

The Annual Report of the National Director of the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools

2022 – 2023

Executive Summary

Vision, values, and leadership

1. In schools in which there is a contextually-appropriate, deeply rooted Christian vision that is well-known and understood by leaders, and that is fully embedded in policy and practice, inspection evidence indicates that the impact of the vision is palpably transformational for adults and pupils. This is compelling evidence for the benefits of Church schools understanding both their original foundation and their up-to-date context, and then identifying how to best serve their community with humility, wisdom, and respect.
2. There is a growing number of Church schools in which the curriculum reflects the Christian vision. This is a positive development compared to 2022-2023. However, numbers of schools for which this can be said do remain relatively low. This raises a question about some schools' true understanding of the purpose of their vision, given the overwhelming amount of time in the school day that is devoted to the taught curriculum.
3. Evidence consistently suggests that strong, informed, and insightful governance is essential for the effective development of Church schools. In schools where this is the case, the impact is obvious and is overwhelmingly positive. Currently there are too many governor vacancies, including of foundation governors, in both maintained schools and academies. As a result, many Church schools are limited in their development which, in turn, has a negative impact on both pupils and adults.
4. It is apparent from inspections that the majority of Church school governors are overwhelmingly committed to their school and to their community, and that this bears fruit for the work that they do with schools. However, it is not uncommon to find that governors do not have a clear understanding of the *purpose* of their role. This is manifested, for example, in the fact that more governing bodies carry out monitoring than they do evaluation. This particularly relates to monitoring and evaluating the impact of schools' vision. Without evaluating the evidence that is gathered through their monitoring activities, governors are not equipped to make effective decisions on next steps because they do not have evidence of the impact of actions. This, too, is inhibiting the development of Church schools. Whilst not applying to all governing bodies, there is a sufficiently inconsistent picture across the country for it to merit comment.

5. Values remain a common and valuable element of Church school life. In schools in which values are a coherent outworking of the Christian vision, they are particularly effective. In some schools, vision and values appear to be conflated thereby causing schools to miss out on the strategic direction that is provided by a clarity of vision. Where values are most effective, they are providing a common language for the outworking of the vision.
6. Inspection evidence reveals that there remains some confusion and/or a lack of understanding about whether schools should have or need to have a Bible verse ‘attached’ to their vision. There is no right or wrong answer here, and school leaders should be empowered to make a decision that is right for their school. A Bible verse *can* provide a tangible, visible ‘hook’ that enables the school community to understand the vision, but only when included as part of a deeper strategic and theological discussion amongst leaders. Evidence indicates that use of a Bible verse does not *automatically* lead to better performance in inspection or, more importantly, to an *automatically* more authentic and effective Christian vision.
7. One of the most defining and important findings of inspection in 2022-2023 is the need for strong leaders who understand what it means to lead a Church school. It is essential that all those involved in recruitment and development take note of this finding, and devise recruitment campaigns and leadership and development strategies accordingly.

School culture, relationships, and inclusion

8. In high level terms, Church schools appear to be characterised by qualities such as love, forgiveness, dignity, respect, care, and kindness. Pastoral support and mental health and wellbeing are taken seriously and provision for pupils and adults is prioritised. This can result in the presence of a school chaplain, or similar role. However, despite the comprehensively positive benefits of chaplaincy to the whole school community, the presence of this role, or similar, remains relatively low.
9. Evidence is clear that understanding of what it means to enable pupils to grow as active agents of change is an improving picture, but that it remains inconsistent. In addressing matters of injustice and empowerment, it is important that school staff and leaders understand not only the notion of courageous advocacy, but also that of political impartiality.
10. There is an obvious desire across Church schools to be welcoming communities, accepting of diversity and difference. This intention is commendable. However, practice emerging from this is inconsistent at present, with the main areas of strength being in schools that serve communities that themselves are characterised by being racially and culturally diverse. Evidence suggests that the inconsistency in practice is largely due to limited understanding, as well as the lack of availability of appropriate resources.
11. Religious education (RE) *can* make a significant and positive impact to this, but it does not always. Nothing will act as a substitute for improving understanding of the diversity that is inherent within, and a fundamental defining characteristic of, humankind made in the image of God.

Spirituality and spiritual development

12. In the schools that have a shared understanding of spirituality and a planned approach to spiritual development, there is a valuable language for expressing spirituality. This language and understanding can be a unifying and sustaining force within the school community, particularly during difficult times. Whilst an undeniable strength in some schools, there remains work to do in general terms in ensuring that spirituality is playing an integral role in the education offered by Church schools.
13. The curriculum in the majority of Church schools, whilst increasingly reflecting the vision, does not include spirituality as a matter of routine. Ad hoc responses to awe and wonder are commonplace, and are of value as far as they go; but planned opportunities for pupils to explore the spiritual aspects of subject matter remain less commonplace.

