



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

### **Sandal Castle (VA) Community Primary School**

Barnsley Road,  
Sandal,  
Wakefield, WF2 6AS

**Previous SIAMS grade:** NA

**Current inspection grade:** Outstanding

**Diocese:** West Yorkshire and the Dales

Local authority: Wakefield

Dates of inspection: 12 October 2015

Date of last inspection: Not applicable

School's unique reference number: 108270

Headteacher: Nichola Russell

Inspector's name and number: Antoinette Drinkhill 691

### **School context**

This is a larger than average-sized primary school created from the amalgamation of the VA junior school and community infant school. It has recently expanded from two-form to three-form entry. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average, however it is above average for those who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled and pupils with special educational needs is above average. New accommodation for early years and Key Stage 1 was opened on the junior site April 2015. Ofsted placed the school into special measures in February 2014 but it was subsequently graded as good in June 2015. The consequence of this is that the school has experienced a period of significant change over recent years.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Sandal Castle (VA) Community Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding**

- The school's core values, informed by Christian principles, are secured by the inspiring and committed Christian leadership of the headteacher, school leaders and governors.
- Outstanding pastoral care and support, underpinned by respect and compassion lived out on a daily basis, builds trusting relationships throughout the school and beyond.
- Religious education (RE) strongly supports the school's caring ethos and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils
- The robust relationship with the local parish church forms a solid foundation for the Christian life of the school.

### **Areas to improve**

- Review the vision and aims of the school to confirm explicit Christian values ensuring that they are fully understood by all and securely underpin all pupils' learning and behaviour.
- Enhance opportunities for pupils to plan, lead and evaluate collective worship in order to increase their engagement and widen its impact on the school community.
- Provide creative opportunities for pupils to fully experience prayer in a meaningful way in collective worship and at other times and places in the school environment.

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

Sandal Castle is a welcoming and caring school where children are proud of their learning, their friends and their teachers. There are close links with St Helen's Church which are seen as central to recognising the Christian foundation of the school. Christian values, although often implicit, underpin the Christian character of the school. These values are explicitly modelled by the inspiring headteacher and her staff who spend a great deal of time supporting individual needs and providing an inspiring, educationally challenging and inclusive environment. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) education and Philosophy for Children (P4C) are strong and central features of the school. They contribute significantly to the well-being and safeguarding of pupils, families, staff and community. Consequently children say that they feel valued and understood. They enjoy coming to school and 'find learning fun'. Children say they are listened to and feel that they 'get a say'. There is a commitment to respectful relationships and care for all members of the school community which is evidenced by the excellent behaviour and attitudes of the pupils. This is demonstrated in a 'class charter' and results in positive relationships with parents and families. Parents comment that the staff always 'go the extra mile', 'try for everyone' and that teachers are 'brilliant'. They value the work of the headteacher and the safeguarding lead practitioner in supporting them and whilst they may 'cross swords', they never leave 'disappointed'. Parents also feel that improved behaviour within school is due to the promotion of Christian values. The school operates at the heart of the community and makes a significant difference to the lives of the children and families it serves. The school is rapidly improving and Ofsted 2015 identified children's progress in maths and English as good and attendance as improving. Worship is having an increasingly positive influence on the everyday life of the school. RE makes a key contribution to children's understanding of diverse communities and supports the core values and ethos. The school has achieved the RE Quality Mark Gold award. The school is aware of the need to raise the profile of Christian distinctiveness in a sensitive way and is considering how to provide more explicit expressions of this in and around school and externally for example, via the school's website.

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

Collective worship (CW) is seen to be an important part of school life. It is pupil centred and responds to the needs of children and world events. Parents enjoy attending. Daily worship uses reflection and prayer to support children's SMSC development and understanding of the importance of faith. Classroom reflection areas are also used to promote spiritual growth and children's personal faith journey, where diversity is commended and shared values celebrated. There is a weekly theme for worship that includes; biblical narratives, key world events, celebrations and the aspects of the liturgical calendar. During CW children learn about different faiths and about how the Christian faith is celebrated in other countries. A variety of people including clergy are involved in leading CW and this helps to emphasise the underpinning of the Christian foundation of the school. Children respond positively to outside visitors. Children's behaviour is attentive in CW and pupils participate well. Their thoughtful answers to the week's reflective, philosophical question, 'are you a better person if you are knowledgeable?' showed maturity of thought and an ability to give reasoned opinions. They clearly demonstrate respectful relationships, considerate responses and listened to each other well. Pupils sometimes plan and lead worship. However they say that they would like more opportunities to this and comment that sometimes CW is a bit passive and that they would like to be more actively involved in its planning and delivery. There is a close link to the parish church through the regular opportunities to worship there and participate in key celebrations in the Christian calendar. Pupils and their families regard the church as a further element of the school and enjoy their visits there. The school meets the statutory requirements for collective worship.

