

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Dent Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Address Laning, Dent, Sedbergh, Cumbria, LA10 5QJ

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

Overall grade **Good**

The impact of collective worship **Good**

The effectiveness of religious education (RE) **Requires Improvement**

School's vision

For all the community to be joyful and equipped to succeed and serve.

Key findings

- The school is deeply rooted in its rural community. Every child and family are known well with a focus on meeting the needs of each unique individual as a child of God. This sense of purpose was exemplified throughout the recent pandemic.
- The recently appointed acting headteacher is passionately committed to creating a strong learning community where all can flourish. As a result, the pace of improvement has increased rapidly this term.
- School leaders have recently introduced a refreshed, biblically underpinned school vision. Pupils and staff can articulate its importance day to day. Processes to monitor and evaluate the impact of this change are not yet fully developed but early indicators are that it is having a positive impact on wellbeing and learning.
- Collective worship, supported by strong relationships with local churches, enriches pupils and enables them to reflect and make connections to their lives and learning. Collective worship positively supports the growing opportunities for spiritual development.
- There is a renewed focus on the importance of religious education (RE) as a rigorous academic subject. A progressive curriculum is not in place. As a result, pupils' knowledge of religions and worldviews is limited.

Areas for development

- Ensure rigour in the monitoring and evaluation of the Christian ethos. This is so that it consistently informs school improvement and enables leaders and governors to evidence the impact of the renewed vision over time.
- Implement a religious education (RE) curriculum that reflects the Church of England expectations for RE. This will ensure pupils' understanding and achievement in RE is progressive and reflects the school vision.
- Extend opportunities for spirituality across and beyond the curriculum. This is so that the impact of spiritual development is fully maximised and contributes to the success and flourishing of all.

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

Dent is a supportive, joyful school that is deeply rooted in its very rural community. Every family is known and valued and a personalised approach to learning is a key feature of the school. During periods of remote learning and school closures the school lived out its vision through the love and care shown to the whole school community. As a result, parents remained overwhelmingly supportive, rightly describing staff as 'always approachable' and the level of care as 'exceptional'.

The school has had significant changes in staffing and structure. The acting headteacher is highly respected by the school community and is working successfully for the flourishing of all. Significant progress as a Church school has been made in his first term in charge. A revised, biblically rooted Christian vision has been introduced and has quickly and clearly been articulated by staff and many pupils. It is now driving decisions and having a positive impact on learning and relationships. It is not yet fully reflected in policies. Pupils' aspiration for themselves and each other is raised through the established values of justice, wisdom, compassion, trust, service, endurance and forgiveness. One pupil commenting 'I used to think wisdom was about being clever, but now I know it's much more'. Governor monitoring is not always systematic and this limits their confidence in articulating the effectiveness of the school as a Church school. This is developing again following the pandemic. Re-established diocesan links support their role.

Pupils are enthusiastic, kind and polite. They feel safe and their enjoyment of school is reflected in high attendance. They live out their school values and exemplify the joy referenced in the Christian vision. A pupil new to school described how she received cards of welcome before she started and how this had enabled her to settle quickly and make friends. Pupils are beginning to understand how their voice can make a difference, for example, recent work in English led to pupils writing letters to the Foreign Secretary regarding a lack of education for girls in Afghanistan. Older pupils act as role models and activities such as the pupil parliament enable everyone to contribute and feel included. The curriculum and particularly carefully chosen texts promote a diverse world, including through the intentional use of visits and visitors. Staff provide a positive learning environment in which mutually supportive relationships flourish.

Wellbeing is high priority and extends beyond the school day. Leaders clearly understand their context, including the challenge of isolation for farming families during the pandemic. Work in school and with families to raise awareness of local challenges are enabling the school to be a positive advocate for change. Relationships with external agencies further support the welfare of staff and pupils and increase staff expertise. Staff value being part of a close-knit team. They feel able to ask for support and new staff quickly become part of the 'school family'. There is effective communication between home and school with parents appreciating the quick response when rare concerns arise.

Worship brings the vision to life and is integral to the school day, including virtual opportunities maintained throughout the pandemic. There is a sense of joy and service to each other when the community gather. Pupils gain a deep understanding of the parables Jesus told and relate these to their values. Following hearing the parable of the wise and foolish builders, a pupil explained that 'If you build your life on something solid, it will be more worthwhile'. Pupils explain the importance of prayer and reflection and are invited to join in without compulsion. A range of blessings support a growing understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the Anglican tradition of which the school is a part. Provision is enhanced further by a well-established and appreciated partnership with the Western Dales Mission Community. Pupils are actively involved in reading, acting and leading prayers. Opportunities for planning and leading in its entirety are in their infancy but actively sought by pupils. Governors monitor worship; however regular, robust evaluation is not being used to inform improvements. There are opportunities for spiritual development, including effective use of the outside space and natural beauty around the school. A broader understanding of spirituality across the curriculum is emerging.

RE has not been sufficiently prioritised. The curriculum has lacked progression and insufficient learning time has been allocated. As a result, pupils' have not known how to improve and their understanding of faiths, especially those other than Christianity is limited. RE is now being given a renewed focus and improvement plans are in place.

Leaders' desire for their school 'community to be joyful and equipped to succeed and serve' is gathering momentum. They have taken some bold steps in a short space of time so that that the school meets many of the expectations of a good Church school.

**The effectiveness of RE is**

Requires improvement

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is variable. Not enough work is well matched to pupils prior learning. As a result, expectations have been too low and progress is limited. Some good use of enquiry and questioning is developing. The use of the Understanding Christianity resource is supporting awareness of the key concepts in Christianity. The RE leader is developing the current curriculum provision, particularly in relation to other faiths and worldviews.

Contextual information about the school

Date of inspection	27 November 2021	URN	112331
Date of previous inspection	11 March 2015		
School status	Voluntary Aided	NOR	37
Name of MAT/Federation	n/a		
Diocese / Methodist District	Carlisle		
Headteacher	David Prescott (Acting)		
Pupil profile	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 above national averages.		
Additional significant information (if needed)	Dent Church of England school is in a very remote location on the Cumbrian Yorkshire border. The substantive headteacher left in December 2020. This was followed by an interim executive arrangement with another school. The current acting headteacher, a teacher in the school, has been in the role since September 2021. The vision statement has been in place since October 2021.		
Inspector's name	Revd Simone Bennett	No.	949