

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Austwick Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	
Austwick, Lancaster LA2 8BN	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Leeds
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Date of inspection	5 December 2017
Date of last inspection	22 May 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	VA 121620
Headteacher	Jo Lister
Inspector's name and number	Malcolm Price 627

School context

Austwick Primary School is a smaller than average village school on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. There are currently 51 children on roll, with another 4 in nursery provision. Most pupils live in the village and the neighbouring hamlets, though some come from further afield. Pupils are drawn from a variety of social and economic backgrounds with parents working in professional, trade and farming occupations. There is an element of rural deprivation. Following the previous inspection, there has been some instability in leadership including a period of confederation. Since January 2016 there has been a substantive headteacher in post. The nearby Church of the Epiphany is currently in a period of interregnum.

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

- The distinctively Christian character of the school is demonstrated through a clear, collaborative focus on Christian values, which brings to the school a sense of belonging illustrated by exemplary relationships.
- Collective worship supports this distinctiveness and offers all members of the school community opportunities to participate and engage.
- Standards in religious education (RE) are high and children demonstrate impressive knowledge and understanding, coupled with an ability to apply this to their appreciation of spiritual matters and to their own attitudes and behaviour.
- School leaders provide a nurturing environment based on Christian values, which is enabling all children to thrive personally, to achieve well both collectively and as individuals, and to make good progress academically.

Areas to improve

- Explore ways to extend and develop children's responsibility for the planning of collective worship and their role in its delivery.
- In consultation with children and wider school leadership, develop the use of outdoor spaces for reflection and worship.

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

From an already strong position, this warm and welcoming school has made significant strides in developing and promoting its distinctively Christian character. The Christian values that were already embedded have been reviewed by the whole school community so that a distinct set – love, peace, perseverance, responsibility, friendship, respect and forgiveness - now provides a focus on which everyone can base their shared lives. These values form a constant thread through school life and are referred to as a matter of course by children. This means that they relate the values with ease to their exceptional knowledge of scripture. They connect love with the parable of the lost sheep, friendship with the relationship between David and Jonathan, forgiveness with God's treatment of Jonah, and respect with the story of Ruth and Naomi. They can discuss how, in the Christmas story, Mary and the Wise Men must have shown perseverance, and at the same time they compliment each other for persevering to produce excellent art work on this theme. This spreads to the wider curriculum where, for example, children refer to the value of peace as part of their studies of the first world war. Most importantly, the values impact positively on children's attitudes, behaviour and learning. Relationships between children, and indeed between all members of the school community, are excellent. Children are extremely courteous to visitors and noticeably supportive of each other. Parents and governors comment on this, especially on how the buddy system ensures children take responsibility for each other and are cared for. Prayer is a feature of everyday school life. Children use standard prayers, such as the Grace, but have a deeper understanding as shown by a comment that 'you could go outside and talk to God'. There are reflective areas in classrooms and around the school and younger children can be seen using the 'heavenly hotline' telephone to speak to God. Children know about liturgical colours but, more importantly, can explain that purple is the colour of Advent because 'Jesus is the King'. The distinctive Christian character of the school day is enhanced by the after-school ACES club which complements and enhances children's learning in RE and collective worship. Through its distinctive character, the school is enabling children to achieve well academically, especially in reading, with most children meeting or exceeding national age-related expectations. Progress over time is good across the core subjects and the school provides focussed support where this is needed for some children, particularly in mathematics and phonics.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is viewed by the whole school community as a key feature of the school day and serves a vital role in nurturing and celebrating the school's distinctive Christian character. There is a real sense of belonging, which is illustrated powerfully by the passing of a small cross around the circle of all those present and also by the use of responses from the Anglican tradition. All the expected elements of collective worship are present and the school hall is enhanced as a worship space by relevant displays and artefacts. Children listen attentively and offer reflective thoughts. They sing well and know the Lord's Prayer by heart. They can explain the significance of Advent candles, for instance by referring to the prophets. They respond sensitively when asked to use a small stone to represent a special gift they could give someone, such as helping someone who is lonely. The worship committee enjoy the responsibility given to them to contribute to planning and leading. They were able to present the story of St Nicholas in an informative and engaging manner, asking children to consider how the story might remind them of another story from the Bible. This enabled children to use their knowledge of scripture to make connections between the story of St Nicholas and the feeding of the five thousand. Given the confidence that children display and the strength of their background knowledge, there is scope for them to take a more significant role in planning and leading. As expressed in the school's aims, they are given 'the roots to grow' but can now be given 'the wings to fly'. Christian festivals are celebrated in the local church and children are involved in aspects such as leading prayers and giving readings. When children are involved in presenting worship, they are encouraged to contribute to its review. They say that they would like to redevelop a reflective area in the school grounds. Foundation governors are also involved in monitoring and evaluating the impact of collective worship and accurately report that children value peace and reflection and enjoy Bible stories and songs. During the current interregnum, the area dean has supported collective worship and children appreciate his input, especially when he relates worship to current affairs and when he encourages them to act out stories.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