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

Religious Education (RE) is seen as a core curriculum area with clear links to the wider school curriculum. Standards in RE are at least in line with national expectations and rapidly improving with many children achieving higher. The school follows the Wakefield Agreed Syllabus. Assessment and tracking of pupil attainment and progress in RE is undertaken effectively using a system that promotes a deepening of understanding and the development of a questioning approach to learning. Marking and feedback are a strength of the school and the 'green for growth' challenges are used to cultivate children's higher order thinking skills. Children are made aware of their next steps in learning and are encouraged to undertake self-assessment in RE. Lessons are well planned, have clear learning objectives and are active, creative and engaging. This was seen in one lesson where children were thinking about what it means to be stewards of God's beautiful earth. Opportunity was given for children to question, respond and justify answers in a meaningful way. RE working walls in classrooms show that children are challenged to think deeply and reflect on the 'big questions' in life. The RE curriculum is further enhanced by P4C and links to British Values, which supports children's SMSC development. Children enjoy RE and have knowledge and understanding of the areas covered, particularly in respect of other world faiths and how Christian values can support making the 'right choice'. Tolerance and a deeper understanding of diversity are encouraged in order to develop an appreciation of equality for all and the global nature of faith. RE lessons provide excellent opportunities for children to explore and learn about diversity found in local, regional and national communities. It also helps them to find the best ways to express their own ideas, opinions and beliefs about religious, spiritual and moral questions as well as the significance of religious beliefs for some people. A variety of visits to the local church, ably supported by the vicar and, feature within the RE curriculum. Leadership and management of RE is undertaken by a faculty style staff group. This is well supported by the 'lead practitioner' who has outstanding subject knowledge and leadership skills. There are very effective systems for assessing and tracking pupil progress in RE that are becoming embedded.

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

The headteacher, who is also a National Leader in Education (NLE) and her dedicated team lead by example and enjoy the trust of their children and their families. They have shown outstanding leadership and resilience during a time when the school has experienced significant turbulence. The school is now said to be rapidly improving and was given a grade of good by Ofsted in June 2015. Core values such as love, trust, nurture and respect underpin everything that is done in school. Parents of all faiths and none strongly support and value the school for its caring, Christian character. Children enjoy coming to school. The school is valued by parents and those of all faiths and none say that the leadership and governors have a strong commitment to Christian service. Leaders and governors recognise and understand the diverse needs of the children and families and work hard to provide a child-centred, personalised curriculum. Parents appreciate that the school is a secure place where they and their children feel a sense of belonging. This is particularly evident for children attending the 'SPARKS' nurture group, where pupil's wider needs are met to ensure best possible progress. There is also a well-attended breakfast and a range of after school clubs. The work of the senior leadership and the safeguarding officer has ensured that attendance has improved over time and continues to do so. Parents are appreciative of the renewed environment in the school and value the approachable staff, the open, honest relationships and good communications that the school fosters. The school's philosophy and Christian values underpin all the work it does. Strong links with the church and clergy are beneficial and add to the school's capacity to support families in need. Governors have undertaken several external reviews to audit their effectiveness and to identify areas for improvement and in order to develop their understanding. Consequently, they now have a greater impact and are more actively involved in school. They have undertaken joint monitoring and work scrutiny, they visit classrooms to help out and work with children in the 'SPARKS' nurture group. They also undertake training to develop their understanding and ability to support and challenge the school in an effective and appropriate manner. This ability would be further improved by working with the Diocese to support identified work on Christian

distinctiveness. The headteacher has a good grasp of the issues that have impacted upon the school and its ability to improve. Collective worship and prayer are an important aspect of school life and an emphasis on the use of implicit Christian values to support teaching and learning to ensure pupils achieve their potential socially and academically.

SIAMS report October 2015 Sandal Castle (VA) Community Primary School, Wakefield, WF2 6AS