

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Sessay Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Sessay, Thirsk, North Yorkshire YO7 3NA	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	York
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Name of federation	Husthwaite and Sessay Church of England Federation
Date of inspection	14 June 2018
Date of last inspection	May 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary Voluntary Controlled 121514
Headteacher	Fiona Bennett
Inspector's name and number	Lucy Jordan 910

School context

Sessay is a smaller than average school serving a rural village. Around three quarters of the pupils live outside the local area and travel to school by car or bus. It is part of a federation of two Church of England schools established in 2016. The executive headteacher was appointed in May 2018, having led the school during an interim period from January 2018. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is lower than average as is the proportion eligible for pupil premium funding. Almost all pupils are White British. The school has recently undergone significant building works to improve the accommodation.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Sessay as a Church of England school are good

- Leaders have a clear vision, 'Growing together in love and learning', underpinned by the Christian values of challenge, trust, responsibility, enjoyment and respect which inform all decisions made. These values have sustained the school during significant changes to the school's leadership.
- Relationships at all levels, informed by the school's Christian vision, ensure the school is a welcoming and inclusive place in which children's personal development flourishes.
- Collective worship makes a positive difference to all groups within this church school community and has an impact which extends beyond the school hall.

Areas to improve

- Develop ways to embed the school's Christian values so that they permeate all aspects of school life and their impact on the lives and achievements of the pupils can be explicitly articulated by all members of the school community.
- Provide experiences for pupils to engage in personal reflection beyond the classrooms to support their spiritual development further.
- Enrich pupils' experience of collective worship by ensuring they plan and lead it frequently.

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

Sessay is a very friendly and welcoming school in which pupils' personal development and wellbeing has the highest priority. The school's chosen Christian values of challenge, trust, responsibility, enjoyment, respect and friendship underpin all aspects of school life and most members of the school's distinctively Christian community recognise how these help them in their daily lives. From different starting points, most pupils make progress which is in line with that seen nationally. Actions taken by the new headteacher in particular in developing more robust monitoring processes are helping to raise pupil achievement further. Parents hold very positive views of the school and say that the Christian character helps 'shape (my child) as a person'. They speak of the 'warm, welcoming atmosphere' and their confidence to speak to the supportive staff about their pupils, knowing they will be listened to. All children in this small school are well known valued as individuals. Their confidence and ability to express their thoughts grows as a result of their membership of one of the five pupil voice groups, matched to individual interests and needs. Having a role in the collective worship group, for example, enables pupils to live out the school's Christian values in a meaningful way, unique to the school's context. Pupils say that they become 'responsible like Noah'. The school's distinctive Christian context impacts on relationships at all levels which are a key strength. Behaviour throughout the school is excellent and pupils are clear that there is no bullying at Sessay. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to play with children from different age groups and carry out their roles as playground buddies responsibly. Staff value the 'friendships' they have within their team and the physical and spiritual closeness of St Cuthbert's Church to the school. The new headteacher has worked hard to build relationships across the Husthwaite and Sessay Church of England Federation and this is much appreciated by staff, clergy, parents and pupils alike.

Pupils enjoy coming to learn and be with their friends at Sessay, many of whom live in different villages. Attendance is higher than that seen nationally and parents really value the school's church school ethos.

The school's Christian character makes a good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Activities such as collaboration-wide faith week enable pupils to explore spirituality in a wider context through a broad range of thought-provoking experiences such as 'Share a Pencil Day'. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong. They know and understand the meaning of forgiveness, which they relate to Bible stories, such as the story of Zacchaeus .

From a very young age, children develop their understanding of and respect for different faiths. As a result of strong leadership and imaginative teaching in RE, pupils' understanding and respect for diversity and difference between faiths is good. RE makes a good contribution to the Christian character of the school. The youngest children relish spotting the difference between Christian and Islamic places of worship. Through imaginative activities, they work in pairs and small groups to develop their social skills. For example, they identify similarities between a church tower and the minaret of a mosque - both being tall and having means by which to invite people to worship. They deepen their understanding of respect and reverence through rich discussions about appropriate behaviour in places of worship and learn the 'right' way to behave in church. RE makes a positive contribution to children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship plays an important part in the life of Sessay. For example, during recent building work a spare classroom was transformed to ensure the school community could continue to gather together each day. Parents enjoy attending collective worship and place high value on it saying 'It bonds us together as a community'. Staff value 'a time out to reflect' with worship instilling 'a sense of belonging'. Collective worship held at St Cuthbert's is particularly valued and everyone enjoys the celebration worship in church each Friday.