A hallmark of this school is children's extensive knowledge of scripture, and it is clear that this has been gained primarily through excellent teaching and rich and varied learning in RE. Teachers are able to draw out remarkable awareness and mature comments from children because they are themselves confident in their knowledge and understanding. For example, when discussing Advent, teachers enable children to explain that the prophets are 'someone who God speaks through' and that the season is about 'getting ready for celebrating Jesus' birth'. Children can also relate this to the theme of hope when explaining that Christians believe that 'Jesus will come back'. They also know names for Jesus, such as Emmanuel and Son of God, and can progress from an understanding of what makes Jesus special to an appreciation of what makes everyone special, relating this to the parable of the Lost Sheep. In RE lessons, children typically apply their knowledge of scripture to explaining shared values. They do this with reference to Old Testament stories of Isaac and Jacob and the Fall. Similarly, from the New Testament, they can connect kindness to the healing of the blind man and forgiveness with the man lowered through the roof, explaining that 'Jesus made him walk again and forgave his sins'. Their knowledge extends to other specific faiths, as shown through their studies of Divali in Hinduism and the Pillars of Islam. Teachers also take opportunities to develop learning of a wider range of faiths, for instance through learning about Sikhism or Passover within Judaism. Teachers promote the use of enquiry and interpretation skills, such as when children are asked to analyse passages from the Bible. Teachers also use reflective marking in RE books, which encourages children to consider big issues such as whether or not it is good to have free will, for example by relating teachings from prophecy to modern day world and social issues. As a result of strong teaching, standards are at least as good as, and sometimes better than, those in other areas of the curriculum. The school has adopted the Understanding Christianity scheme. This has been dovetailed into the existing scheme of work and training has been cascaded to relevant staff. In terms of assessment, all children have an individual progress record to which both they and teachers contribute. The school has moved seamlessly to a system which records progress in RE in three categories, similar to that used in other curriculum areas. This progress is gathered termly and fed back to governors, enabling them to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the subject. It is eminently clear that RE is given a high status and is creating opportunities for promoting children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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

School leaders, including governors, are highly effective in ensuring its success as a church school. They consistently express a distinctively Christian vision for the school, as shown by their decision to review and refine the already successful values and mission statement in order to make them even more accessible to children. Leaders share a common understanding of how to shape the school's Christian character with the result that children are confident in explaining how the Christian values impact on their attitudes and in recognising when they are demonstrated. Foundation governors meet regularly with the headteacher and are fully involved in monitoring the school's progress as a church school. They say that they are impressed with how well children articulate the mission statement and put it into practice. This impression is borne out by children's obvious confidence in expressing and living out the key values. Links with the local church are well established and include a range of joint events. This partnership has continued to flourish despite the recent interregnum, partly through the support of the area dean but also through the involvement in school life of other church members. Leaders have also encouraged a strong partnership with the nearby Bethel Chapel through events such as Rewind to Easter. This partnership, together with visits to St Paul's Cathedral in London, is widening children's appreciation of different forms of Christian expression. Leaders encourage children in leadership roles and value their opinions. The school council operates a suggestions box and takes a key part in arranging support for charities such as Children in Need. Through a link with Jinja in Uganda and the headteacher's visits there, children have been able to raise funds for that community. This is giving them a wider perspective on the world and compassion for those less fortunate than themselves. In addition, leaders have formed a partnership with a predominantly muslim school in Bury, which has led to reciprocal visits by children. Leaders provide opportunities for children to learn more about diversity and to understand those of other faiths, not only through their studies in RE but also through a wide range of visits to places of worship, including a Sikh temple and a synagogue, as well as participation in a diversity day at Settle College. All these initiatives demonstrate that the school has met the focus for development from the previous inspection to 'enhance pupils' awareness of national and global issues by forming links with other schools in contrasting circumstances'.