

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

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| Layston Church of England First School | | | |
| Address | The Causeway, Buntingford, Hertfordshire, SG9 9EU | | |
| Date of inspection | 4 July 2019 | Status of school | Voluntary Controlled |
| Diocese | St Albans | URN | 117390 |

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| Overall Judgement | How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish? | Grade | Excellent |
| Additional Judgements | The impact of collective worship | Grade | Excellent |

School context

Layston Church of England First School is a first school with 148 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages. There have been 2 headteachers since the last inspection with the current one in post since September 2018. One of the 2 deputy headteachers also joined the school in September 2018.

The school's Christian vision

We take the Gospel intent of 'love one another' as a blue-print in our lives and use our Christian Values to guide and inspire us. We are inclusive and nurture each person as a child of God and promote the love for learning through our curriculum so that every child has a chance to shine. Matthew 5:14-16

Key findings

- The Christian vision is deeply embedded and underpins every aspect of the daily lives of the whole school community.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are exceptionally positive. There is a very strong culture of welcome and inclusion.
- Everyone feels cherished and all pupils and adults flourish. The whole school community feels valued and supported and all groups are able to contribute to discussions of faith knowing their opinions will be treated seriously and with respect. The school is very effective in ensuring good outcomes for vulnerable pupils.
- Collective worship is uplifting. The school uses the Forest School to deepen the pupils' spiritual development through marvelling at God's creation.
- Religious education (RE) is very well led and offers a safe place to explore and deepen theological thinking and debate.

Areas for development

- Enhance the pupils' spiritual development through the use of the reflective spaces within the classrooms, enabling them to have an area in which they can be tranquil and pray.
- Forge links with schools in other countries in order to deepen the pupils' understanding of global issues and Christianity as a living world faith.
- Develop a joint system of moderation and assessment with leaders of other church schools to ensure the high expectations in RE are maintained and excellent practice is shared.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

All leaders effectively demonstrate how the school's Christian vision shapes and drives the strategic direction of the school. The vision and twelve associated values are openly demonstrated through the excellent behaviour, attitudes to learning and the decidedly positive relationships between all members of the school community. Everyone is thought of as a child of God. This underpins the highly effective proactive support for vulnerable pupils, in class and in the Little Acorns nurture group. Leaders are passionate about building on good practice as a Church school. They have a highly robust system of monitoring and continuous self-evaluation and they actively seek the support of the diocese through training events. Leaders talk about their understanding of current thinking in Church school education. The value of trust is demonstrated in the extremely positive relationships the governors have with the adults and pupils. One parent said that the school is like a 'family' and they feel 'welcomed and included at all times'. The open-door aspect of the school is highly valued by parents. Links with the local church are extremely strong. Leaders are actively working with other local church school leaders. This has resulted in joint planning in order to maintain and improve standards in all subjects. Highly effective induction is prioritised for all staff and governors. Collective worship is seen by adults and pupils as an inspirational focal point of the school day. Pupils have time to reflect on the school's values and how they can live them out. Pupils attend Forest School once a week and have their own collective worship where they focus on the awe and wonder of God's creation. Certificates are awarded to pupils demonstrating the vision and values. These are prominently displayed to inspire others.

The curriculum is very effectively planned to meet the needs of all the pupils. Vulnerable pupils and their needs are expertly identified. Teachers are very well trained in supporting all pupils to reach their full potential. There is little difference between the progress of pupils that are disadvantaged and those that are not. Progress is above average for all pupils. Displays are vibrant and work in books is sensitively marked by the teachers with thoughtful and encouraging comments. This enables pupils to meet challenges within a safe and secure atmosphere. They demonstrate that they feel confident to take risks and are very enthusiastic about taking control of their own learning. Pupils say that they enjoy posing and discussing 'big questions', such as 'Why did God create the earth?' and 'Does God know everything that is going to happen?' The planning of Forest School activities and work in RE books shows that pupils' spiritual development is given a very high priority. The school has identified ways to further enhance this spirituality, encouraging pupils to pose 'big questions' across all subjects. RE is very well led with incisive action planning in place to facilitate deeper theological and philosophical debate. All teachers have access to sharply focussed training in order to further strengthen the skilful expertise within the school. The leaders are instrumental in promoting joint working with other church schools. Expectations are high and evidence in books shows that the pupils are developing skills of enquiry and analysis. Pupils demonstrate the value of respect when talking and writing about different world religions. Their learning is enhanced through visits to a range of places of worship. As a result, they make deeply insightful comparisons between faiths, emphasising the similarities rather than the differences. Pupils talk about the Christian belief of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Pupils talk passionately about the ways they can challenge injustice and inequality. They are proactive in protecting the environment in their work as an Eco School. The pupils regularly suggest ways they can support charities such as Cancer Research and the World Wildlife fund. The Christian vision and values of justice, service and courage form the foundations of the pupils' ideas in campaigning for change. There are established links with schools locally. New links have been made with schools nationally. Currently the school does not have any links with schools in other parts of the world.

The school proudly declares its Christian vision and values on its website, around the school, and through the local parish magazine. The whole school community lives out the school's vision in the deep respect they demonstrate for one another. Pupils in each class act as 'Meeters and Greeters' for visitors. This ensures an innovative, warm and highly inclusive welcome as they shake hands and talk to the visitors about what they are learning. Parents talk about teachers always 'going the extra mile' if their children need support to overcome difficulties. The excellent signposting for mental health support is a real strength of the school. Leaders are well trained and offer exemplary support to each other as well as pupils and parents. There is a strong, highly tangible culture of care, encouragement and hope, clearly demonstrating the school's Christian vision. Attendance is above national average and there have been no exclusions in the past year. Leaders deeply consider the school's Christian vision and values when implementing the behaviour policy. They focus on support, compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. The policies

have a clear emphasis on prevention over reaction to poor behaviour. The adults in school lead by example and the older pupils support the younger ones, acting as friendship 'buddies', demonstrating the values of forgiveness and trust. Pupils are given and take second chances. Everyone is treated with dignity and respect. The highly effective communication between everyone is seen as a key in promoting good choices and excellent outcomes for pupils. Leaders make bold ethical arguments for supporting vulnerable pupils. They focus on inclusion and seek innovative ways to overcome barriers to learning for all pupils. This support enables pupils to develop extremely positive attitudes to learning, to overcome difficulties and to flourish. The wide range of extra-curricular activities are inclusive, well planned and attended. Pupils talk about how their attitudes influence their own outcomes and how they can support each other to shine.

Collective worship is a strength of the school. It is warmly welcoming to those of any or no faith. Prayer is a highly influential focus of worship with pupils writing their own prayers which are displayed in books. Pupils talk about collective worship as being 'uplifting', influencing the way they behave and live their lives. Worship is highly creative and as a result impacts very strongly on pupils' spiritual development. It takes on a variety of forms with times of music, singing and reflection. The vicar and other members of the local church community regularly lead collective worship. The vicar actively supports teachers and pupils as part of the worship group. The school leads services in the local church for the whole community. Pupils and adults in school also attend scheduled church services, enabling them to participate in Anglican traditions.

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| Headteacher | Sonia Singh |
| Inspector's name and number | Carolyn Gleeson 929 |