

**INSPECTION OF A CHURCH IN WALES SCHOOL  
UNDER SECTION 50 OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2005**

**Alderman Davies Church in Wales Voluntary Aided primary School**

**Diocese of Llandaff**

Alderman Davies Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School,  
St David's Street,  
Neath  
SA11 3AA

Neath Port Talbot Local Education Authority  
School Number: 6713313

Date of Inspection: 26 January 2011  
Concurrent with Estyn Inspection Team

Head teacher: Mrs Caryl Dobson  
Chair of Governors: Mr Adrian Parker

Section 50 Inspector: Mrs Dilys Williams  
National Society registration: 511

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**The Inspector would like to thank the head teacher, staff, governors, parents and pupils for the opportunity to be part of the life of the school, and to thank them for their consideration and co-operation during the inspection.**

# 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Alderman Davies Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School is situated in the centre of Neath, adjacent to St David's Church. Its grounds are limited and it is surrounded by buildings and busy town roads. The school opened in 1858 and is the oldest school in Neath. In 1981, in keeping with rationalisation measures adopted by the LEA the infants and junior schools were merged to form one primary school under a single head teacher. In the academic year 2005/06, a remodelling project costing £2.3m was undertaken to develop a school which now provides facilities necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, it has retained all the character and charisma associated with being Neath's oldest school. The school's most recent project is the POD, a learning resource for pupils.

When the school was remodelled, a lift was added and the school made accessible for all pupils, including those in wheelchairs.

There are currently 370 pupils on roll, between the ages of 3 and 11. Pupils can enter Nursery on a part-time basis following their third birthday, for either a morning or afternoon session. There is a "wrap-around" provision for some children to be able to stay all day long. In Reception to Year 2 there are six classes: one of these contains a mixed age range (Years 1 – 2). At Key Stage 2 there are six classes: three of these contain a mixed age range (Years 3 – 4 and 5 – 6). There are 15 teachers in the school, supported by 17 Learning Support Assistants.

The majority of pupils come from the local area, which the school describes as neither prosperous nor economically disadvantaged, although there is a significant proportion of families at both ends of the spectrum. 16% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, 13% are identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and 5% are from ethnic minority backgrounds. None is looked after by the local authority.

A number of pupils travel to the school from outside the traditional catchment area: this is mostly due to the school's excellent reputation and because their parents wish them to attend an Anglican school. The majority of pupils transfer to two local comprehensive schools after Year 6. These are community/LEA maintained schools; there is no Church in Wales secondary school provision in the area.

# 2. SUMMARY

The summary judgements on three Key Questions, based on the Estyn four point scale (Excellent, Good, Adequate, Unsatisfactory) are as follows:

<b>KQ1</b>	<b><i>DOES THE SCHOOL HAVE A DISTINCTIVE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER, AND IS THIS REFLECTED IN THE EXPERIENCE OF LEARNERS?</i></b>	<b>EXCELLENT</b>
<b>KQ2</b>	<b><i>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL'S CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IMPACT ON THE WELLBEING OF EACH PUPIL AND THE WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY?</i></b>	<b>GOOD</b>
<b>KQ3</b>	<b><i>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED AS A CHURCH SCHOOL?</i></b>	<b>EXCELLENT</b>

In addition, the answer to the question "Does the School fulfil its statutory requirements for collective worship, religious education, admissions and information for parents?" is **YES**.

### **3. REMARKS ON THE KEY QUESTIONS**

#### **3.1 Does the school have a distinctive Christian character, and is this reflected in the experience of learners?**

The inspector's overall judgement for this Key Question is that the school is excellent, and there are many aspects of its character which are in the forefront of this education sector.

##### **3.1.1 How distinctive is the school's Christian character?**

The Christian character of the school is deep-rooted, very much in evidence, and superbly supported by the relationship that has been built up with the local church over the years. It stands out in the many schools this inspector has visited. An atmosphere of warmth and welcome permeates everything that goes on at the school.

The mission statement is succinct and clearly visible: *Encouraging all to fulfil their potential within a caring Christian environment*. Christian symbols, signage and numerous biblical and moral quotations are clearly displayed from the reception area to classroom corners. Pupils are happy to be in the school and they demonstrate care for each other. The Head teacher and all the staff show they live the Christian gospel: they are considerate, kind, sensitive, approachable and very willing to support all learners.

There are prayer areas in each classroom and in many other areas of the school. Pupils have a mature attitude to prayer and feel comfortable writing their own, either spontaneously or under supervision, using prayer as a personal message to God.

Pupils, staff, parents, governors and members of the local community all extol the spirituality of the school. In a questionnaire completed by 95 parents, they all knew that it was a Church school, they all believed it was a caring institution based on clear Christian values and 100% of them agreed or strongly agreed that the school has a distinctive Christian character.

Rating for this element: Excellent.

##### **3.1.2 What is the impact of Collective Worship on the whole school community?**

A crucial achievement of this school is its excellent collective worship which is of a very high quality at whole school, Key Stage and classroom levels. It takes place daily in a variety of styles and venues. It undoubtedly has a positive influence on the whole school community.

Themes and Christian values from the Spiritual Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning (SSEAL) and Professional Learning Community (PLC) initiatives are launched in the school in whole-school collective worship. From there they are taken into Religious Education (RE) and Personal & Social Education (PSE) lessons and followed up in other aspects of the life of the school and community. During the inspector's visit, the theme was "Going for Goals": the music of the collective worship session was chosen from discussion with pupils to highlight the theme; associated hymns, songs and reflections were arranged in a booklet used in collective worship sessions for the half-term; many lessons and class worships were linked to it.

The school is fortunate to be able to use, easily and regularly, its local church, which is situated right next door. One member of staff said "It is like an extra classroom for us".

Whole school worship takes place in the church once a week. All pupils from Nursery to Year 6 attend, and both this inspector and the Estyn inspectors found it a very uplifting and moving experience. Pupils sing enthusiastically but are equally involved in the quiet musical reflection at the end of worship. All acts of worship start and finish with the lighting and extinguishing of a candle whilst a song is sung: the candle and singing create a reverent atmosphere. The school prayer is used in every worship session, which parents and members of the local community are encouraged to attend.

Of the 95 parents who responded to the questionnaire, 90% agreed or strongly agreed that the pupils found collective worship a valuable experience. One parent said "My daughter loves worship time in school and as a result makes time at home to talk to God". Another said "It sets an unparalleled moral foundation".

Rating for this element: Excellent.

### **3.1.3 How does the school's curriculum support its Christian character?**

Religious Education is taught in line with the Church in Wales syllabus. Exciting work is taking place to improve the religious education curriculum.

Pupils demonstrate clearly the knowledge and understanding they have gained in this subject. They are able to reflect, talk about, question and express their beliefs and the beliefs of others. The quality of teaching is good. Staff work hard to produce challenging and exciting lessons. A variety of teaching and learning approaches enhance the experience of the learners, who have developed mature attitudes and feelings about their religious education lessons. They respond to well constructed questions in a thoughtful and open manner. The teaching staff are well supported by teaching assistants who are eager to help and be involved with the learning in the classrooms.

Standards of achievement are good. Staff work hard to ensure that assessment is as rigorous in religious education as it is in other core subjects. Audio and visual assessments are being developed, and work is underway to pilot the effectiveness of using a tracking system to monitor progress in RE. The school is exploring how RE, PSE, SSEAL and Values for Living can be linked to enrich the curriculum.

Of 95 parents who responded to the questionnaire, 88% agreed or strongly agreed that they were kept well informed about the pupils' work in religious education. Although this was the lowest of the response figures, it is higher than this inspector has seen in any other of her inspections. (It may be pointed out here that of all her inspections, this set of parents consistently submitted the most positive replies to all the questions.) One parent said "This is an outstanding school, with a caring staff who have high standards in education. RE is a key feature of the school and Christian values are taught not only in lessons but in the ethos of the staff."

Rating for this element: Good.