Collective worship

14. Collective worship is frequently described as being the ‘heartbeat’ of schools. This is an encouraging finding in relation to Church of England and Methodist schools. It would be more encouraging still if the positive impact of worship and an understanding of spirituality were to consistently break through from acts of worship into the rest of school life. It will not be possible to have an informed view on this until and unless governors’ monitoring *and* evaluation activity extends to the impact of collective worship.
15. Inspection reports suggest that there is some confusion relating to the ‘requirements’ and benefits of different models of leadership of collective worship, with some schools believing that they *must* insist on pupils leading acts of worship. Schools would benefit from being empowered to make contextually-appropriate decisions on this issue, including a consideration of whether and how leadership of worship universally enhances pupils’ and adults’ spiritual flourishing. They should then make decisions accordingly.

Religious education

16. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in RE appear to be improving, likely aided by teachers’ improving subject knowledge. Diocesan training in RE appears to be having a consistently positive impact for schools.
17. Whilst balance in RE teaching (theology, philosophy, human science) is improving, homogenisation within faiths occurs too frequently. This is likely to be a teacher training issue, one in which diocesan expertise should prove to be valuable.
18. There are a number of areas in RE that require further attention.
 - a) Whilst teaching and learning in Christianity is generally strong, knowledge and understanding of Christianity as a global faith remains a relative weakness. This aspect of Christianity appears to be under-resourced for teachers.

- b) Evidence in relation to the teaching and learning of a range of worldviews and faiths other than Christianity indicates a gradually improving picture, but one in which there remains a good amount of work to be done. It is possible that lack of resources is also a factor here.
- c) Teaching of RE in KS5 is inconsistent, both in quality and in availability.

Partnerships

- 19. Inspection evidence reinforces the existing knowledge that schools are not islands, and that those that invest time and energy in partnerships benefit holistically from them. Church schools' partnership with the diocese is of particular value in terms of having a positive impact on Christian vision, RE, collective worship, spirituality and spiritual development, and the work of governors.
- 20. Schools' partnerships with churches are also of comprehensive and wide-ranging benefit.
- 21. When a school is part of a multi academy trust that understands the specific character of Church schools, the school benefits from appropriate support.

General observations

- 22. Evidence indicates three interesting and frequently occurring valuable principles across Church schools.
 - a) Intentionality – where action, vision, monitoring and evaluation, spirituality and most other elements of Church school life are approached and carried out with determination, deliberateness, and clear meaning and purpose, they appear to be of greater worth to the school community.
 - b) Explicitness – building on the benefits of intentionality, when leaders are explicit with others about the fact that the school is a Church school and all that this entails, there appear to be more tangible benefits to the school community when compared with schools where this is regarded as being implicit. The ability for leaders to be explicit requires them, firstly, to have a deep and meaningful understanding of what a Church school is, what it does, and why it does it.
 - c) Understanding why – unfortunately yet understandably, compliance remains a key feature of Church school leadership, and it often seems to take precedence over an understanding of *why* actions are being taken. If the answer to the question 'why?' is 'because of inspection', then leaders should feel empowered to think again and to determine the true purpose and worth of their actions.

Introduction

The Church of England's involvement in school inspection is a legal requirement that is enacted by SIAMS through the lens of 'inspecting in a Christian manner'. This means that the principles that are expected of and within Church schools, and that are evaluated through inspection, are also imposed internally upon the inspectorate itself. Combining rigour, accountability, and high standards with compassion, dignity, and respect is intended to enable all those involved to play their part in inspection in a way that is humanising and that has integrity, never losing sight of the purpose of the work. As its basic premise, SIAMS inspection should help Church schools to gain insight into the impact of their work, leaving them in a better place to move forward than they were before the inspection. In turn, albeit at a distance from the vital work of educators who are 'on the ground', SIAMS plays its part in the improvement of life chances for all children who attend either a Church of England or Methodist school. This means that inspection will not always be easy, and it will not always be stress-free; but it will always have integrity.

2022-2023 was the second full year of the national integration of SIAMS, and it saw a number of significant developments. Most notable amongst these was the publication of the new inspection Framework in November 2022, for implementation in September 2023. This early publication date was planned to enable schools and diocesan education teams to familiarise themselves with the new approach to inspection, thereby making a reality of the intention to run an inspection system that is not designed to catch schools out, but rather to empower them to serve their communities in the best way possible.

All inspectors were retrained in the spring 2023 to enable them to inspect under the new Framework, and to refresh their understanding of the principles and practice of SIAMS inspection. A further part of the development process of the new Framework, was to continue to seek feedback through the academic year, leading to changes in the wording of the two judgements and in the inspection-related process of Church school self-evaluation. This transparent outworking of the principles of reasonableness and of working collaboratively remains at the heart of SIAMS.

Inspection capacity remains a challenge for SIAMS. This has been somewhat lessened during 2022-2023 by the sign-off and registration of almost 60 new inspectors, the majority of whom are either Church school or diocesan leaders. A successful advertising campaign in January led to the recruitment of a further 140 trainee inspectors. These trainees will be trained, assessed, and signed-off over the course of the coming academic year, thereby increasing inspection capacity still further by the end of the summer term 2024.

