

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Bilsdale Midcable Chop Gate Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Chop Gate, Middlesbrough TS9 7JL	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	York
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Date of inspection	8 June 2017
Date of last inspection	4 July 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VC Primary 121480
Headteacher	Kathryn McDonald
Inspector's name and number	Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

Currently there are 14 pupils on roll in this very small rural primary school. Pupil numbers are very low and the proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is above average. The headteacher was appointed acting headteacher in September 2015 and became the substantive headteacher in April 2016. The school is in a formal confederation with Carlton and Faceby Primary School, sharing key staff including the headteacher. The assistant headteacher is the religious education [RE] subject leader. A new chair of governors was appointed in 2017.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Bilsdale as a Church of England school are good

- This is a welcoming and accepting Christian family community where the core Christian values of faith, hope and trust underpin the life and work of this small rural school in the heart of the dale.
- The strong leadership of the headteacher and assistant headteacher is taking the school forward on its journey as a church school. As a result, all pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- RE makes a significant contribution to the school's Christian character and to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural [SMSC] development. As a result, pupils' religious literacy and knowledge of the church year is very good.
- The experiences offered to pupils and the links with St Hilda's Church enrich the worshipping lives of pupils and adults alike.

Areas to improve

- Embed the work of the Church School Team in monitoring and evaluating collective worship and RE as important aspects of Christian distinctiveness.
- Extend the programme of visits and visitors to enable pupils to meet people of faith more frequently to nurture their spiritual and cultural development and knowledge of the world wide Christian church.

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

This very small rural primary school in the heart of the dale is a welcoming and accepting Christian family community where faith, hope and trust abide. Bilsdale has a longstanding presence in the community and is known for its pastoral care, love and nurture which it extends to all. Relationships and behaviour are very good, with pupils new to the school saying that pupils and staff are 'wonderful'. Dedicated staff help pupils to believe in themselves. They provide challenge in the curriculum for all pupils, including those who are able academically. This results in accelerated progress for many pupils and all pupils make good progress and achieve well. Consequently, pupils who join the school make outstanding progress.

RE is linked to many aspects of school life and makes a very good contribution to the school's Christian character and to pupils' personal and academic development. Pupils are excited by RE, which also 'challenges what we don't know'. Pupils reflect deeply and have a good detailed knowledge of the Christian story of salvation. They link their key school values, such as hope, to relevant Bible stories and see hope as God's promise that love and goodness will ultimately overcome all evil. This is because pupils and staff are benefitting from using new resources, such as 'Understanding Christianity' which is helping them develop a deeper level of biblical knowledge. In addition, members of the church share Bible stories in RE lessons with the pupils, using Godly Play.

Pupils use their beautiful grounds and surrounding countryside to remind them of God's creation. For example, they link sacred tools to gardening, commenting on St Benedict and the monks from his monastery treasuring their working tools and treasuring one another. Pupils are aware of the northern Celtic saints, such as Cuthbert, Bede and Hilda, after whom their houses are named. They are growing in their awareness of being part of a wider diocesan family through their vicar and visits from the archdeacon.

Charity fundraising also helps pupils' global awareness.

Some pupils show an awareness of diversity and comment that 'gender can be fluid for people'. This is because the school is fully accepting of everyone, regardless of their background. Living in a rural community means that pupils do not have vast experiences of diverse communities and cultures. The school is aware of this and has already identified a link with a school in a very different context. Such partnerships ensure pupils' spiritual and cultural development is nurtured.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils at Bilsdale plan worship regularly and have complete ownership in confidently leading worship for the whole community. This is especially true for those who are members of the church school council. They are comfortable with the rituals they use in ringing the bell and lighting the three wicked candle. Pupils who may find some of their work a challenge, enjoy reading from the Bible and leading prayers. They take relevant themes, such as remembering to say grace and being thankful for food. Pupils enjoy writing their own prayers as 'prayer reminds us of God so we never forget him'. The church school council takes a box of prayer resources out to the gazebo at lunch times.

Saints days and the Christian calendar are celebrated in school or church. For example, the recent Ascension and Pentecost service included Hungarian and German languages represented in school, giving a sense of the worldwide Christian family. St Hilda's Church and its vicar are central to the school community. The strong partnership with the church enriches the worshipping life of the school for the pupils and their families. The vicar is a welcome and regular visitor to school, leading worship every week. Services at church, such as the lambing service, are important in this rural farming community for pupils and adults alike.

This year, the Easter service included celebrating holy communion. This involved and engaged adults and pupils holding a variety of beliefs. Families are comfortable attending the church 'up the hill'. Subsequently, several families have been baptized in St Hilda's Church. Pupils and adults, including parents, are growing in their understanding of the Christian belief of trinity. The vicar helps to widen their horizons by using a Trinitarian blessing. Pupils use a prayer which encompasses God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They pray, 'God watch over us, Jesus walk with us and Holy Spirit work in us until we meet again'. Pupils, staff and governors evaluate worship throughout the term.

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

The strong leadership of the headteacher and the assistant headteacher are enabling this school to move forward on its journey as a rural church primary school. Bilsdale has always had a unique place and is 'loved and cherished by the local community', New staff have been made welcome, 'accepted and valued' because of the school's strong Christian ethos. They have felt the 'love and nurture which is apparent' and immersed themselves in enjoying and sharing this special space. Dedicated staff know each child individually and they are very supportive of the parents, working closely with them.

Parents speak highly of this 'perfect little family' and especially praise the headteacher whom they describe as 'amazing'. Faith, hope and trust underpin all school policy and practice, informing the strategic direction of the school and pupils' personal and academic development. Consequently, pupils thrive and achieve well.

Governors, which include a new chair, have correctly identified the need for the newly re-established church school team to monitor collective worship and RE more regularly. Both RE and worship are well led, managed and resourced and both meet statutory requirements. The RE subject leader meets with other schools to share good practice. In addition, the school benefits from diocesan support as well as attending training.

As Bilsdale is confederated with Carlton and Faceby Primary School, key staff are shared between the two communities. Governors support staff in their roles and responsibilities. In addition, Bilsdale pupils join Carlton and Faceby pupils every Friday for their confederation day at Carlton School. Parents are fully involved in the life of the school and assist with clubs and activities such as swimming. Pupils write for the parish magazine and the vicar is in school every week, 'empowering the people of God'. As a result of the close partnership between church and school, pupils have been known to use a new language at home. For example, one pupil re-enacted 'anointing' on the staircase at home. In all these ways, there is a renewed impetus to preserve the identity of this rural family school, whilst preparing its pupils for life and enriching their spiritual journeys.

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