Activities initiated in collective worship impact on pupils' behaviour and attitudes outside the school hall. Following worship based on friendship and forgiveness, pupils explain that 'When you say sorry you actually have to mean it. You don't just say sorry and walk off.' They recognise how their actions reflect those of Jesus Christ in the way He showed friendship and forgiveness towards Zacchaeus. Pupils relish participating in worship, especially when they have the chance to dress up as a Biblical character!

Themes in worship stimulate the children and deepen their sense of moral purpose. A good example of this followed a half term of collective worships based round the Christian value of courage. When asked what had been learnt about courage, a child reflected, 'You have to keep going and be brave. Do what you think is right. It might not be a very big thing but it is still being courageous.' Children can make links between worship themes and Biblical texts. For example, they explain the courage shown by Daniel when in the lion's den. Worship themes often inspire charitable fundraising.

Prayer is central to collective worship and children see the purpose of prayer, saying 'They take things that are worrying me from my mind' and 'Prayers keep me thinking.' The Lord's Prayer has a high priority and pupils say grace before lunchtime. Pupils would like more opportunities to write their own prayers and to lead prayer as part of collective worship. Pupils value their classroom reflection areas, especially when they have interesting activities within them, such as the open zip which 'you zip ... up when you're friends again'. They find the classroom

reflection area helpful: 'We can use it to help us fix problems, like if we've had an argument'. Themes support worship values and Christian artefacts such as a cross, Bible and quotations from the Bible which link to current themes enhance these calm inviting areas. Pupils say that they would like a place for quiet reflection that they can use at playtimes and are keen to develop the African hut for this purpose. Children are familiar with Anglican practice such as lighting three candles to represent the Holy Trinity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and responding to 'Peace be with you' because leaders have established these as normal practice within collective worship. Pupils' understanding of the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is appropriate for their age. They recognise the importance of Jesus Christ and find listening to and watching Bible stories enacted enjoyable. They can see how Jesus 'set a good example'. The worship group undertake their role seriously and have gathered some good evaluations of collective worship over time. They say they would like to have greater involvement in planning and leading worship and are eager to share their ideas. The school acknowledges the need to enrich collective worship further. Clergy support the collective worship leader with planning and leading collective worship. The evaluation of collective worship has led to improvements. For example, the structure of worship now follows the gathering, engaging, responding and sending with children spending time reflecting on collective worship long after it took place.

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

Leaders, including governors, articulate the impact of the school's chosen Christian values of challenge, trust, responsibility, enjoyment and respect in all areas of school life. Governors' good understanding of the school's distinctive Christian character informs strategic decisions such as the appointment of the new headteacher. The new headteacher is committed to ensuring leaders at all levels promote and live out the school's Christian vision of 'Growing together in love and learning' and this informs all decisions leaders make about school life. A good example of this has been establishing regular training sessions across the federation which are helping to improve outcomes by sharing good practice. Leaders recognise that pupil achievement is variable year on year and school development planning reflects their strong commitments to ensuring outcomes are consistently high for all pupils, whatever their starting points. Guidance from the diocese and local authority is helping the newly appointed and ambitious headteacher to prioritise areas for improvement. For example, establishing more effective monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress and aspirational target setting ensures that the needs of each child as a unique individual, are met. Self-evaluation is accurate and leaders have a clear view of development areas rooted in evidence. In a very short period of time, the new headteacher, with the full support of her governors, has established new structures and systems. These are underpinned by the school's Christian values and with the children's wellbeing at the heart of every decision. Leaders recognise the uniqueness of their close school community, made up of children who mostly live out of the catchment area and their responsibilities in ensuring children's curiosity and confidence are carefully nurtured so that they succeed in the wider world. Collective worship and RE meet statutory requirements, with worship themes linked to Christian values such as friendship, rooted in Biblical texts. Christian values inform teaching in RE, with pupils developing an understanding of respect and tolerance by comparing places of worship in villages different to those in which they live. This contributes to pupils' very good behaviour and attitudes throughout the school and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, leaders recognise the need to embed Christian values so they permeate all aspects of school life, and pupils' academic and personal development. Both the collective worship leader and RE leader have the training, time and resources to undertake their role effectively. Leaders are committed to supporting roles and responsibilities at all levels. For example, the RE leader has attended training focused on exploring the Bible creatively. With both schools in the federation situated in separate church parishes, opportunities for the school and churches to work together have been capitalised on, to the mutual benefit of all parties. An example of this was in the whole school Christingle service in which members of the congregation made up Christingle kits for children to create in school with the service held back at St Cuthbert's. Following significant improvements to the listed school building, leaders are keen to define the link between school and church further by creating a path between the two. Supportive partnerships between home and school are very effective and reflect the school's Christian vision. The partnership of schools within the federation has strengthened recently with both schools benefitting from working together more closely within a Christian context.

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