Quality assurance (QA) remains embedded at the heart of SIAMS, with QA being carried out on reports and inspection practice. QA of the QA is also ongoing, with moderation and continual professional development being important aspects of the work. Whilst recognising that there always remains room for improvement and development in SIAMS, I am content overall that inspection is in a good place. This is exemplified through inspection outcomes, individual positive feedback, our responses to complaints, and the culture of reflective practice that drives the system. Not all schools are happy with their experience of SIAMS, and as long as that remains the case, I will continue to investigate and to identify areas that could be improved further. Driven by a determination for all aspects of SIAMS to live up to its calling of 'in a Christian manner', I remain open at all times to feedback and reflection.

Dr Margaret James | National Director of SIAMS

What inspection outcomes are telling us about Anglican and Methodist Church schools

Vision, values, and leadership

1. Evidence reveals that, where a school has a contextually appropriate Christian vision that is embedded and that drives its work, the impact of the vision on the lives of both pupils and adults is palpable and transformational. Clearly, the vision cannot be contextually-appropriate if leaders do not understand the community that they serve. Blackford VA Primary in the Diocese of Carlisle is described as ‘the cornerstone of the community’, suggesting that this rootedness in and understanding of context is fundamental to the school’s work.
2. Other examples of contextually-appropriate Christian visions, and knowledge and understanding of need, include Blockley VC Primary in the Diocese of Gloucester where leaders describe their responsibility to ‘show God’s love so that pupils can be what God made them to be’; Guilsborough Academy in the Diocese of Peterborough, in which leaders regard the school’s purpose as being to ‘serve the community’; and St Augustine’s High School in the Diocese of London where the school is described as ‘a vibrant oasis of peace and curious inquiry’.
3. Overwhelmingly, narrative evidence from inspections indicates that recruiting strong and effective leaders, who have a good understanding of what it means to lead a Church school, is a defining factor of a successful school. This relates to the headteacher and other leaders on the staff team, as well as to governors, and trustees/directors if the school is an academy. This has implications for leadership recruitment and development strategies and criteria, as well as for decisions related to which trusts Church schools join when they become academies.
4. Incidents of schools’ curricula reflecting their vision are increasing. This includes enrichment and extra-curricular activities, exemplifying the reality that an holistic education stretches beyond the confines of the classroom into all elements of spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. However, despite this being an improving picture in general, there remain considerable numbers of schools in which pupils’ spiritual development through the curriculum is still approached on an ad hoc basis at best.
5. When a school’s Christian vision is explicitly rooted in its Anglican and/or Methodist foundation, and when leaders at all levels truly understand the depth of meaning that this brings to everyday school life, there is a strong narrative that pervades and sustains the community. This narrative, or story, as long as it is embraced in a thoughtful and reflective manner, has the potential to provide the strength and nourishment that bring together school communities in times of joy and celebration, as well as sustaining them in times of sadness and pain.
6. A Christian vision for education that captures a need for human growth in body, mind, and spirit is rooted in and indicates a depth of Christian thought and intention. Inspection evidence indicates that such a vision transforms lives, especially when a culture of ‘watching over each other in love’ is the norm, and especially when it starts at the top. In Puddletown Academy in the Diocese of Salisbury

leaders see their role as inspiring others, and their vision and practice work together to enable this to become a reality.

7. Governors have a particularly important role to play in the success of this. It is their understanding and application of the 'school story' that enables them to apply it to strategic decision-making and policy-setting. When this understanding is evident, governors lead with strength, boldness, and courage which, in turn, leads to innovative practice.
8. Currently, however, too many schools have vacancies in governor positions, including foundation governors, and this limits schools' ability to develop and thrive as described above. This is a fundamental inhibiting factor for Church schools, and co-ordinated work is needed from all interested parties to address it and to turn the tide of decline.
9. It is important to remember that all governors of Church schools – not just foundation governors – are governors of Church schools, and that monitoring and evaluation of the school as a Church school is a corporate responsibility.
10. Those governors who are in place, are committed to Church schools – to the schools' original foundations and to the place they have within local communities. Evidence suggests that they want to help headteachers; to learn the many and varied requirements of their role; to make good decisions; and to lead Church schools to a place of flourishing. Yet, evidence also suggests that in a majority of cases the legal and legalistic demands of being a governor are diverting their attention away from understanding the *purpose* of their school and the needs of the community, to a performative box-ticking culture. This results, for example, in governors fulfilling their requirement to monitor various elements of the school's work, such as collective worship, but then not evaluating the evidence that they gather. This means that governors' work can be time-consuming, but can yield few beneficial results in terms of impact of their work and of the school's.
11. Inspection evidence reveals that another reasonably commonly occurring example of a box-ticking culture, one that is likely driven by inspection, is school leaders' determination that all members of the school community are able to recite the school vision and cite its biblical roots, where they exist. Possibly driven by a fear of being tested or caught out by an inspector, or possibly because of a limited understanding of SIAMS inspection requirements, this practice does little in reality to improve the work of the school or the life-chances of pupils. It is not required by inspectors and it is not necessary. The purpose of Church schools having a Christian vision is to bring their original foundation up to date in a way that honours it and that meets the needs of the community that they serve. Therefore, members of the school community knowing what the vision 'looks like' in practice because of the impact that it is having on their lives, is a far more valuable and telling piece of evidence than their ability to recite it. In other words, there is a danger of the 'success' of the vision being reduced to people's ability to articulate it, and this lacks depth and meaning.
12. To take action in all of its various forms, or to know that action has been taken, is not the same as knowledge of impact. Leaders/governors being a presence in school and knowing what is done there is a good start. However, this knowledge does not benefit the school community unless it moves from being a piece of knowledge held by governors to them monitoring the action and then evaluating its impact- a step that is not being seen in enough Church schools through inspection. It is a moot point

