

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ermine Street Church Academy

Address	2, Swynford Road, Alconbury Weald, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE28 4XG		
Date of inspection	13/02/2019	Status of school	Academy inspected as VA Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust
Diocese / Methodist District	Diocese of Ely/East Anglia District St Neots and Huntingdon Circuit	URN	141949

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

School context

Ermine Street Church Academy is a primary school with 108 pupils on roll; it is an Anglican school which works with the Methodist church in supportive partnership. The school has high levels of cultural diversity and many pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils considered disadvantaged is below national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with national averages. The school opened in September 2016 with 10 pupils; over the last thirty months it has experienced rapid growth, leading to regular adaption and change to class structure and staffing.

The school's Christian vision

To be the heartbeat of the community, rooted and established in God's love; bearing fruit in all seasons.
Ephesians 3:17 and Jeremiah 17:8 Explore, Discover, Learn

Key findings

- The Ermine Street Church Academy's distinctively Christian vision, supported by effective partnerships, impacts positively on the community. It genuinely brings hope and aspiration and enables all to live well together. This excellent practice holistically infuses and shapes all the decisions made by the school.
- Spirituality is evident in worship, reflective spaces around the school and in the curriculum. This is less evident in the broader curriculum.
- The school community is caring and respectful, however, fewer opportunities exist to extend that care to the wider community through courageous advocacy and global partnership links.
- Collective worship is valued by pupils and staff who speak of its impact; there are opportunities to develop pupil contributions further.
- The RE curriculum is established, adapted to include a Methodist unit, and given sufficient curriculum time. When studying Christianity, pupils are developing critical thinking skills and personal responses; these skills are less evident when studying different faiths and beliefs.

Areas for development

- Broaden the impact of spirituality so that pupils have meaningful opportunities for reflection and transformation across the wider curriculum.
- Provide more opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to explore global issues and develop an approach to courageous advocacy.
- Improve consistency of RE teaching ensuring high expectations of pupil work in all units of work.
- Involve pupils in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the impact of collective worship.

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

The school's drive, arising from its vision, to give its pupils 'roots' and 'wings' is an imperative in all strategic and day to day decisions. This means that pupils flourish in the school, demonstrating progress academically, socially and spiritually. Whilst still embedding, the vision is already having impact: this is a growing, supportive and harmonious community where all are respected whatever their faith, background or ability. Families are given renewed hope and aspiration by the transformation in their children's lives and the support that they personally receive. Parents speak warmly of the values that the school promotes and how much their children enjoy coming to school. More than one parent talked of being in a 'desperate' place before their child had moved to the school but the situation had now 'completely turned around'. This positive experience is explained, said the parents, by the teachers' understanding of children's individual needs. In this way, the school is effective in making its vision pertinent to everyday life and its community is transformed and helped.

The vision of the school to show God's love to all shapes policy, school improvement objectives, timetabling and recruitment decisions. The recent appointment of a family support worker is evidence that the school is working holistically with families. Close partnerships are in place with both the Methodist and Anglican churches; ministers deliver collective worship and consult on curriculum content and reflective spaces. The school seeks to provide strong emotional and spiritual foundations for all and ensures that pastoral support from the clergy is available to pupils, staff and parents where required. A parent commented on the 'excellent bereavement care' received by their child from the pioneering minister demonstrating the positive impact of partnerships. Nurture breaks are also timetabled as part of the school's decision to prioritise pastoral care and mental health. Monthly meetings with community development officers enable strong links with social care providers forging cooperative projects in this rapidly growing new town. A community mother and toddler group is due to start in the school imminently.

Small classes enable personalised learning opportunities. Outcomes in 2018 were broadly in line with national averages for the Phonics Screening check, end of Key Stage 1 and end of Key Stage 2 assessments. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, attainment is higher than national expectations and this good practice has been cascaded to staff in other schools in the trust. Pupils make good progress on joining the school due to the holistic support given to them and rapidly move towards age related expectations which is giving them 'wings'.

The school's ethos encourages character development. A group of enthusiastic children have created a lunch time 'Book Club' where they hear younger children read, this helps nurture them in a culture of mutual respect and care. Parents commented on the older children's enthusiasm to serve lunch, pleased that the children were developing a sense of service and gratitude. The school's recent Young Carers Award is evidence of the children beginning to look outward and understand the lives of children who are less fortunate than themselves. There is less evidence of opportunities for pupils to practically support charitable causes or learn from global links. Opportunities for spiritual development exist in collective worship and in the provision reflective spaces around the school however, there are fewer planned opportunities across the curriculum.

Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Children speak of the school being a place where everyone respects each other and does the right thing- which they attribute this to the ethos. There have been no exclusions since the school opened and a downward trend in incidents where children are disrespectful. Children, even those new to the school, have a keen sense of belonging and seem genuinely pleased to be part of the school. A child new to the school pointed out the friendship bench to their parent, but then commented, 'I have never had to use it'. Collaborative learning styles enable children and staff to learn in a nurturing environment. One parent commented that this school is, 'a world away from where we were before', and commented that staff do not treat their role as a job, but, 'it's a way of life'.

The school encourages all to live together well and this has positively impacted the community. A parent praised the school as an excellent choice for children of all faiths and none, she explained: 'he was invited to talk about his faith, it made him proud of being a Muslim', she added, 'he feels totally integrated, the school has helped him learn about his own faith'.

Collective worship is robustly planned and delivered by both staff and clergy from the Anglican and Methodist traditions as well as other groups however, children are not involved in the planning of worship. Collective worship follows a cohesive theme, the thread of which is replicated in classroom and shared reflective spaces. Children comment that reflective spaces help them learn about God and value the opportunity to pray both individually and in worship times: ‘prayer makes you calm,’ said one. Collective worship is valued by staff. The school’s prayer is recited naturally by the children and has been published in a Methodist book of prayer. The pattern for collective worship normally includes engaging symbolism, story, reflection and a relevant Biblical text. Worship is invitational, the use of sign language to welcome promotes inclusivity; children are free to respond without compulsion. Children are enthusiastic to take part and sing joyfully. A member of staff said that they were always, ‘uplifted’, by the singing in collective worship. Children can understand the symbolism of songs explaining: ‘God is the lighthouse, I am the boat’. Pupils are given the opportunity to reflect and are challenged to respond to the message in their day to day relationships. One child explained that when she listened to the Bible reading in collective worship, it was a time to, ‘Relax into God’s love’. Regular evaluations of collective worship by both children and clergy are in place. The children’s evaluations tend to focus on what happened rather than the impact of collective worship on their spiritual growth therefore pupils evaluation is underdeveloped.

The effectiveness of RE is Good

The school has ensured that sufficient curriculum time is given to the subject. The Locally Agreed Syllabus and Understanding Christianity are supplemented with a Methodist Unit on John Wesley. Children are given the opportunity to study different faiths and beliefs. Some effective examples of critical thinking were evidenced in the Year 5 and Year 6 children’s work on creation however not evident in the same depth when studying all world faiths. As a result there is a lack of consistency of challenge across units of work. Where good teaching was observed, pupils were engaged, working collaboratively on their learning tasks.

The school has been keen to ensure standards of writing in RE books match those in the English books and marking reflected this. Marking now increasingly relates to skills and knowledge specifically relevant to moving the pupils’ RE learning forwards. This now needs embedding, enabling more pupils to be given the tools to reach a greater depth in the subject.

Headteacher	Mr Adrian Shepherd
Inspector’s name and number	Jane Elizabeth Trampnow