.'

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

This is an outward-facing school that has deliberately sought training, advice, best practice and support to further develop its effectiveness as a Church of England school. Continuous progress has been made since the last inspection, appropriately addressing the points for development. Inspired by the headteacher's determination that the Christian vision should be lived out in all aspects of school life, governors have kept their focus on the drive to make a difference to every child through the living out of distinctly Christian values. The success of this is clear from strengths in attainment at the Early Years Foundation Stage, and Key Stage 1. Weaknesses for specific groups at Key Stage 2 relate to individual pupils with additional needs. The school has taken strong action to address not only these children's academic needs but also their social and emotional needs. Governors are clear about their central role in monitoring the impact of the school's Christian character. They currently achieve this by being actively involved in school life. More formal systems for recording this and the decisions made for further improvement are not yet in place. The leadership of the school is described by parents, staff and visiting worship leaders as being open, approachable and willing to act upon suggestions for improvement. Staff feel as valued as the children and there are strategic plans to develop leadership at all levels, including a teaching assistant becoming the new worship leader next year. The leadership of RE and worship, as undertaken by the headteacher, are given a very high priority but distributing leadership will enable him to evaluate the impact of actions as well as lead improvement. Arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. The decision to join the BAET was motivated by the desire to further strengthen ties with the church and strategically ensure that this continues into the future. There is already evidence that this has been successful with the chief executive officer focussing on the impact of the school's vision on a regular monitoring visit and in the headteacher being asked to share the successes of his strong Christian leadership with other schools in the trust. The fact that the school's vision is interwoven throughout all aspects of school life is clear from all documentation and the website, ensuring that the Christian character of the school has a high profile. Even in the middle of the detailed school development plan there is the phrase 'the life that spills over every cup' as a description of success for the effective use of pupil premium funding. The school's Christian vision is consistently found in every aspect of planning a rich and varied curriculum that meets the needs of all children. For example, installing a climbing wall so that 'children can be physical' as one parent described it or ensuring that pupils have multi-cultural experiences from pre-school to Year 6. As part of their study in RE, pupils in Class 5 were asked to design a logo for a multi-faith school and many simply said 'Bitterley School - where everyone is welcome.' The strength of Bitterley school's Christian vision is that its welcome is indeed not just 'talk' but is evident in every action taken by staff and pupils together.