CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION

THE NATIONAL SOCIETY

The Methodist Church

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Jesson's Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

School Street, Dudley DY1 2AQ

Previous SIAS grade: Outstanding

Current SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Worcester

Local authority: Dudley

Date of inspection: 13 March 2015

Date of last inspection: 26 November 2009

School's unique reference number: 103845

Headteacher: Sarah Lea

Inspector's name and number: Duncan Jones 813

School context

Jesson's VA Primary School is situated in the heart of Dudley in an ethnically diverse area, with families belonging to a wide range of faiths. It is a large school with 588 pupils on roll. The number of children eligible for free school meals is well above average as is the number for whom English is not their first language. There has been a significant change in staffing recently with the appointment of a new headteacher and new co-ordinators of religious education and collective worship.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Jesson's VA Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The inclusive Christian vision of the school ensures that all children are supported in their personal well-being and in their academic achievement.
- The school's strong Christian ethos ensures that children of all faiths have an outstanding understanding of and respect for diversity.
- Highly effective teaching of the school's Christian values through worship and religious education enables children to think deeply about their behaviour and actions.
- Parents are well-supported and feel extremely welcome in the school.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that children frequently plan, lead and evaluate the impact of collective worship to increase the impact of worship on learners.
- Develop a rigorous system of assessment in religious education to enable informed planning of lessons and accurate measurement of children's progress.
- Ensure that all members of the school community share a highly developed interpretation of spirituality, so that staff can plan for a range of spiritual experiences for all learners.

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

At Jesson's VA Primary School, Christian values are deeply embedded. The school is founded on values of tolerance, love and respect, and central to Jesson's ethos is the belief that every child is unique and important. The result of this inclusive ethos is that in this school, where children belong to a wide variety of faiths, the respect shown by children towards one another and of each other's beliefs, is truly remarkable. Children say that they do not see themselves having to make a special effort to include others, it's "just part of the school". The school's Christian values have a very high profile. The focus on a new value each half term is explored through collective worship and extends across the curriculum. This ensures that children are not only aware of what the current value means, but have a good understanding of how it relates to the teachings of Christianity and a wide variety of faiths. The school's teaching of its values has a significant impact on children's behaviour both in school and at home. Parents describe how their children learn to make choices based on an understanding of right and wrong learnt in school. The school's inclusivity extends to parents who find the school welcoming and easy to approach. They particularly value the regular "Working Together" sessions and the work of the caring and effective Pastoral Team. This approach is also evident in the school's outlook on academic achievement: children of all abilities are nurtured to achieve their maximum potential. In all these ways, the Christian character of the school has an outstanding impact on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils. Whilst opportunities for spirituality within the curriculum are identified, the school does not share a well-developed definition of spirituality.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Great value is placed on collective worship which occupies an important place in the life of the school, inspiring both children and staff. Jesson's very effectively focuses on the school's Christian values in collective worship, whilst at the same time embracing the beliefs and practices of children of all faiths. Collective worship is carefully planned around the school's value for each half term and links are then effectively made in the classroom through teaching in other areas of the curriculum. Displays in the school support the messages from collective worship and show examples of how children's excellent behaviour is influenced by the school values. The result of this is that children are inspired and challenged to reflect on their actions. One child described how the theme of "courage" had given him the courage to own up to something he had done wrong; another described how her understanding of "trust" had deepened as a result of stories told during worship. The school's support for various charities also results from messages the children hear during collective worship. Biblical teaching is strong. This means that children are able to recount Bible stories they have heard in collective worship and discuss how these relate to the school values and their everyday lives. Due to frequent references to the Trinity and displays in each classroom and the hall, children have a good understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The school's links with the parish church and the regular services held there ensure that children have a clear understanding of local Anglican practice and the seasons and festivals of the Christian year. Since the last inspection the school has made good progress with work on providing "sacred space" in two courtyard gardens and these are well used by the children. Children understand the value of prayer in their lives and take advantage of ways the school helps them to express this. For example, one parent described how the opportunities for prayer in school had sustained her child during a family bereavement. Children contribute prayers during collective worship and are involved when classes lead an act of worship. However, children do not yet fully regularly plan, lead and evaluate the impact of their worship. A children's group, the Worship CREW has been formed, partly with this in mind. Formal monitoring of worship is not yet in place, although regular informal monitoring has led to changes such as improved seating arrangements for the children. This has ensured children are fully engaged and so increased the impact of collective worship on their lives.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Children at Jesson's enjoy religious education (RE). This is because teachers have good subject knowledge and make their lessons interesting and lively. Children develop good skills of enquiry and analysis and like discussion and debates because "there is no right answer". Good links are made between the school's Christian values and RE, so, for example, lessons about the Ten Commandments are linked to the whole school value of "justice". Standards in RE are at least in line with national expectation and the children make good progress from often low starting points. A key strength of RE at Jesson's is the way in which it enables children to understand different faiths and to appreciate their similarities and differences. Children especially benefit from first-hand experience when their friends describe their own beliefs and practices and bring into school artefacts connected with their faith. Class visits to a wide variety of places of worship enhance the curriculum and also make a significant contribution to the school's over-riding value of inclusion: children are proud that their school has visited their place of worship and keen for their friends to see it. Following the recent retirement of the longstanding RE subject leader, a team has been formed to lead the subject forward. This has ensured that RE continues to be effectively monitored and improved. The school is also making effective use of training offered by the diocese to strengthen the leadership of RE. The high status of RE is reflected in the subject's inclusion in the school improvement plan. RE is not yet outstanding because although there are assessment procedures in place, these are not yet detailed enough to inform consistently further teaching or to demonstrate fully the progress made by children.

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

The newly appointed headteacher and all leaders articulate a very clear vision of the school as an inclusive church school resulting in an excellent shared understanding of Christian distinctiveness right across the school community. Staff lead by example, taking the view that this is the best way for children to learn. For example, on visits to places of worship staff are as keen to find out about different traditions of worship as the children, with the result that shared respect for difference and diversity is enhanced. The school's ethos is so well embedded that staff comment it is noticeable that when new children join the school, it is very often the Jesson's children who take it on themselves to teach the new arrivals the Jesson's ethos of love and respect. Careful analysis of the school's performance and the needs of individual children provides leaders with the information required to pursue their vision of valuing and nurturing each child. This is then translated into effective provision, such as academic support for individuals and the initiatives taken by the Pastoral Team in supporting parents in their contact with the school. Staff describe the school as a family where, through the strong Christian values, there is a "supportive and loving ethos". The partnership between school and church is also strong, with the rector and other foundation governors closely involved in the work of the school and in monitoring the school's curriculum and ethos. The development and empowerment of staff as future leaders of church schools at all levels is a particular strength of the school, both in terms of staff moving on to lead other schools and in developing leadership qualities within the school. Professional development of staff is good with the result that, for example, the newly formed RE and collective worship team is growing in effectiveness and introducing new ideas in order to continue to raise standards. Members of this team are also part of the Senior Leadership Team demonstrating the importance attached to these areas of the school's life.