



## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### Widcombe Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

Pulteney Road, Bath, BA2 4JG

**Current SIAMS grade: Good**

**Previous SIAS grade; Good**

**Diocese: Bath and Wells**

Local authority: Bath and North East Somerset

Dates of inspection: 3 November 2015

Date of last inspection: 8 November 2010

School's unique reference number: 109259

Headteacher: Claire Taylor

Inspector's name and number: Daphne Spitzer NS No 37

#### School context

Widcombe Church of England Junior School is located in the central area of the city of Bath. It is a 2 form entry school with 240 children on roll. The majority of children are from white British heritage families. The numbers with special educational needs and/or physical disabilities are below the national average and those eligible to receive Pupil Premium are well below. The deputy headteacher, who was appointed to the school in January 2014 following a short period as acting headteacher, has now been appointed to the post of headteacher with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> November.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Widcombe Juniors VA as a Church of England school are good

- The school's Christian values, make a good contribution to the children's academic achievement, personal and spiritual development
- The high quality of children's spiritual awareness promoted by the school's distinctive Christian character has a strong impact on the whole life of the school
- The good leadership of the headteacher, and religious education subject leader, clergy and governors, drives the continuous improvement of the school's distinctive Christian character thereby raising its impact

#### Areas to improve

- Review the school's Christian vision and values, monitor and evaluate their impact using the whole school community, in order to further raise the school's distinctive Christian character
- Provide prayer spaces and opportunities for reflection for use by children in unstructured situations in order to enhance their sense of personal spirituality

- Provide opportunities for children to plan, lead and evaluate the impact of collective worship on a regular basis so that they develop a greater understanding and ownership of worship

**The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners**

Widcombe Church of England Junior School is a caring, community where Christian values permeate daily life. The school creates a secure, inclusive, Christian environment in which all children are cherished and highly valued. As a result, attendance and achievement are outstanding. The school's recently agreed values rooted in Christian teaching are recognised and celebrated in all aspects of the life of the school. Whilst children are not always able to link some of the values with Biblical stories or teaching, a good number of Christian values are embedded. For instance, children say they link the way they trust their teachers to help them learn, with the story of Jesus and Peter walking on the water. Relationships at all levels are excellent. The Christian value of friendship is strong. Children say they are happy at school because we are 'good friends to everyone, there is always someone to go to'. They are developing a mature understanding of the relevance of Christian values; this is evident by the way they describe how they 'internalise and share their ideas and understand they're not alone, others recognise your experiences'. This is an example of the highly developed understanding of spirituality possessed by the school community; the result of the way planning for the development of spirituality is integral to the whole curriculum and is having a strong impact on all aspects of learning. Children speak about their developing sense of knowing themselves which enhances self-belief and optimises learning. The rich opportunities in the curriculum for spiritual growth also enable children to develop a strong sense of mutual respect and tolerance towards other people as well as positive attitudes towards people of diverse communities.

**The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

Collective worship is an important part of the school day for the whole school community. Children say this is because they learn about the school's Christian values and Christ's teaching which provide good guidelines for life. As a result, collective worship is very effective in promoting distinctive Christian values. For instance, the value of respect was well illustrated by a variety of scenarios taken from Christ's life as well as from real life situations. The headteacher ensured that children participated well and were fully engaged. Probing questions were asked which challenged children's thinking and promoted spiritual awareness very effectively. As a result of children's increased participation in worship their enjoyment and appreciation of its relevance has increased significantly since the last inspection. This has been verified by governors' monitoring. Worship promotes spiritual development very effectively; evident for example, in the recent whole school discussion and vote on children's preferences for prayer or silent reflection during worship. This event stimulated deep thinking on the value of reflection in particular, increasing children's understanding. Children also appreciate the time in class together for reflective discussion following the visit of the 'Open the Book' team each week. Although prayer at lunchtime, is said together as a class, there is no opportunity for prayer written by children to be said during the day; nor are reflective spaces provided within rooms or in a central space for moments of quiet reflection for individuals. Children have recently been introduced to Anglican practice by a focus on the Lord's Prayer led by the vicar. However, simple liturgical responses or greetings are not yet in use. Nor is there other than an implicit understanding that the lit candle on the focus table signifies the light of Christ. The leadership of worship is good. It has raised the quality of planning for worship; for example, by introducing themes promoting values over the last year as well as celebrating the church seasons in school and at church. The programme is varied, with different leaders, including from the church community and different settings such as smaller class groups which ensure all children's needs are met. However, except during school church celebrations for the major Christian festivals, children do not take yet leadership roles on a regular basis. This