whether this monitoring and evaluation can be described as 'formal' or 'informal' as long as it focuses on impact and is effective.

13. Evidence of current practice in this regard suggests that leaders are heavily influenced by the need to be compliant. Unless educational culture changes to one in which school leaders believe that they have the freedom to do what they know is best for their school community, such a box-ticking culture will likely continue to predominate to the detriment of meeting true need. Inspection evidence currently indicates that box-ticking is less effective than leaders knowing their school, their community, and the school's purpose and then making their own vision-driven decisions based on this knowledge. However, evidence also indicates that it is more common in terms of routine practice.
14. The concepts of leadership, ownership, and effectiveness appear to be closely aligned in terms of impact. The vision of Oldswinford VC Primary in the Diocese of Worcester is described as 'a healing process, transformational, and changing lives'. In such an example, school leaders have clearly understood their context and taken ownership of what the vision needs to be and do in order to be effective. This example should encourage school leaders to follow the same path, and to take a well-informed bespoke approach to devising a contextually-appropriate Christian vision.
15. Inspection appears to create a hesitancy for school leaders around being open about how embedded actions are, and a perceived 'risk' for them in admitting that work may be at an early stage of implementation. For work to be 'early days' is quite acceptable. In reality, not everything can be done at the same time or to equal depth in a short space of time; and inspection should be reflective of reality. The creation of an inspection culture in which school leaders are comfortable to describe some actions as 'early days' would be a positive step forward for those on both sides of the inspection equation.
16. Both Christian vision and values are evident in inspection reports. Where schools understand the relationship between the two, both are effective. However, in schools in which vision and values are conflated to the detriment of vision, strategic direction and a sense of purpose appear to be compromised.
17. Schools that list a set of values as their vision illustrate the above point. A vision sets out destination, where the school community plans to travel together, what they want to achieve. Values can be the means by which they will achieve this; or in other words, they can be the means by which the vision is expressed or outworked.
18. Evidence indicates that values, in schools that employ them, appear to be comprehensively influential in helping members of the school community to understand the vision by helping to create a common language. They can help set the culture of the school, providing a 'golden thread'. Care does need to be taken, though, to ensure that values in themselves do not create a compliance culture in schools, one that loses sight of vision and purpose and replaces that with little more than a superficial values-led behaviour system.
19. Evidence indicates that for vision (and values) to have the intended impact, they need to be enacted intentionally. Schools that rely upon an *implicit* vision/values-driven culture prove to be less

successful in this regard than those in which vision and values, and the Anglican/Methodist foundation of the school, are *explicitly* and intentionally established as a routine part of school life.

20. For a school's vision to be a Christian vision, it is not necessary to have a Bible verse connected to it. The Christian vision adopted by Glazebury Academy in the Dioceses of Liverpool – *Growing together at the heart of God's community* – appears to be a highly effective vision because it encapsulates the school's foundation and purpose along with a knowledge and understanding of its community.
21. However, a Bible verse can help the school community to understand the vision. It can provide metaphors, analogies, clear theological roots, and pictorial depictions and representations that increase understanding, familiarity and effectiveness. Christian symbols can help with this, as long as they do not end up being performative and/or perfunctory.
22. SIAMS does not have a view on this, as long as the vision is a Christian vision and as long as there is evidence that it is being effective.

School culture, relationships, and inclusion

1. Inspection evidence indicates that school culture is heavily influenced by the vision (and values), that in turn are lived out through relationships.
2. The most commonly used adjectives to describe the culture in Church schools are:
 - accepting
 - nurturing
 - loving
 - kind
 - dignifying
 - respectful
 - compassionate
 - forgiving
3. In inspection reports, Church schools are often also described as 'families' with associated positive conclusions being drawn. It is important to note that families work best when they like each other; love unconditionally; grow, change and develop together; disagree well; are honest and open with each other; and spend meaningful and enjoyable time together. However families can be dysfunctional and can hurt each other, and so this metaphor should be used with care. Part of effective monitoring and evaluation is to check out the appropriateness of any use of this analogy, work that should be rooted in an understanding of the school community.
4. As with other 'outworkings' of Christian vision, culture appears to be most effective and most reflective of the vision when it can be described as being driven by relentless goodness and intentionality. Leaving culture, and the relationships that embody it, to chance or having an implicit assumption that they will be good is not a risk that Church school leaders should be taking.

5. Church schools are generally reported as specifically welcoming and caring for those who might be described as vulnerable. Another essential role of governors in their monitoring and evaluation is to regularly check out whether this is, in fact, a reality in their school.
6. In a Church school no-one should go unnoticed and evidence suggests that this is widely true, with schools being described as places of healing, acceptance and safety. However taken in the context of the observations on the limits of governors' monitoring, and particularly evaluation, care should be taken in interpreting the prevalence and depth of this evidence.
7. Pastoral support for those in need appears to be a strength of Church schools. Whilst this is encouraging, the continued relatively low incidence of chaplaincy is noteworthy - especially given its comprehensively positive impact for both adults and children. Schools, churches, and dioceses would benefit from exploring models of chaplaincy, regardless of title or shape of role, as a strategy for helping to offer pastoral support in response to what appears to be significant and widespread need in schools.
8. Inspection evidence indicates that treating everybody in the school community with dignity and respect leads to the creation of a culture in which everyone belongs, *knows* that they belong, and *feels* that they belong. It should not be assumed that any one of these three automatically leads to the other/s without intentional effort, policy-making, and monitoring and evaluation by school leaders.
9. Having a shared sense of belonging presupposes deep-seated roots in an understanding that humankind is diverse and that difference is normal. Gaining such an understanding requires intentional and ongoing work and, most likely, specifically focused continual professional development for teachers. Currently, evidence indicates that understanding of difference and diversity across Church schools is inconsistent, despite what appears to be a desire for it to be otherwise.
10. Where there is an understanding of difference and diversity inspection evidence indicates that it can often – but not always - tend to be relatively superficial, albeit well-intentioned. The deepest understanding of the diversity that is naturally inherent amongst human beings appears to be in schools that serve communities that are, themselves, racially and culturally diverse. Further work in this area is needed in dioceses and Church schools across the country to avoid superficiality, stereotyping, othering, and passing to the next generation some of the limits in understanding of the present and past.
11. The most common way that schools and inspectors describe approaches to behaviour management in Church schools is by means of 'forgiveness and reconciliation'. Reflecting the fundamental Christian tenets of the life that can be lived in Christ, forgiveness and reconciliation are encouraging elements of life in a Church school.
12. Adults in vision-driven schools explain that they are best able to act as role models for pupils when they, themselves, are experiencing the life-enhancing impact of a Christian vision for education. This suggests that to enable both pupils and adults to flourish, the culture of a Church school should find its roots in the vision, and that any outworking of the vision should explicitly reflect its source. It is

also an important reminder of the need for adults in Church schools to thrive, and of the need for policy and practice that enable this.

13. A potentially underestimated characteristic in society in general, and on which Church schools appear to focus effectively, is kindness. Empowering children to freedom of thought and action rooted in the Christian narrative always involves kindness towards both self and others. In Bucklebury VC Primary in the Diocese of Oxford, this is called ‘tangible love’.
14. An important factor in being kind to one’s self, is an awareness of matters related to mental health and wellbeing. In Church schools these considerations appear to be a general strength. It is unclear, however, how effective a range of strategies are because leaders’/governors’ monitoring and evaluation remains inconsistent and, at times, unfocused.
15. As well as ensuring a positive internal school culture for the direct benefit of those within a school community, it is important that Church schools equip and enable pupils to look outwards to matters of justice and injustice, and to the needs of others. Starting from schools being places of safety and nurture for pupils, they can then act as a springboard from which pupils are able to develop an awareness of the injustice that exists in the wider world and the part they can play in countering it. This is effectively summed up in the concept of courageous advocacy.
16. Inspection evidence in the academic year 2022-2023 indicates that schools’ understanding of courageous advocacy is generally improving when compared to the academic year 2021-2022. However, it is still not a concept that is universally understood.
17. A notable number of schools carry out worthy adult-led charity fundraising activity in the name of courageous advocacy and yet, in the process, they fail to empower pupils to understand injustice and to develop as active agents of change. Such activity is therefore not an example of courageous advocacy. As in last year’s annual report, I encourage schools to have direct engagement with the [Courageous Advocacy](#) document, co-produced by the Church of England and Christian Aid, to gain understanding of this important issue.
18. In schools in which an understanding of courageous advocacy is either present or developing, it remains important to remember that advocacy on behalf of others needs to move beyond discussion and understanding to action. In the process schools must, at all times, remember the legal requirement to remain politically impartial, in line with [DfE guidance](#).
19. Inspection evidence suggests that children and young people are more likely to grow as agents of change if/when their own environment is safe and nurturing. This is an important consideration for schools.
20. An important question for schools and dioceses to examine when tackling matters of injustice, and helping pupils to learn about being agents of change, is why they are doing so. Inspection evidence to date suggests that this specific understanding is superficial at best. If action is being taken simply because an inspector will seek evidence, then schools should think again. However, relating questions of injustice and empowerment to Christian vision and to spiritual development is likely to lead to meaningful outcomes.

Spirituality and spiritual development

1. Inspection evidence indicates that, in schools where spirituality is understood, there is a shared language for both adults and pupils to express and discuss spiritual matters, including their own spiritual development. Emerging from this shared understanding, spirituality and spiritual development then form a natural part of the curriculum and wider school conversations, reflecting the reality that we are all spiritual human beings who are made in the image of God.
2. In turn, evidence goes on to indicate that in such schools, this language and understanding of spirituality can be a sustaining force for the whole school community, especially at times of sadness, challenge, difficulty, and trauma.
3. However, in too many Church schools, any consideration of spirituality appears to remain limited within the confines of acts of worship. In particular the curriculum in the majority of Church schools, whilst increasingly reflecting the vision, does not include spirituality as a matter of routine. Ad hoc responses to awe and wonder are commonplace, and are of value as far as they go; but planned opportunities for pupils to explore the spiritual aspects of subject matter, including their responses to them, remain less common. It is logical to conclude that the reasonably widespread absence of a shared understanding of spirituality in Church schools subsequently leads to this lack of embedded spiritual development, consequently limiting the holistic growth of adults and pupils.
4. An understanding of spirituality, and of one's own spiritual development, enables a fuller understanding of self. It strengthens and deepens character, and it enables a healthy focus beyond self. Therefore, it is essential that schools and dioceses invest and engage in training as a matter of priority. This is so that schools are able to move to a place in which they are meeting the holistic needs of adults and pupils, and so that spiritual flourishing becomes a strength in the majority of Church schools for the rich and lasting benefit of those within them.
5. It is not uncommon, according to inspection evidence, for schools to have reflection spaces in various locations both within and without their buildings. This is positive, yet comes with a caution: that is, for schools to ensure that these spaces have a clear purpose and that they are used to good effect. It is possible that both reflection spaces and Christian symbols (such as crosses on walls) inadvertently assume a performative role in the life of the school, becoming too familiar to the school community and, ultimately, overlooked or ignored.
6. Measures to increase and improve spirituality in Church schools should *not* be taken because of the accountability activity carried out by SIAMS, but out of an understanding of the benefit and need to enable human beings to flourish spiritually.

Collective worship

1. The most common descriptor of collective worship in inspection reports is that it is the 'heartbeat of the school'. This is encouraging; more so when this description is enriched by adjectives such as 'inclusive', 'invitational', 'joyous', and 'engaging'. In Minster VC Primary in the Diocese of Salisbury, collective worship is described as being 'rich and authentic' – an aspiration for Church schools across England.

2. Evidence indicates that acts of worship are usually led by adults, including members of the clergy, other representatives of the parish or local churches, and 'Open the Book' teams. Most are led by school staff and leaders themselves. It appears that this breadth of worship leadership adds engagement, depth, and breadth to the school's experience of worship, and enhances the spirituality that is a commonly embedded element of worship.
3. Inspection reports frequently comment on the lack of pupils' involvement in planning and leading acts of collective worship. Whilst entirely appropriate and beneficial for some pupils (arguably in all schools) to be so involved, it should be noted that it does not automatically equate to enhanced spiritual growth or flourishing. The earlier point about not necessarily equating action with positive impact has still greater significance and sensitivity when applied to this issue. For some pupils, involvement in the leadership of worship will be the gateway to deep spiritual flourishing and growth. However for others it could be a difficult, embarrassing, too nerve-racking, and/or unhelpfully difficult experience – far from the intended spiritual flourishing. Staff and leaders would be wise, therefore, to involve pupils in the decision-making process around leadership of worship.
4. There is a mixed picture related to the evaluation of the impact of collective worship. In schools in which governors are already monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's Christian vision, their activity tends to extend to monitoring and evaluating the impact of collective worship. This is good. However, as already described, in too many schools governors do not monitor and evaluate the impact of the school's Christian vision and, where this is the case, this absence extends to collective worship.
5. It is important to note that monitoring and evaluation of impact is not an activity that governors have to carry out because inspection dictates that they must. It is activity that informs, and therefore also enables, appropriate strategic decision-making for the benefit of the school and of the pupils within it. In order to know whether collective worship is having the intended impact for pupils and adults in the school, monitoring followed by evaluation of what is observed is essential.
6. Inspection indicates that prayer appears to be an important aspect of the worship life of Church schools. Some have a school prayer that has been written by the pupils and staff; many make regular use of the Lord's Prayer; some use 'call and response' prayers; others use Anglican and/or Methodist liturgy; and some schools invite pupils to write and then to lead prayers. All such examples of practice are encouraging, as long as they enhance the spiritual flourishing of pupils and adults. Only monitoring and evaluation can provide this insight for an individual school.
7. A note of caution related to prayer is the need for schools to understand the why of prayer, and not only the how and the what. Inspection evidence is less clear on whether this is currently comprehensively the case. When such a richness of understanding is embedded, the impact is obvious. For example, in Bishop John Robinson VA Primary in the Diocese of Southwark, the inspection revealed that 'prayer ripples through the school bringing comfort and hope'.

Religious education

1. RE in Church schools is commonly described as being a safe space for pupils to explore their religious views and opinions. Where combined with high standards of teaching, this paints an encouraging picture of the state of the subject.
2. Assessment within RE appears to be in a better state than it was in the last academic year. Evidence suggests that it is generally more embedded, and that teachers are increasingly making use of the information to inform their teaching as well as whole-school developments in the subject. This remains inconsistent across the country, but suggests an improved and improving picture.
3. There appears to be an assumption that teaching a range of faiths, traditions, and worldviews automatically enables pupils to have a good understanding and appreciation of diversity. Inspection evidence suggests that it does not. Broad coverage of faiths and worldviews within RE *can* contribute significantly to an understanding of diversity, but evidence indicates that a discrete focus is needed if pupils are to gain a real, deep, and life-changing understanding of the diversity that exists in this country and in the wider world.
4. Teachers' RE subject knowledge appears to be improving, especially in respect of Christianity, and this is having a positive impact on the subject in general. This improvement points to the effectiveness of the support and training that is provided by dioceses, as schools that have active engagement with diocesan training in RE perform better. Ongoing improvement is needed, however, with that seen in 2022-2023 by no means universal or consistent.
5. As well as subject knowledge itself appearing to be improving, inspection evidence suggests that teachers' understanding of the meaning of 'balance' within RE (theology, philosophy, human science) is also improving. This is good news for the general quality of teaching and learning in the subject, and it needs to be extended to more schools. Evidence suggests that engagement with diocesan training is likely to have a positive impact on this.
6. There tends to be a reasonably general tendency for teachers to homogenise practice within individual faiths. In other words, Christianity tends to be treated as a uniform faith/tradition, as does Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and a range of other faiths. More nuanced resourcing, as well as increased opportunities for continual professional development, is likely to have a positive impact.
7. Despite there being a general improved and improving picture in RE, inspection evidence reveals that there are some important points on which action is needed.
 - a) Although the quality of teaching of faiths other than Christianity appears to be improving, it still remains weaker than the teaching of Christianity with a good amount of work needing to be done. Lack of resources appears to be a factor in this, with extensive use being made of the 'Understanding Christianity' resource for the teaching of Christianity, but with no similar resources for the teaching of other faiths.
 - b) Whilst more attention is being given to Christianity as a global faith, understanding of the diversity that is at the heart of global Christianity remains at a relatively low level. As with

faiths other than Christianity, this aspect of the teaching of Christianity appears to be under-resourced.

- c) There are a number of incidents of an absence of RE in KS5. As a basic legal requirement, let alone the high status that the subject should have in a Church school, this is concerning.

Partnerships

1. It is evident from reading inspection reports that schools do not work best as islands. Those that have meaningful, reciprocal, and vision-driven partnerships with other schools, diocesan teams, and their local communities appear to have a fuller and healthier approach to education. Leaders appear to be better supported and better informed; pupils appear to have a wider and richer range of opportunities; and all elements of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appear to be enhanced.
2. Connected with this, academies that are in trusts that understand their specific character as Church schools receive all of the benefits cited above, with the impact of the trust being notable. This finding is somewhat skewed however, as reporting only appears to comment on the impact of trusts when the impact is positive. This does not denigrate the validity of the findings, indeed it is supported by grade data, but it does mean that the findings cannot be generalised to the impact of all trusts on all academies. Grade data indicates that academies perform slightly better against SIAMS criteria than their maintained counterparts when looking at the top two grades. No academies were judged to be Ineffective, whereas two VC maintained schools were awarded this grade. This data is too small a set to be statistically reliable but is interesting, nonetheless. It is a finding that will be worth tracking in the coming years.
3. Evidence indicates that active engagement and partnership with dioceses and diocesan training is particularly important for schools – both maintained and academies. This relates especially to receiving pastoral support, and to schools' work on Christian vision, RE, collective worship, spirituality, and to the work of governors. However, as above, the findings are skewed with no negative comments about dioceses found in reports, and with no explicit evidence of the impact of a lack of this engagement. Nonetheless, where no diocesan connection is described and where weaknesses in Christian vision, RE, collective worship, spirituality, and in the work of governors are cited, it is reasonable to make a negative causal connection. In short, it is reasonable to conclude from the evidence that is available that diocesan expertise enhances Church schools in a wide range of ways, and it should therefore be regarded as a fundamentally important partnership.
4. Similarly, evidence suggests that having an active and reciprocal link with churches (both parish and other local churches) benefits schools. Such engagement can bring to the school meaningful inter-generational relationships; enhanced richness in spirituality and worship; additional capacity for pastoral care and support for adults and pupils alike; and a prayerful partner that knows the school well and that has its best interests at heart. It is not always within a school's power to establish and sustain this partnership, however, and diocesan support in working through difficulties can be helpful.

5. The existence of a range of school partnerships suggests a generosity of school spirit and a generosity in the interpretation of community. Schools that have the confidence to seek out and establish such a community for themselves, into which they can contribute and from which they can benefit, appear to also have the confidence to express their own Christian-vision-rooted identity. Ensclosed in the protection of their community, evidence indicates that schools such as these are more likely to know their own story and live their life well. Both pupils and adults benefit from this.

General observations

Story-telling

1. Taking a bird's eye view of evidence from reports suggests that inspection can matter too much to schools, and that this can inhibit them from living out their own story with a freedom that would likely benefit their pupils. As indicated earlier, schools that have a strong sense and knowledge of their own Christian-vision-rooted story can thrive, and can enable those within them to also thrive. If inspection enhances this school narrative, it is serving a good purpose. However, if inspection becomes the sole driving force, an end in itself, one that diverts attention from the real needs of the community, it is possible that schools' attention on their own vision and purpose should be prioritised.
2. Story-telling matters on both a micro and a macro stage.
3. In its smallest and most common form in schools, telling/reading stories brings individuals, classes, key stages and whole schools together. Stories bind people with a shared interest, joy, heartbreak, and breath-taking suspense. Church schools often share Bible stories, thereby opening up to everyone the opportunity to explore historical, spiritual, metaphorical, and moral stories that are full of wonder. They enable pupils to question, challenge, explore, imagine, and 'grow in knowledge and understanding'.
4. A broader, yet simultaneously more personal, understanding of story-telling enables us to look at the story of our own lives and/or the corporate story of the school. In this, there is deep value for a school community.
5. Clandinin and Connelly (Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes, 1995. *Teachers College Press*) write of the presence of 'secret, sacred, and cover stories', and these are relevant for Church schools.
 - Secret stories speak of the hidden parts of a school - actions, events, truths that must be kept secret from public gaze, behind the scenes - especially on the occasion of an inspection. To reveal a secret story to an inspector could jeopardise a positive inspection outcome. So the stakes are high, as is potentially the pressure of the need for secrecy.
 - Sacred stories are taken for granted assumptions that usually remain unchallenged. Schools often speak of them as the '[school name] way', and questioning these sacred

stories is not encouraged – possibly, it is even untenable (‘This is how we do things here!’). These sacred stories may well be beneficial for the school; and yet if, by definition, they must go unchallenged they might also provide an avenue for the establishment of poor or questionable practice. Nonetheless, schools are often proud of their sacred stories, and inspection evidence records how members of school communities often describe ways in which they believe that these sacred stories set them apart from other schools.

- Cover stories are possibly the most relevant of the three. They can be described as the pragmatic way in which schools manage the dilemmas that are created when there is a conflict between how the school believes it should act (eg, its values – its sacred story) and the reality of a situation that it may be facing. The occasion of an inspection may force a school’s cover stories to come to the surface, as leaders deal with the particular pressures that inspection can create. As with other human beings dealing with other stressful situations, school leaders may then construct actions around a cover story in order to convince an inspector of the integrity of their words or actions. However these actions may be at odds with the school’s own sacred stories, thereby causing dissonance.
6. Having read hundreds of SIAMS reports, the difference that it makes when a school has a strong and deeply rooted narrative, or story, that is deeply known and properly understood by leaders is clear. When this is the case, and when leaders have confidence in the effectiveness of the school’s own story as a result of a range of the factors explored above (including as a result of their monitoring and evaluation of the impact of their actions), it is less likely that they will be subject to the force (draw or lure) of the cover story. In terms of retaining integrity and not being overly influenced by others’ views and judgements of the school, this is an important consideration - as long as the school has evidence of the positive impact of their vision-driven actions.
 7. Clandinin and Connelly also describe a four-part, story-based structure that captures how people (and organisations) tend to live life (Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research, 2000. *Jossey-Bass*). The four parts are to:
 - i. live life (have experiences)
 - ii. tell stories of these experiences
 - iii. retell stories of these experiences
 - iv. relive life – possibly/hopefully in a better way as a result of learning from the above.
 8. In this understanding of how life is led, and in the context of a SIAMS inspection, there is a possibility of there being a beneficial outcome of inspection – apart from any inspection grade or judgement itself. In other words, if inspection encourages the retelling of the Christian-vision-driven story or stories that schools routinely live and tell, then it is possible that it will be contributing to schools’ ability to relive their collective life in a better way, or in a way that more fully and more deeply identifies needs, and then acts to meet those needs.
 9. Collective knowledge and understanding of the shared story or narrative is a fundamental starting point in schools being able to do this.

Risk-taking, learning, and growth

10. Many adults know the value of, and the connection between understanding self, knowing that they are safe, and learning. This combined knowledge can enable risk-taking and then growth.
11. Educationalists routinely recognise and create the conditions within which pupils can take risks from a place of safety, in order that they may learn and grow. However it appears that regimes of accountability, mainly inspection, may be preventing many school leaders from doing this themselves – taking risks and learning from them - for the benefit of their school community.
12. Vygotsky wrote of the zone of proximal development (*Mind in Society: the development of the higher psychological processes, 1978. London: Harvard University Press*). As part of this theory he describes the space that exists between what a learner can do alone, without help, and what they can do when appropriate support is in place. That space is the zone of proximal development.
13. Many adults in education would see the need for guidance, support, and appropriate help as an integral way of enabling a pupil who cannot do something to work with someone whom they trust, to take a risk, and learn how to do it. