

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### Axbridge Church of England First School Academy

#### Vision

In our vibrant, inclusive community, every child is empowered to thrive and experience the joy of learning. We nurture each child's unique potential, inspiring curiosity, independence and a lifelong love of discovery. Guided by our Christian ethos and values of Community, Courage and Love, and rooted in strong partnerships with our local church and parish, Axbridge Church of England Academy sits at the heart of its community. Here, every child is supported to flourish and live 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10).

Axbridge Church of England First School Academy is living up to its foundation as a Church school and is enabling pupils and adults to flourish. It has the following notable strengths.

#### Notable Strengths

- The impact of the academy's Christian vision and values is seen most meaningfully in its inclusive nature. This is a community where everyone is known, everyone is precious and everyone has a voice.
- The Christian ethos is woven throughout the academy. Exceptionally strong partnerships with the trust, the diocese and the local parish are at the heart of this distinctiveness.
- In their collective worship, pupils and adults flourish spiritually. They explore big questions together and reflect on what they learn.
- Through their understanding of justice, pupils have a deep sense of rights and responsibilities. This results in an extremely caring community.
- Pupils respond enthusiastically to the development of their understanding through religious education (RE). They engage readily and in a lively manner with questions of meaning and purpose.

#### Development Points

- Embed the academy's approach to spirituality in order to deepen a shared understanding of spiritual development.
- Enhance the RE curriculum to include more awareness of the diversity in how religions and worldviews are practised and followed. This is to improve pupil understanding of the breadth of faith and beliefs.
- Enable pupils to encounter a greater range of Christian worship practices. This is to enhance pupil experience of prayer and contemplation.



## Inspection Findings

### Vision and Leadership

Axbridge Academy is a joyous community. It is at the centre of this Somerset town, geographically, educationally and spiritually. Leaders use the Christian vision of 'fullness of life' most effectively to cherish and nurture individuals. Pupils and adults respond by being proud to belong to the academy and making their unique contributions. The revised associated values drive the living out of the vision. Love, community and courage have universal meaning but they are given added depth by strong scriptural links and Christian teachings. Pupils confidently discuss parables of Jesus that exemplify the values and are adept at applying these values to life today. They explain how 'the lost son' shows both courage and love in practice. The diocese and trust constructively engage academy leaders in shared consideration of the latest thinking about Church school education. This results in meaningful dialogue over developments in the realisation of the vision and values. Local partners, as part of their governance, assist with the effective evaluation of the impact of the vision and values. They are welcome visitors and are treated as treasured members of the community.

### Vision and Curriculum

Leaders articulate with passion how pupils thrive through the vision-inspired curriculum. Pupils are at the centre of the learning process. This includes pupils who are deemed to be vulnerable and/or disadvantaged. To achieve fullness of life, learning is considered in all its aspects. Teachers encourage pupils to identify what they already know, to be curious and to take steps to achieve their best. They are ambitious to see pupils grow and extend themselves through enrichment activities. Adults are role models for this and show how to put learning into practice. Pupils respond to this with delight and classrooms buzz with positive interactions. Pupils confidently share their thoughts and insights and are deeply supportive of each other. Leaders have recently recognised the need for a more far-reaching approach to learning about spirituality. This encourages pupils and adults to be more self-aware, to consider their interactions with the world and with God, or something beyond themselves. It is too early to judge the impact of this approach on pupils' spiritual development. Pupils enjoy reflection areas in each classroom that encourage them to respond to a termly big question and record their insights.

### Worship and Spirituality

There is a rich variety of collective worship that contributes greatly to pupil and adult flourishing. Pupils love singing both for its pure pleasure and for the insights they gain into Christian beliefs. They recognise that songs often express feelings that are hard to put into their own words. Collective worship is based on Christian practice, effectively incorporating scripture and prayer. Leaders thoughtfully find points of connection for pupils, often using drama and linking to pupils' experiences. Reflection is central to worship. Pupils and adults talk movingly about how this helps them be both calm and to find renewed energy. Pupils are invited to lead prayer spontaneously on the theme of the worship. Many do and this adds to the sense of a vibrant, spiritual community. End of the day routines revisit elements of collective worship and pupils recognise how this prepares them to go out positively. Pupils have good awareness of Christian festivals and understand that they are not all celebrated in the same way by every believer. They do not have the opportunities to experience a range of Christian worship practices, such as contemplation, prayer and music. The local parish church is used regularly for collective worship. Pupils and adults find the building inspiring and parents can join in, which adds to the sense of community.

### Vision and School Culture

The living out of the vision and associated values produces a remarkable sense of unity and interdependence. This includes the nursery who share appropriately in the vision and values. Leaders successfully prioritise the wellbeing and mental health of pupils and adults. This includes effective strategies to help pupils develop resilience. Local partners sensitively ensure the wellbeing of senior staff. There is a systematic personal development programme to help pupils explore how they view and react to the world around them. Pupils



understand that practising love involves wanting the best for peers. In rare circumstances when relationships go wrong, they know that love means you apologise and put things right. Leaders rightly and appropriately focus on the early identification of pupils with additional needs and those deemed to be vulnerable and/or disadvantaged. They use inclusive strategies to remove barriers to learning and to participation in academy life in general. Such pupils are cherished for how they enhance the community.

#### Vision, Justice and Responsibility

Pupils and adults confidently assert that living out the vision entails prioritising the consideration and practice of fairness. Leaders ensure that understanding justice and injustice is part of everyday life. Pupils care passionately about their academy and their local community. They take great pride in taking opportunities to exercise leadership and to enhance life around them. Pupils show good understanding of the rights of others. They talk with insight about the most important rights for children. They are also aware that with rights come responsibilities. They link these meaningfully with practising the values of love, courage and community. Pupil councillors enthusiastically champion a local charity that provides materials for poorly resourced schools in countries with emerging economies. This arose out of their knowledge and appreciation of the situation of refugee families. They show both empathy and a determination to help practically. Pupils talk ardently about how buddying between younger and older pupils produces a more harmonious and cohesive community. Eco councillors speak movingly about the importance of conservation and their responsibilities. They acknowledge how this has been prompted by reflection time, forest school and curriculum content on the natural world.

#### Religious Education

The high profile of RE at the academy contributes greatly to the preparation of pupils to live fully in today's wider society. Leaders have carefully constructed a balanced and well-sequenced RE curriculum. They base this on the local syllabus and supplement it with a greater depth of material on Christianity. This is sensitive and effective. The academy draws on the expertise of the diocese and trust to ensure that professional development is relevant and well-resourced. Leaders, thus, empower classroom staff to deliver the material confidently and engagingly. RE covers a range of religions and worldviews with both accessible and challenging elements. Teachers use the curriculum to identify the knowledge required for each unit and extend understanding with clear learning objectives. Good use is made of a 'big question' each term to bring coherence to the unit. For example, 'what kind of world did Jesus want?' effectually brings together learning about disciples, baptism and compassionate action. Teacher planning enables drama and art, times for reflection and opportunities to engage with questions of meaning and purpose. Visitors enrich learning about the local observance of religions and worldviews. However, pupils are not sufficiently aware of the diverse practices that believers use in following them.

## Information

Address	Moorland Street, Axbridge, Somerset. BS26 2BA		
Date	10 February 2026	URN	138763
Type of school	Academy	No. of pupils	178 (including 40 in the nursery)
Diocese	Bath and Wells		
MAT	Wessex Learning Trust		
MAT Chair	Paul Jacobs		
Headteacher	Dominic Shillabeer		
Chair of Local Partners	Toni Hael		
Inspector	Simon Stevens		