### **3.2 How does the school's Christian character impact on the wellbeing of each pupil and the whole school community?**

The inspector's overall judgement for this Key Question is that the school is good.

#### **3.2.1 How effective is the school in shaping spiritual and moral development?**

The ethos of the school, the acts of collective worship and the SSEAL initiative all focus on the development of the whole child. SSEAL is so named because the school through its own initiative has added Spirituality to the standard SEAL project. There is a strong emphasis on respect for all and the sense of right and wrong. The SSEAL group is enthusiastic and ensures that the "pupils' voice" is heard. The staff aim to grow the spiritual life of the pupils alongside their academic development and social, moral and emotional well being. They are tireless in their endeavours to support pupils in the many activities the school offers for spiritual and moral development. There is a strong focus on the care of our environment and forging close links with the outside community. Local and international charities are supported so that the pupils develop an understanding of local and wider needs.

The *Values for Life* project and *Values Tree* are just two examples of the care taken that everyone understands the importance of Christian values and the principles of showing love to and respect for one another. Pupils are excited about the spiritual garden project and feel that their thoughts and ideas are heard and valued.

The "cross in the classroom" initiative helps to develop the children's spiritual strength. A Year 6 boy talked about the cross in his classroom: "You can get it if you feel sad, hold it to your heart and say a prayer". The inspector was told of a pupil who was leaving the school as her family was moving away. She asked for time to be with the "holding cross" because it gave her a feeling of security.

In the responses to the questionnaire, 99% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the school offers good support for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

Rating for this element: Excellent.

#### **3.2.2 How well does the school develop pupils' personal qualities and achievements?**

Pupils are undoubtedly happy and appreciative of their school. They behave very well overall and enjoy both lessons and playtime. The classrooms and internal and external school areas provide a stimulating environment for learning as well as a quiet environment for prayer and reflection.

The school's creative, regularly changed displays encourage and challenge the pupils in their learning and approach to life. The playgrounds in this large town school are small but every effort has been made to enrich the children's leisure time.

There is no doubt that every child is encouraged to achieve his or her potential. They receive first class attention and are carefully nurtured as they progress through the school. Achievement Assemblies are held regularly to celebrate pupils' achievements. The close relationship between the school and the church is critical, providing another dimension to the pupils' personal development. A parent said "The children benefit hugely from the enriching Christian influence in the curriculum. We are proud of the links with the church".

In the responses to the questionnaire, 99% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the school made a significant contribution to pupils' education.

Rating for this element: Good.

### **3.2.3 To what extent do the school's Christian values underpin well being?**

The school's values are evident in all aspects of its activities: in the warm welcome which visitors receive; in the feeling of security and being valued to which pupils attest; in the continual reinforcement of the gospel in all school areas. A parent said "We chose ADS purposely for our children because of its faith and nurturing values. Our children are flourishing, remarkably content, and totally embrace the Christian characteristics on offer."

The staff behave with Christian regard for each other and for the pupils, during school hours and beyond. Children are encouraged to understand the significance of Christ's command to love one another as he has loved us. His teachings are well reported and thoughtfully applied in day-to-day practice.

Pupils with Alternative Learning Needs are cared for and well supported. There is an active Nurture Group, set up to help and guide pupils who may have problems during the school year. Pupils in this group learn respect for their fellows and begin to understand their deeper feelings.

Any tensions in the playground are dealt with by good listening and questioning strategies. Staff are kind and show respect and understanding in such situations, giving sound and helpful advice.

Rating for this element: Good.

### **3.3 How well is the school led and managed as a Church School?**

The inspector's overall judgement for this Key Question is that the school is excellent, and again there are aspects of the quality of provision which are at the forefront of the sector.

#### **3.3.1 How effective is the school at securing distributed and sustained Church school leadership?**

The Head teacher is inspiring. She has a clear vision for the school underpinned by her strong Christian beliefs. She is charismatic and has a quiet way of influencing her staff such that they act and work instinctively towards the goals, targets and values she sets. She is very well supported by her deputy who is equally committed to the school and shares the Head's Christian values, aims and way of working.

