



YR EGLWYS  
YNG NGHYMRU



THE CHURCH  
IN WALES

## Gwella Inspection of Church in Wales Schools Report

Christchurch Church in Wales (Aided) Primary School, Swansea

Diocese: Swansea and Brecon

Local authority: Swansea

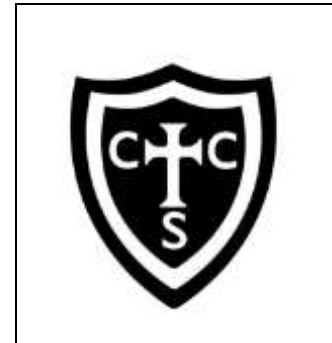
Date of inspection: 28<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Date of last inspection: March 2014

School's unique reference number: 6703306

Headteacher: Helen-Marie Davies

Inspector's name and number: Kathryn Thomas



### School context

Christchurch Church in Wales Voluntary Primary School is the only Church in Wales school in Swansea and as such, draws a quarter of its pupils from outside the catchment area. There are currently 158 pupils on roll and a substantial waiting list for places. Nearly 34.7% of pupils live in the 30% of the highest deprived areas in Wales. Approximately 26% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and the school has identified 26% of pupils as having additional learning needs, both of which are above the average for Wales. Nearly 58% of pupils come from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background. A minority of pupils (41%) have English as an additional language and 19 different languages are spoken at the school. The headteacher has been in post since 2012.

**The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Christchurch Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church in Wales school are EXCELLENT**

### Established strengths

- Explicit Christian values are embedded within the school and underpin every aspect of school life and have a significant impact on pupils' wellbeing and academic performance
- The excellent behaviour and mature attitude of pupils
- The commitment of a dedicated and highly skilled family of staff to care for and support pupils to be the best they can be is a powerful demonstration of the living out of Christian love which strives for the best outcomes for everyone
- The high priority awarded to inclusivity which makes pupils and adults feel greatly valued

### Focus for development

- To seek opportunities to share the good practice developed in RE collective worship and leadership of a church school, in order to contribute to the development of church school leadership more widely
- Develop further links with organisations beyond Wales

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

Christian values permeate the whole school and create an ethos which ensures that pupils and families feel they are supported and know they are important. As a result, relationships are excellent. As more than one parent remarked, 'it is like a family.' The Christian character is evident in creative, interesting displays and artefacts around the school, with no opportunities being missed to inspire and develop the pupils' enquiring minds. For example, the numerous pieces of religious artwork around the school pose questions for the pupils to reflect on. Pupils enjoy speaking about what they can see and what they think it means.

The school's motto, 'Let your light shine' is used to motivate pupils to be the best they can be. For example, when asked, 'How do you shine your light?' a pupil in reception says, 'I can hug and say nice words,' and one parent comments proudly that her daughter 'has developed the boldness to sing about the love of God' outside school in the park. The behaviour of pupils is exemplary. Pupils of all ages show respect and tolerance towards others, they are rightly very proud of this. Pupils attribute this to the school vision and values which are so central to school life.

Parents are very clear about the Christian foundations of the school. They are overwhelmingly positive about the impact they have on their children and the support the school gives them, especially in times of difficulty. Many commented about the support the school gives to a local café for the homeless. They give the example of Harvest when pupils themselves decided to bring in food to take to the drop point to help people to have something to eat. 'This is not just worshipping the Lord, it is faith in action.' The pastoral care for and focus on the wellbeing of all members of the school community is exemplary. Pupils know they are cared for. They talk about how inclusive the school is, 'no-one is left out, we all get chances and everyone has a say.' The provision of school uniform and Wales rugby shirts for St David's Day celebrations in cases of need is evidence of this. Pupils explain how the 4 R's in their vision (respect, responsibility, reflect and reach for potential) 'teach us how to be a better person.' The vision and values enable them to flourish as unique individuals, be different and learn from their mistakes. Their understanding that they should treat others as they would like to be treated results in excellent behaviour and relationships throughout the school. It also impacts on the strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of children's development. The motivating curriculum and residential trips and visits to places such as the Royal College of Music allows these areas to be specifically planned for and helps to develop high levels of co-operation and appreciation.

