

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Bierton Church of England VC Combined School			
Address	Parsons Lane, Bierton, Aylesbury, HP22 5DF		
Date of inspection	12 February 2020	Status of school	Voluntary controlled primary
Diocese	Oxford	URN	110417

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	Good
Additional Judgement	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good

School context

Bierton is a primary school with 288 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. 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. Significant expansion works have taken place over the last two years to increase the school's capacity. The assistant head is currently acting headteacher. There is a significant proportion of new staff. A new vicar took up post in December 2019.

The school's Christian vision

Our school motto is 'Aim High, Achieve Success, Find your Sparkle and Shine.'
We want to develop children as citizens who make a difference to themselves; their peers and their community. We are all different; we are all unique; we all have strengths. We want our children to find their light and let it shine; and let God and ourselves be proud of who they are.
'Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'
Matthew 5:16

Key findings

- The school has developed its Christian vision and implemented it with a renewed biblical focus through a time of many changes. As a result, pupils' and adults' wellbeing is extremely well supported and everyone is enabled to flourish.
- The vision and associated values have a positive impact on the daily life of the school and on outcomes for all pupils, especially the vulnerable. All are enabled to 'let their light shine'.
- Various opportunities for pupils to engage in social action projects are being developed. However, these are in the early stages and are not sufficiently embedded in the experience for all pupils.
- There is a lack of clarity in policies and practice between the different purposes of religious education (RE), daily collective worship and spiritual development. The school's understanding of spirituality is not clearly defined or shared, so opportunities to develop it across the curriculum are missed.
- Everyone at Bierton celebrates the Christian nature of the school. Recent partnership with the Diocese to support self-evaluation as a Church school has supported the school to achieve the grade of Good.

Areas for development

- Ensure strategic development as a Church school, by working together with the Diocese and governors, to consolidate the impact of the Christian vision. This involves including the vision in development planning and policies, such as RE and collective worship.
- Create a shared understanding of spirituality, using it to plan for spiritual development across the curriculum.
- Develop a range of pupil-driven social action projects, focused on both local and global communities, to enhance personal development for all pupils.

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

Despite a period of exceptional change, Bierton is a happy and developing Church school. Recent events involved a major building expansion project, staffing changes and a period without a permanent vicar at the parish church of St James. However, the school's distinctive Christian vision has been reviewed and revised with a biblical focus from Jesus' teaching to 'let your light shine'. This is coupled with a revised curriculum plan based on the mnemonic, SPARKLE. This ingenious approach incorporates relevance, knowledge, learning powers and enrichment and also links to their Christian vision. Pupils and staff flourish in an environment where their wellbeing, and everyone 'finding their light', is a priority. All understand the school as a place where Christian values, such as love, honesty, responsibility and respect, are lived and celebrated. For example, pupils are excited to nominate others and receive their Christian values awards at weekly celebrations. The school's original foundation as a Church of England school is maintained, although monitoring of this has lacked a strategic focus. Until recently, the school has not engaged sufficiently with current thinking in Church school education. Therefore, initiatives such as national guidance documents on addressing homophobic bullying and on developing spirituality, are not deeply embedded. Leaders are aware of the ways recent national developments are able to assist their work and are engaging more closely with the Diocese, to deepen their understanding.

Close partnership with the local church has been maintained with the support of another local minister until the new vicar was recently appointed. The school is proactive in working closely with local Christians. Leaders appreciate the support gained in reinforcing the Christian message of the vision through engaging worship. Priority has been placed on developing pupil-led worship since the previous denominational inspection. Pupils enjoy their involvement especially with their own 'Open the Book' team. Governors carry out regular self-evaluation, often jointly with lead teachers. However, this has recently lacked rigour and a focus on Christian distinctiveness. Staff and leaders apply the distinctive vision very well to learning experiences, ensuring they meet the academic needs of pupils. A wide range of enrichment opportunities enhance learners' experience, ensuring they find their special way to 'shine'. For example, these include weekly 'Sparkle' time and special weeks on mathematics, RE and diversity. Pupils are also enthusiastic about their choir and soloists singing in the Royal Albert Hall, sporting achievements and visits to a local older persons' home. All pupils are well supported in their learning and encouraged to 'find their light'. This included a successful initiative to raise attainment in reading, especially engaging boys. Some opportunities exist to provide for pupils' spiritual development but the lack of a shared understanding has limited developments.

The school's Christian vision for pupils to 'find their light and let it shine' means that hope and aspiration are strong features of the daily life at Bierton. Learners are encouraged to face challenges with resilience, having a 'growth mindset'. Parents and pupils appreciate the compassion that is lived out in relationships. For example, older pupils know and look after younger ones as they are 'taught to be inclusive'. A parent of a child with additional needs said, 'I can't imagine anything better...it's a very nurturing environment.' An emphasis on good mental health is evident in the listening club (TLC) for pupils and 'shout out boards' for staff. A special 'inside out' day, when all attended with their clothes inside out, engaged the whole school community in talking about feelings. The school has taken part in a number of social action projects, including a developing link with a school in Zambia and a partnership project with a local care home for older people. Pupils are very excited about such projects. For example, following a visit to the care home one pupil showed empathy by saying, 'It's brilliant to see the smile on their faces'. Some projects are in the early stages and so not all pupils are involved in being advocates for change.

Collective worship is an invitational, uplifting and inspiring experience for both pupils and adults in school, having a strong emphasis on celebration. This reflects the school's vision to let individual lights shine. One pupil recognised that 'if you feel upset inside, you can let your light shine'. There are regular opportunities for pupils to plan and lead in their own class assemblies and 'Open the Book'. Pupils show secure knowledge of Bible teaching and enjoy acting out and hearing biblical stories. Because of this learning, they are able to explain the Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit being like 3 wheels on a tricycle. The school council is used to evaluate worship and pupils feel empowered that their ideas are listened to and acted upon. 'It made you think how fortunate we are,' one pupil said in response to hearing a visitor speak about their experiences abroad. Another pupil appreciated time to reflect on their own beliefs, saying, 'It's an inclusive school. We're not forced to do anything', showing how invitational worship is. The school works with the local church

and appreciates the special services held at the parish church, such as Christingle and Harvest Festival. Strong church and school links are also evident in invitations for school families to popular 'Messy Church' events. Reflection areas are well used by pupils who use the spaces to write their own prayers. However, time for weekly individual class worship is not fully used by staff.

The school is effective in ensuring pupils flourish through high quality RE that reflects the Church of England guidance. RE reflects the school's vision to ensure learners from different backgrounds are affirmed as unique and 'find their light.' Pupils are enthusiastic about RE and have a good understanding of Christianity as a living world faith. They have a sound knowledge and understanding of different religions. They enjoy using texts, such as the Bible, to 'learn new things'. One child said that a lesson on Hinduism was 'one of my favourite lessons'. Pupils affirm that RE offers them a safe space to reflect on their own beliefs. A Muslim pupil remarked, 'It's a chance to share your different ideas if you're in a different religion'. Consideration of the impact of Christianity on Britain's cultural heritage and peoples' lives worldwide, is less strong. The new RE lead has ensured effective planning and assessment is in place and has shared effective practice with other teachers in school. Display boards in classes are also reflection areas so do not allow for deeper insight, or a range of big questions, reflecting different faiths and worldviews.

Acting Headteacher	William Gadsby
Inspector's name and number	Liz Youngman 465