

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Rode Methodist VC First School

Address	Rode, Frome, Somerset BA11 6NZ		
Date of inspection	19 & 20 June 2019	Status of school	Rode and Norton St Philip Federation Voluntary controlled (VC)
Methodist District	Bristol District	URN	I23823

Overall Judgement	Grade	Excellent
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?		
Additional Judgement		
The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good

School context

Rode Methodist is a first school with 79 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages.

The school is part of a federation of two schools, one Methodist, one Church of England. In 2014, the headteacher of Rode Methodist VC First School agreed to take on the executive headship of Norton St Philip Church of England VA First School with the intention of the schools being federated. At this time, Norton St Philip was experiencing declining numbers, growing financial difficulties and concerns around behaviour and achievement. In 2016, the Rode and Norton St Philip Federation was formed, managed by one board of governors and an executive headteacher. It now operates as a single school on two village sites. Pupils in Reception and Year 1 are taught in two classes at the Norton St Philip site and Years 2, 3 and 4 in three almost single-age classes at Rode. The federation provides transport between the two sites that enables before and after school care to be available at Rode. A private pre-school operates on the Norton St Philip site. Foundation governors represent the Church of England and the Methodist Church on the governing body.

The SIAMS inspections were conducted as a joint inspection of both schools over two days. Pupils receive exactly the same educational experience and provision so the reports contain the same inspection findings.

The school's Christian vision

Our Christian vision is to ignite a creative spark; illuminating new possibilities, hidden potential and big dreams, enabling each and every child to embark on a unique adventure towards life in all its fullness. (John 10:10)

Key findings

- The creation of the federation has been highly successful in retaining village schools at the heart of these two communities. It unquestionably operates as a welcoming and fully inclusive organisation. Although each school officially retains its separate religious status, the joint working of the two churches has gained momentum and has proved pivotal in the establishment and growth of the federation.
- The exceptional calibre of leaders at the helm ensures pupils and adults flourish exceptionally well. The qualities of wisdom and resilience have been shown in abundance by the headteacher and the chair and vice-chair of governors over several years, in order to bring the federation to its current position. They are fully supported by highly competent and creative senior leaders.

- The curriculum is innovative and an outstanding model of how the educational aims of both church partners can become a reality. Everyone works to the Christian vision and is constantly inspired to raise their own aspirations in serving others.
- The impact of both collective worship and religious education (RE) is securely Good but neither of them reflect the innovative approach to child-led learning that prevails elsewhere in this community. Work is well underway to put this in place and there are already glimpses of Excellent practice emerging.

Areas for development

- Develop the delivery of daily worship with the same high level of creativity evident in other areas of the curriculum and ensure that pupils have full opportunity to mature as leaders.
- Implement the planned changes to the RE curriculum with the introduction of the new syllabus. Ensure that it embraces the federation's innovative approach to teaching and learning that is already successful.
- Establish formal mechanisms for the joint networking of the Methodist and Church of England partners so that the network is sustained in the long term.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

Leaders at all levels consistently take strategic decisions that are informed by the Methodist aims for education and by the Church of England vision for education based on John 10:10. This has been the case from the very start of the Federation when Rode Methodist governors set about making Norton St Philip a viable and sustainable school. They saw their Christian service as being courageous advocates and, in the words of John Wesley, to 'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.'

The core purpose of both schools is seen as Church schools for all. This lies at the heart of both Methodist and Church of England visions for education and has created a highly inclusive culture completely in tune with the nature of the village communities. Café on the Mead and Café in the Park are weekly after-school events in summer that happen simultaneously in both villages. Pupils love coming to school and attendance continues to rise. The federation, therefore, attracts and welcomes families from outside the village boundaries and changes to the admissions policy have been consulted on to reflect this.

The vice-chair of governors skilfully steered governors of both denominations along the path of negotiating a joint faith statement for the federation. This has proved to be groundbreaking work and offers a valuable model for joint denominational schools nationally, although this has yet to be recognised and utilised more widely.

The headteacher is an inspiring leader who has shown great resilience and determination in remaining true to the vision for the federation. Under her guidance the schools have continued to take one innovative step after another in removing barriers to education for local families. A year ago, leaders dug deeper into the theological basis of the federation's vision and have arrived at a stage where it now coherently expresses all that happens in the schools. The language is accessible to all stakeholders and pupils confidently explain what 'igniting a spark' means in relation to the story of John Wesley and 'life in all its fullness'.

The joint input of the churches has moved to a new and practical level. The balance of Methodist and Anglican thinking on education has been successfully addressed over time. The vicar and Methodist representatives have developed an impressive network of colleagues who have committed themselves to regular support of the schools. In some cases, this rejuvenates relationships with schools more widely. The intention is that working with the federation will be built into particular roles and responsibilities in churches locally and at diocesan and

district level, although this arrangement has yet to be secured in formal documents. This is an innovative model born out of the impressive work of the existing team, especially the Anglican children's and family worker and the Methodist foundation governor. These colleagues are known and highly valued across both communities.

The federation's policy for managing behaviour goes under the name of 'Relationships and Behaviour'. This properly reflects the high level of trust that now exists between all adults and pupils. It is the basis of exemplary behaviour and how these communities live in harmony. Pupils have high aspirations for themselves and for others and are equipped with the skills and motivation to transform the lives of others as well as their own. It is easy to forget the young age of the pupils as they talk with huge empathy of the needs of others. The maturity with which they understand values such as hope and justice grows as they move through the school and gives them a moral framework for life. Pupils acting as peer supporters spot the slightest hint of injustice and know how to resolve any tensions or unease, naturally offering second chances.

The rich and inspiring curriculum cultivates a deep curiosity about the world because it is truly child-led. It fully embraces the Methodist aim of 'encouraging everyone to enjoy the full and free liberty of thinking for themselves'. Pupils generate ideas for topics to be explored and are taught the skills for learning independently and challenging their own thinking. Each child's unique 'learning adventure' begins in the exciting Early Years area where they learn to apply their knowledge from one activity to another. Time spent in the woodland area, for example, being still and looking at the beauty of nature means that observing and painting roses to create an indoor reflection area makes complete sense to the children. For older pupils, the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, maths) leader has adapted this project to make it the school's own. Armed with the framework of 'I think, I wonder, I reflect on next time', pupils independently tackle investigations. Impressively, experience has already given them a passion for justice and taught them to consider ethical issues of exploitation and deprivation that is exceptional for their age. The federation's curriculum captures the interest of pupils and their families because parents become actively involved in the homework projects designed to be done together. Consequently, everyone flourishes at a very deep level and pupils make consistently good progress and often better, including pupils with additional needs.

The process of introducing the new local syllabus for religious education is at an advanced stage. The results of the trial in Early Years are impressive because it has been adapted to the federation's child-led learning philosophy. Records of class discussions show how children listen in considerable detail to what other have said and pose further relevant questions in response. Throughout the school, pupils have a secure knowledge of Christianity. They are familiar with an extensive range of features of different religions, although the breadth of their vocabulary for religious concepts is underdeveloped compared to other subjects. Pupils enjoy lessons and tackle topics with their usual honest and open attitudes to sharing opinions. For them, diversity of beliefs and difference between people is taken as a given and something to be celebrated so an easy dialogue flows on religious topics. The RE leader is taking an ambitious approach to the new syllabus by simultaneously incorporating the techniques of Philosophy for Children and devising a creative approach to assessment.

In collective worship, much has been achieved since the start of the federation. The joint faith statement of Methodist and Anglican governors is carefully crafted to embrace the views of different groups in the community and, as a result, is totally inclusive. Pupils have such a clear and well-defined understanding of how holding your own viewpoints alongside the differing views of others that it makes it perfectly possible for everyone to engage. This is because they are invited and can choose how they respond. Typical comments were: 'You can make prayer time your own.' 'Worship is worth doing, you work out more about what you believe and what you don't.' 'You get to know more about yourself.' Worship, therefore, is doing much to help pupils develop respect for the dignity of others as well as themselves.

Collective worship fully expresses the school's vision. Pupils say 'It has to be collective to be real.' Celebrations of Christian festivals in church or chapel are very popular. Pupils are familiar with liturgical language and Christian concepts such as God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, although these are not used on a daily basis. There is absolutely no sense in which religious views are imposed but worship offers rich opportunities to reflect on the school's values and pupils are regularly inspired by this. They spontaneously suggest practical and realistic ways in which they can take action to makes life better for others and advocate change. This is because classroom activities offer imaginative ways to express the values. Small plastic buckets, one for every child, for example, fill with notes from other pupils about how they have experienced the generosity of that child. The spiritual impact of worship flows on into the school day and pupils develop a sense of meaning beyond the literal. Pupils do not have scope to shape worship independently but their enthusiasm to engage remains undiminished.

Senior staff have grown to be innovative leaders of Church schools under the federation. They have developed high levels of expertise in how the vision is rolled out in operational structures so that 'life in all its fullness' becomes a reality. In particular, the innovative work of the business manager, STEAM co-ordinator and the leader of Early Years means their expertise is regularly sought and is influencing practice in schools more widely. The vision for the federation is applied equally rigorously to operational management. The move to single age classes across two sites has only been possible with the transport arrangements that the school funds with no external help. The business manager does not compromise in her insistence that funds are allocated according to what is best for pupils so that they stand the best chance of experiencing 'life in all its fullness'. The success of this is in the detail, such as allocating all staff, including those in the office, a weekly session on playground duty so they know and engage with all pupils. All staff are trained to support specific needs such as attachment issues or bereavement and support networks are set up for families so that vulnerable pupils have full access to extra-curricular activities.

The wellbeing of staff receives equal attention at a strategic level so adults flourish and are hugely committed to the federation. It is the small everyday actions, however, modelled by leaders, that reflect the Methodist principle of 'watching over each other in love' and the Church of England vision for schools to 'serve the common good'.

Executive headteacher	Carolyn Tommey
Inspector's name and number	Lyn Field 151