Pupils talk enthusiastically about exploring big questions about spiritual and moral issues such as why and how we should help others and what people believe about God. These sessions promote a high degree of spiritual reflection as well as understanding of and respect for diversity and difference both within Christianity and between different religions. Well-planned opportunities across the curriculum enable pupils to have a rich understanding of diversity of faith in their community. Pupils clearly understand Jesus' teachings of love and fellowship. After learning about and making Peace Mala bracelets, one pupil commented, 'our school is obviously a church school but there are other religions and this bracelet helps us to think about how we can respect other people's faiths.' The diversity within the school is celebrated in many ways. For example, Chinese speaking pupils have opportunities to write in their first language.

Parents comment that, 'the staff know the children well, it's like a family'. Members of staff remark that they are proud of helping 'create people who are respectful and who know God's values.' They work tirelessly to ensure all succeed. For example, they provide extra support to nurture and engage vulnerable pupils and their families in this inclusive community. The priority given to the wellbeing and personal development of each child is excellent. As a result, pupils feel that they are in an environment where they are able to learn effectively, where they feel valued and safe. The care and guidance for all pupils, particularly those who are vulnerable, have additional needs or who are eligible for free school meals is outstanding. This has a significant impact on pupil progress and nearly all pupils make at least good if not very good progress from their starting points. All pupils are challenged to reach their potential. They have many opportunities to experience a wide range of stimulating engaging activities which make them think and grow academically, creatively, spiritually and physically. Learning is fun. The recent implementation of the new Curriculum for Christchurch celebrates the inclusive and diverse ethos of the school extremely well and enables pupils to flourish. All pupils spoken to preferred the new way of working where they learn alongside older and younger pupils.

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

Staff, pupils, parents and governors agree that collective worship is an important aspect of the life and culture of their school. It affirms, celebrates and enriches its Christian ethos. Pupils like the way in which it brings the school together enhancing the sense of family they value so highly. They remark, 'We all join in and be like Jesus'. Beyond that, there is a sense of the school as a worshipping community because all members of staff take part. Themes are developed with care so they explore Christian values and the messages in biblical and secular stories in ways which provoke reflective thinking. Pupils make connections between the stories, values and their own lives. 'Jesus teaches us to be a better person, to follow Him, to think of Him as a role model. He taught people how to be how God wants them to be - respectful and kind and we learn how to be all these different things.' Even the youngest pupils recognise the transformational impact of stories that tell us what things to do right. Pupils recognise the relevance to them of themes and stories and the messages they convey have a discernible impact on relationships and behaviour. As one pupil remarked, 'collective worship always has

a value or one of the 4Rs. It is preparing us for the world and the difficult times we may face.' In response to themes which raise concerns and awareness, the school community is inspired to social and charitable action. For example, through supporting a local food bank and café and using the pupils' toast money to benefit families in Nepal. Many, showing a good understanding of the value of prayer, confidently contribute prayers in worship. Some of the oldest pupils appreciate that the school's inclusive approach to worship does not force faith or belief on them, 'We respect atheists and agnostics as well as other faiths,' but gives them important ideas to think about and they value time for quiet reflection in response to these ideas. These rich experiences develop a high level of spiritual and moral reflection.

Worship is enriched by a variety of leaders. Responsive greetings and the lighting of a candle mean pupils develop a good understanding of Anglican traditions and practices. The youngest pupils talk about how 'God leads us with light and his Son, Jesus is the light of the world.' The older pupils' understanding of the Trinity is strong, 'God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are three persons in one,' Nearly all pupils have a good age-appropriate understanding of this. Pupils enjoy planning and leading services and the 'Agents of Change' also take part in purposeful monitoring and evaluation of worship which is used by leaders to plan for future improvement.