The school's leadership team is passionate about the school's progress: standing still is not good enough. They seek growth alongside careful embedding of the principles that ensure the children feel secure and that everything is being done to help them reach their full potential. They make the school an exciting place with outstanding acts of worship, colourful displays and opportunities for prayer.

Under the guidance of the Head teacher, staff are encouraged to develop very high quality practices. The quality of provision for the *Values for Life* initiative is sector leading. As

mentioned earlier, the school is exploring how RE, PSE, SSEAL and Values for Living can be linked to enrich the curriculum. The school and the LEA are involved in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) which embraces Church and non-Church primary schools. The school's willingness to share good practice with others is commendable.

The Head's encouragement of her staff to take on responsibility and share in the development of the school pays dividends: they all espouse the values and vision of the school and are committed to its excellent management and high standards. Leadership in these fields is shared by all the staff, showing that Church School leadership has indeed been secured and distributed in this school.

Rating for this element: Excellent.

### **3.3.2 How effective is the leadership and management in securing the wellbeing of the community?**

Leadership by example is the norm in this school. The leadership share a common vision for the improvement and wellbeing of all the pupils. The school ethos is one where pupils and staff feel secure and cared for. The staff aim to give pupils the best education they can, spiritually and academically. The governing body willingly give their time whenever possible to ensure pupils and staff are supported and guided, and they are fully committed to the Christian values of the school.

One parent commented "My daughter is being given a very high standard in education. She is developing her life skills in a fun, caring, safe environment. The school has superb home links".

Rating for this element: Good.

### **3.3.3 How well does the leadership and management of the school secure and support a sense of Christian belonging within and beyond the Church in Wales?**

Links between the school and the church are excellent and seamless, working as one to share Christian values and the gospel message. Members of the clergy are seen regularly in and around the school and they lead acts of collective worship in the church and school buildings. In one lesson held in the church a member of the clergy team and a church warden were leading small group work to support the class teacher.

Confirmation classes are held in the school, attended by large numbers of Year 6 pupils. These pupils also make a pilgrimage to Llandaff cathedral. All members of staff attend the annual Llandaff conference: this year school staff ran one of the workshops.

The school has forged close links with the outside community, and as mentioned previously, local and international charities are supported. The staff are excited by the links they are forging through the diocesan Professional Learning Community not only with local primary schools but also with their closest Church in Wales secondary school in Aberdare. The school's Head teacher is the facilitator of the PLC.

Links with European schools are maintained through the Comenius projects, in which the school's excellent practices are exported abroad.

In the questionnaire, 99% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school has effective links with the local church and community. 94% agreed or strongly agreed that it ensures links are made with the wider community.

Rating for this element: Excellent.

### 3.4 Parents' Questionnaire.

As part of this Inspection, parents were asked to respond to the following questionnaire:

1. Are you aware that this is a Church school?
2. Do you believe that the school is a caring institution built upon clear Christian values?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. The school has a distinctive Christian character.					
4. The school offers good support for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.					
5. Makes a significant contribution to pupils' education.					
6. The school keeps parents well informed about the work pupils do in religious education.					
7. Pupils find collective worship a valuable experience.					
8. The school has effective links with the local church/ community					
9. The school ensures links are made with the wider community					

95 parents responded. The results have been included in the commentary above.

## 4. STRENGTHS

Alderman Davies School's established strengths are:

- i. the exceptionally strong Christian character of the school;
- ii. its inspirational acts of worship;
- iii. its outstanding relationships with the local church, clergy and community;
- iv. its pupils' attitudes to learning and knowledge of Christian values;
- v. the Christian witness of the school's leadership.

## 5. FOCUS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The school has four areas in which to focus development:

- i. the consistency of marking comments, which should be related to the set objectives and, where possible, to the level descriptors for religious education;
- ii. a more rigorous and formal evaluation system for collective worship;
- iii. standardised inclusion of audio and visual assessments in RE portfolios of evidence of work;
- iv. sharing its sector-leading practice with other schools.