



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Sessay Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Sessay
Thirsk
North Yorkshire
YO7 3NA

Diocese: YORK

Local authority: North Yorkshire
Date of inspection: 24th May, 2013
Date of last inspection: 7th July 2008
School's unique reference number: 121514
Headteacher: Allyson Buckton
Inspector's name and number: Linda Hodson (314)

School context

Sessay is a small rural primary school, drawing pupils from well beyond its immediate locality. Nearly all its pupils are of White British heritage with few being eligible for the pupil premium. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average. There have been some staff changes since the last inspection, including the appointment of a new headteacher in 2010. Significant improvements to the accommodation are planned.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Sessay as a Church of England (VC) primary school are good.

Despite the limitations of the current accommodation, staff ensure that Sessay is a warm and welcoming school that stimulates learning. Pupils therefore enjoy coming to school and they achieve well. The school's leaders are committed to the continuous improvement of the school as a church school and have provided firm foundations for future growth through the development of a more explicit Christian vision for the school, underpinned by core values. This provides a clear framework for pupils' moral, social and spiritual development.

Established strengths

- The strong focus given, by the headteacher and governors, to the continual improvement of the school as a church school
- Acts of worship are of high quality, engage pupils and stimulate spiritual growth.
- Mutually supportive relationships between the school, church and wider community.

Focus for development

- Securely embed the recently developed values framework in the daily life of the school.
- Broaden pupils' response to worship through their actions in the service of others.
- Provide more opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of diversity in national and global contexts

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

Sessay provides an inclusive, caring and safe environment where pupils feel secure and happy. A recently developed set of values, underpinned by Biblical teachings provides a Christian framework for learning which is understood by all. In this context, pupils thrive and grow as confident learners. Teachers respond well to individual needs, which results in good achievement. Parents appreciate the interaction between older and younger pupils and the open dialogue between home and school. They see the school as “one big, welcoming family” and regard the very positive relationships between all members of the school community as a strength. Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their above average attendance. The school’s values also provide a framework for pupils’ personal development and this is impacting positively on behaviour and well-being. Pupils routinely reflect on the consequences of their actions on themselves and others and their successes in living out the school’s values are celebrated. Religious education (RE) and the wider curriculum make a good contribution to pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision is enriched through educational visits and activities such as Rethink days, Lifepath and visits to places of worship. These all further understanding of the school’s Christian heritage and of Christianity as a world-wide faith. Further links with schools in contrasting communities would help to strengthen pupils’ understanding of cultural diversity.

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

The importance of worship in the life of the school is demonstrated in the way the headteacher and governors act on self-evaluation findings to develop and strengthen provision for collective worship. The school’s revised values are now fully incorporated within worship planning and are explored within a Christian context. Wherever worship takes place, leaders ensure that an appropriate atmosphere is created and that a key message is delivered in an engaging way. Pupils respond enthusiastically through their singing but equally show thoughtfulness and respect during times of prayer or reflection. This quality provision effectively fosters moral development and spiritual growth. The celebration of the major festivals develops understanding of the importance of Jesus Christ within the Christian faith and supports a growing awareness of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The school is well supported by the local church community and both the vicar and local Methodist minister lead worship, as well as staff and older pupils. Pupils welcome the variety this brings and say that “Open the Book” worship, which takes place in St Cuthbert’s Church, is particularly enjoyable. “Messy Church” sessions are also proving popular and are well attended by pupils and their families. Pupils regularly undertake fundraising in support of charities but could further develop their service to others through a broader range of actions.

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

The appointment of a new headteacher and changes of staff and governors has brought fresh impetus and commitment to the development of Sessay as a church school. The vision for the school is now clearly expressed in terms of Christian values, which are understood by all. Although this work is not yet fully embedded, the impact on pupil’s achievement is already evident. More pupils are now reaching the standards expected with most making good progress. The introduction of more formal systems for monitoring and evaluation, including the formation of a values group, is providing leaders with an increasingly accurate picture of the school’s strengths and weaknesses and is driving improvement work. Governors ensure that the arrangements for collective worship and RE meet statutory requirements and that there are professional development opportunities for staff in these areas. For example, they ensure that there is appropriate training to support the introduction of a new Agreed Syllabus for RE. Leaders also make effective use of the advice and training provided by the Diocese. The school’s distinctive provision is enhanced through the very productive partnerships with the Parish and wider Christian community. Pupils develop a sense of community at local level through participation in cluster and village events, but there is scope to further raise their awareness of community at national and global levels.

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