### **The effectiveness of religious education EXCELLENT**

RE is now taught within the RVE (Rights and Values Education) and is an important part of the new Curriculum for Wales. It is highly regarded across the school by both pupils and staff. There is consistent recognition from everyone that it plays an essential part in sustaining the school's distinctive Christian character. It enriches and influences the provision and planning of many other curriculum areas. Leadership includes high levels of subject knowledge and ambitious aspirations for all children. Planning for the 'Christchurch curriculum' is relatively new but robust monitoring and evaluation, which includes the 'Agents of Change' pupil voice group includes careful tracking of children's standards and progress. Rich curriculum resources, some provided by the diocese have contributed to the successful development and improvement of RE. Children's attitudes and responses in lessons demonstrate deep and profound thinking. Parents also express their regard for RE saying 'my children talk about things they have learned in RE, such as this what it means have a revelation' and 'they are inquisitive about religion'. Pupils' enthusiasm and engagement are nurtured from the earliest stages of learning starting in the nursery; the rich curriculum excites pupils in all year groups and they learn extremely well. For example, pupils in years 1 and 2 create a podcast about the Nativity. Dressed as the main characters they interview Mary about her experiences – 'What did it feel like? Did you have any gifts? Where did you sleep?' As they practise, their confidence in speaking and answering grows. When asked what value did Mary show, one pupil said, 'she was brave and showed courage.' Older pupils are impressive in how they use creativity and original thinking to pose questions and state opinions. They write reflective poetry, 'God the creator hangs stars in space.' In analysing religious art, a group of pupils decided the dark colour 'might represent sin that people have committed and Jesus is saving us from it'. Teachers respond appropriately to children's questions and curiosities. They are not afraid to tackle sensitive and difficult concepts, for example bereavement or the refugee crisis, and do so with great sensitivity and skill.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a Church school is EXCELLENT**

The headteacher, senior leaders and staff are very effective in articulating the school's distinctive Christian vision and ethos and in promoting that ethos throughout the school to support successful learning. They are committed to sustaining an outstanding Christian environment in which all aspects of pupils' development and wellbeing are fostered and promoted through biblical teaching and Christian values. This contributes strongly to the standards pupils achieve as they move through the school. Leaders' model their Christian faith and this is evident in all aspects of leadership practice in school. Pupils and parents agree with this and this is made clear through the school's motto, 'Let your light shine.' Foundation governors are passionate about the school. They speak of the 'unstinting support for every child within a loving and incredibly caring atmosphere.' They have a clear understanding of their role and are highly committed. Foundation governors support the school in several ways, and are beginning, after the pandemic, to make regular visits to school once again and to be effective as critical friends. Action plans for RE and worship are included in the school's improvement planning, they are discussed at governors' meetings and are evaluated rigorously. Recommendations from the previous inspection have been met. Collective worship and RE meet statutory requirements.

Leaders and teachers strive at all times, through emotional support, high quality teaching and the provision of rich opportunities, to achieve the best possible outcomes for every individual. The exploration of questions of meaning and purpose in RE lessons contributes richly to pupils spiritual and moral development. RE and collective worship are led with enthusiasm and there is a genuine desire to find ways to improve still further. The school values greatly the support given by diocesan advisers to promote Christian distinctiveness in its school improvement journey. Parents, too, appreciate the dedicated work of staff in supporting their children's personal and spiritual development as well as their academic success. The excellent relationships that exist within the school community are a strength of the school. Purposeful partnerships exist with the wider community which helps to meet pupils' learning needs very well.

Members of staff say the school is like a family.' Leaders enable all staff to contribute to school development, share skills and expertise generously and take on leadership responsibilities. This has created a strong team spirit and shared commitment to the effectiveness of the school. As a result, everyone expresses great confidence in the school vision and consistently uphold its Christian values. Self-evaluation and strategic planning are insightful and effective. Everyone understands the systems and processes required and all members of the school's community are given opportunities to contribute to self-evaluation and school improvement. As a result, the unified team commitment has a direct impact on high standards of achievement for all pupils and a strong sense of wellbeing and happiness for everyone.

The school has very good links with Christchurch Church and the community it serves. Members of the clergy visit the school regularly to lead and participate in worship as well as playing an important role in nurturing and developing links between the church, school, Diocese and local community. Their role, together with the support from the Diocese, are highly valued by the school. During the church's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, pupils acted as tour guides of the church for the public. School staff and pupils made an inspirational video which captured the consequence and importance of the church to the life and work of the school. This highlights the significance and strength of the Christian character of the school and church to pupils and strengthens their understanding of the school's commitment to the family of the church.

**The school meets the statutory requirement for collective acts of worship**

**YES**

**The school meets the statutory requirement for religious education**

**YES**

*I would like to thank the headteacher, staff, governors and pupils of Christchurch VA Primary School for their welcome and cooperation.  
Mrs Kath Thomas*