is an issue for development from the last inspection which has not been fully addressed.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

Standards in religious education (RE) are outstanding. Children make exceptionally good progress from starting points which are broadly above the national average to attainment at the end of Year 6 which is often well above national expectations. Year on year progress over the last few years has improved significantly. This is because teaching is never less than consistently good and often better, as verified by the subject leader's accurate monitoring. Learning is of high quality because teachers use well-chosen activities, often based on enquiry methods, which are both challenging and exciting; questioning is open ended, challenging children to think deeply and reflect. This was evident when older children used analytical skills very well to identify qualities shared by inspirational people, including children. A child commented that inspirational people 'gave joy as well as hope' an example of insightful responses provoked by the lesson. The curriculum is highly effective in promoting Christian values; noted in a lesson where children were linking Christ's teaching from his parables with their school values. For instance, children recognised the importance of the value of friendship in the parable of the Lost Sheep because as one said we need to 'look after everyone, because everyone is special and unique'. Children's understanding of Christianity is excellent, promoted in particular by the much anticipated annual visit of the 'Bible Explorers' to Year 5. Visitors from other faiths, including parents, as well as Christianity and visits to other places of worship are embedded and have a profound impact. This is evident in a child's comment following a visit to a local mosque that 'seeing the place helped her understand'. Children have very positive attitudes to RE; they say they particularly enjoy learning about other faiths as well as Christianity because it helps them develop at a personal level. The curriculum is highly engaging and innovative, promoting spiritual awareness very effectively. The leadership of RE is outstanding; ensuring the subject is prioritised within the school curriculum and that all staff have benefitted from appropriate professional development. Over the last year, a new innovative system of assessing children's learning and progress has been introduced by school leaders affirming the role of RE as a core subject.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good**

The newly appointed headteacher has made an excellent start in promoting the school's distinctive Christian character, during her period as deputy headteacher. She is building on the school's existing Christian vision, working closely with the school leadership and community to raise its impact. As a result, a wide range of Christian values have been introduced with a good impact on the whole school community. However, the headteacher has not yet had time to develop and agree her own vision with the school community; and to review how effectively this large number of Christian values meet the needs of the children and fulfil its school's new vision. The governing body are fully committed to the promotion of the school's distinctive Christian character, as noted by the way, in a short time, they have strengthened their monitoring role and developed detailed action plans with excellent outcomes. They have been challenging of previous school practice as well as supportive of recent initiatives. Their self-evaluation process is good, although an issue from the last inspection has been overlooked. Parents are very supportive of the school's Christian ethos; they say they value its special care of each child as an individual and its increased openness and welcome. The partnership with the local church has improved significantly. This is due to the recent first-time appointment of a full-time vicar. His presence has a profound impact on the life of the school, noted in a variety of ways such as his pastoral support, contributions to collective worship and RE as well as professional development with staff and governors. There is now greater engagement and valued support from the diocese for governors as well as staff. The partnership with the local church community has improved, seen in the new Easter Expression Day. The school's links with Bath Abbey, particularly the choir's participation in their special services and at the city's Christmas market, are integral to their role as a school with a strong distinctive Christian

character.

SIAMS report November 2015, Widcombe Church of England V A Junior School, Bath, BA2 4JG