

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Birch Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Address	School Hill, Birch, Colchester, CO2 0LZ		
Date of inspection	27 June 2019	Status of school	Voluntary Aided
Diocese	Chelmsford	URN	115138

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 Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Excellent

School context

Birch is a primary school with 153 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White 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 disabilities is above national averages. The school is part of the Tiptree and Stanway Consortium. The school has been awarded the Primary Science Quality Mark Outreach.

The school's Christian vision

Jesus said "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

Birch is a welcoming, caring, happy and stimulating Christian School, where everyone is encouraged to reach high levels of achievement; feel valued and have confidence in their own abilities; act kindly and respectfully towards others and develop their potential for the benefit of all.

Key findings

- The passionate and theologically rooted leadership of the headteacher, and the lived out Christian vision, sustains and emphasises the characteristics of the school as a distinctive Church school.
- Relationships are mutually respectful, and pupils' behaviour is excellent, closely mirroring the school's Christian and inclusive vision and its associated values of wisdom, trust and friendship.
- Collective worship is inclusive and welcoming and, under the oversight of the headteacher, is guided by the school's Christian vision, giving clear opportunities for pupils to grow in confidence.
- The school successfully places significant value on promoting the importance of wellbeing for all stakeholders.
- A creative and engaging religious education (RE) curriculum ensures that all pupils have the opportunities to live and experience life in abundance.

Areas for development

- Ensure that governors prioritise their monitoring and evaluation of the school's distinctive vision including RE and collective worship so that it is consistently strategic, robust and systematic and drives forward developments as a church school.
- Embed the use of higher order questioning in RE to enable pupils to develop and articulate their spiritual understanding.

**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**

Rooted in a theological understanding of education the school's Christian vision, together with its associated values, appropriately promotes life in all its fullness. The vision and associated values accurately shape the content of the school development plan, resulting in a creative curriculum enabling all to experience life in abundance. Pupils are extremely well nurtured on the journey ensuring that they flourish through their academic achievements. The school, under the dedicated leadership of the headteacher, knows itself, and the next steps on its journey, well. Policy and practice are fittingly developed through, and strongly reflect the school's Christian vision. Governors ensure that statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are fully met. However, governors' active engagement with the overall monitoring and evaluation of the school's Christian distinctiveness is not well developed and therefore their impact in this regard is more limited. The parish actively supports through Messy Church and Prayer Spaces held in school. 'The development of the whole' is fundamental to the vicar in her work with the school. These opportunities are clearly valued by all. Birch works well with other schools in the Tiptree and Stanway Consortium, including effective peer reviews as church schools.

The Christian vision and associated values underpin relationships at all levels, ensuring that everyone is very well supported. This is recognised by parents, for example, as being rooted in the school's vision. The school thrives on this closeness and how all the pupils know and work well together. There is a deep awareness of each other's needs. As a parent reflected, 'It is a close-knit community, where the staff walk with you hand in hand at all times'.

Pupils live well together and positively engage as part of a caring, Christian community. This means that all are treated with dignity and respect, resulting in everyone feeling valued. A Key Stage 2 pupil commented in their RE work, 'I think that if we can eradicate all racism and make peace, we will never worry about injustice again'. The headteacher expresses this as, 'God is attentive to us in infinite detail and so must we be to others'. The school's expectation is that all, 'can flourish to be who God wants you to be in a community that cares for you'. Pupils are happy, hardworking and feel safe. As a result, attendance is good, and behaviour is excellent.

Birch supports a range of local, national and worldwide charities. The school is amongst the first in the diocese to embrace the Young Leaders Award. Year 6 pupils are invited to take part. This promotes how they can be the change they want to see in the world around them. As part of this, the pupils volunteer and help others within the community. Younger pupils are eager for their chance to take part. Pupils have a clear sense of justice and fairness for both their peers and world issues. They feel strongly that 'if you fall out, you have to forgive, forget the past and get along again'.

Staff actively promote the Christian vision in meeting pupils' needs. In this they are well supported, professionally and personally, for working in this Church school. Mental health, wellbeing and academic attainment are equally valued. The school has successfully implemented a comprehensive and challenging PSHE programme, which includes a clear focus on wellbeing. This focus extends to parents with their involvement in the Change Team, which is actively supported and valued by them. Systems are in place to identify and provide support for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities. The school embraces and expects respect for all by all. Successful partnerships are forged with families recognising the impact on the wider family. Parents affirm that the school is a nurturing community where they are always made to feel welcome and to which they feel a clear sense of belonging.

Collective worship ensures that pupils have time to participate, reflect and think. This is invitational, creative and inclusive. 'God's teachings help us to be better people and to be more forgiving'. Pupils value prayer, 'you can pray at any time of day, not just in assembly'. They engage with times of reflection and identify places within school where they can go to be quiet, be calm and reflect. Planning of distinctively Christian worship is based around the vision, values, Jesus' teachings, biblical stories and the liturgical year. This strengthens pupils' understanding of the vision's relevance to their own lives, irrespective of their personal or family faith background. There are opportunities for silence, prayer and reflection, enabling pupils to appreciate different aspects of Christian worship. Pupils are able to make good biblical links between their experiences in worship and the school vision and associated values. Pupils articulate God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as 'three parts in one God with all equally important', showing an understanding of the Christian belief in the Trinitarian nature of God. Pupils are effectively involved in planning, delivery and evaluation of worship, with pupils aspiring to be 'Assembly Planners'. The prayer

group meets regularly with the headteacher and highly values the welcome they receive to come and pray for the school community.

RE is spoken about enthusiastically by all. Parents support this, identifying the 'depth and broader experience' it gives their children. The RE leader undertakes training and supports staff well. The 'Understanding Christianity' resource is having a positive impact on pupils' deepening biblical knowledge and their ability to critically engage with biblical text and key Christian concepts and beliefs. Pupils are aware of Christianity as a worldwide faith and recognise the importance of other faiths in the UK and beyond, saying 'no particular religion is more or less important than another'. Through the balance of religions addressed the school's vision and values are positively expressed and pupils are well supported in developing understanding and respect for diversity, difference, and living well together. For example, pupils have been able to progress through welcoming visitors and taking part in visits to places of worship of different faiths. Effective assessment processes are in place. Through their visits, governors can identify how RE contributes positively to the school's Christian vision and its associated values. However, governors' monitoring of RE is not rigorous or formalised and so its impact on supporting improvements is lessened.



The effectiveness of RE is Excellent

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Teaching is consistently good with numerous elements of excellent practice in evidence. In-school monitoring takes place regularly and staff are well-supported with both subject content and approaches. A wide range of innovative, creative and effective teaching strategies supports engagement and involvement. Teaching of RE is exciting and dynamic with a wide range of exemplary learning experiences used. Consequently, pupils enjoy RE and are developing an excellent understanding of Christianity and other world religions. This enhances learning and interest, leading to good standards of attainment and progress across the school. Most pupils reach at least age-related expectations. Assessments confirm pupils' attainment and progress in the RE curriculum are in line with other core subjects. RE strongly contributes to pupils thriving both academically and personally. Birch has been proactive in establishing and leading a beneficial RE Hub for North-East Essex.

Headteacher	Revd Kate Moore
Inspector's name and number	Caroline L'Estrange 784