



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

### **Bonsall Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Church Street  
Bonsall  
Derbyshire  
DE4 2AE

**Previous SIAS grade: Outstanding**

**Current inspection grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese: Derby**

Local authority: Derbyshire

Date of inspection: 17 March 2016

Date of last inspection: April 2011

School's unique reference number: 112888

Headteacher: Lesley Murhall

Inspector's name and number: Kerry Palmer (60)

#### **School context**

Bonsall is a much smaller than average village school in a rural setting. The children, almost all of White British heritage, come from a rich mix of socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion with additional needs or in receipt of pupil premium related additional support is lower than national averages. Three mixed age classes occupy an old building, adjacent to the parish church. Good educational use is made of the space available, particularly the spacious and imaginatively developed outdoor areas.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Bonsall Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding**

- The sustained passion and commitment of the headteacher, driven by Christian values, to provide a rich educational haven resulting in children who feel safe, happy and are eager to learn.
- The strong sense of koinonia, Christian community, amongst all school stakeholders, which achieves mutually supportive and trusting relationships so that children are able to confidently make use of the many opportunities to grow in mind, body and spirit.
- The robust and active partnership with St James Church and the village community with a common goal that successfully promotes Christian service and love.

#### **Areas to improve**

- Review the theological basis of the school's Christian values to ensure that all stakeholders appreciate and can articulate the centrality of Jesus to the school's Christian character. Embed this in website information, school aims and policies.
- Investigate strategies to gather parents' views of school worship and Christian

distinctiveness.

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

This is a school where Christian love abounds; it is recognised and valued by all. Bonsall Church of England Primary is a welcoming, inclusive and nurturing school family where the well-being of the whole school community is a key priority. This is because Christian values are central to relationships, attitudes and decision making. The school experience is rich and wide-ranging; instrumental music for all to Forest School offered to foster each child's God given talents and interests. Children of all abilities thrive in a Christian culture where all are actively encouraged to think and question. Effective support for disadvantaged children successfully closes the gap with others and many enrichment activities stretch and challenge the more able. Data indicates that children of all ages make expected or better progress. Relationships amongst all are positive and mutually supportive consistently reflecting respect and cooperation. Children talk confidently and with great enthusiasm about all aspects of school; older children naturally support those younger at work and play. Consequently, behaviour is excellent and good attendance natural. The school is popular and over-subscribed. It regularly accepts children who have moved from schools where they have not settled. One mum said, 'Bonsall's been a lifesaver, not just for my child but our family.' Nothing is too much trouble in response to challenging situations. There are many clubs and activities open to all. Pottery for children and parents, being the latest, is so popular two classes are organised. Successful strategies in collective worship and religious education (RE), and the long established and well developed exchange links with a contrasting inner London primary school, ensure children display respect for diverse cultures and faiths. Children have thought and written about the Christian distinctiveness of their school and can talk about the significance of relevant signs and symbols. Empathy for the less fortunate, locally and around the world, is evident in the thoughtful support for a range of charities and good causes. For example, support for the local Food Bank and harvest gifts given by individual children to particular local people, a link which is sustained year after year. RE is recognised as special and makes a positive contribution to the Christian character of the school.

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

Collective worship, though still called assembly, is an integral part of daily school life which engages the whole school community. It embraces Christian values and successfully links to children's own experience. As collective worship, it rightly invites children to worship, aware that the school and community is a mix of those of faith, other faiths and none. Valuable opportunities for children to plan and lead have increased. A pupil led worship on St Patrick's Day contrasted packing for holidays with St Patrick who 'took only his faith'. Every opportunity is grasped to boost children's self-esteem and confidence; helping-hand awards, birthday congas and thankyou's abound! The contribution of music is significant; children sing enthusiastically from the heart. Prayer always features in worship and the value of reflection is appreciated in children's spiritual development. Worship outside, surrounded by countryside, encourages contemplation of God's creation. A young child said 'I feel there are pictures in my head'. Children know The Lord's Prayer but don't realise its significance. Opportunities for children's own prayers are growing and included a recent Prayer Activity Week. They appreciate the special nature of Jesus as Son of God, but have limited grasp of the concept of Trinity. They know something about saints, but not St James. Close links with neighbouring St James Parish Church include regular worship and curricular exploration, even up to the bells, often led by the vicar. Consequently, children have an appreciation of Anglican tradition and practice. Visiting worship leaders widen the children's experience of a variety of worship styles. A group of year 6 girls led the local Women's World Day of Prayer in the Methodist Chapel. Parents and families welcome regular opportunities to join school worship, especially at festival times. The centrality and importance of distinctively Christian collective worship, obvious in practice, is not reflected in the school's policy document.

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

Teaching and learning in RE is consistently good; work scrutiny makes clear that it is in line with other core subjects. Teachers use questioning well to promote reflective thinking, for example, 'how do you think the disciples felt when Jesus said one would betray him?' A wide range of creative strategies bring the subject alive such as drama, art and prayer stones for the secret garden. One class wrote postcards in role as the donkey in the nativity stable. Discussion and writing are confident and well developed. One pupil was keen to share a series of extended reflective poems written in the neighbouring church yard 'Between the graves now damp with dew, stands the watchful mother yew...'. This all contributes significantly to children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers in this small school work closely together to evaluate and enhance the impact of RE as a core subject. They have a collegiate and accurate perception of standards which contribute to relevant development plans. However, the lively, exciting and rich RE is not evident on the school website. Children can relate the Christian narrative well, explaining key events in their own words, especially Christmas and Easter. However, they are less clear about Pentecost and the birthday of the church. Children speak of the value of meeting people of faith 'we like hearing them and asking questions'. Though primarily Christian, as expected in a church school, the comprehensive programme of study includes appropriate teaching about other world faiths with a focus on similarities and differences. One class considered role of the Qur'an variously as teacher, comforter, lighthouse, rule maker and in that regard being seen as similar to the Bible.

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

Christian values are at the heart of all decision making driven by school leaders and governors who are eager to foster the education of the whole child in this village community setting. The established head and deputy effectively promote a common Christian ethos which is modelled by a cohesive staff team. However, the centrality of Jesus Christ is not widely articulated by the school. Staff development is actively promoted with relevant training, including support from the diocese. Following CPD sessions and support for the subject leader, a relatively new teacher felt confident enough to accept the additional responsibility of teaching RE. In response to the last inspection, staff and children contribute to the evaluation of RE and collective worship but there is no structured approach to gathering parents' views. Governance is focussed and effective. Christian distinctiveness is a regular agenda item and governors join the headteacher at diocesan training and briefings. Developing Christian distinctiveness is one of the headteacher's performance management targets. This is regularly reviewed by link governors as is progress through the three year rolling programme of development priorities relating to this important aspect of school life. Partnership work with a local cluster of church schools is of growing significance. Parents and families are much involved in school life and are very supportive of its Christian foundation, 'it's the best school in the world!' volunteered one. They speak highly of the dedication and commitment of all staff and 'they get such a good foundation for growing up'. School, parish and village community work with common purpose and in close cooperation to achieve the best for each child. Statutory requirements for collective worship and RE are fully met and the potential for further development is excellent.

SIAMS report March 2016 Bonsall CE (VA) Primary School, Matlock DE4 2AE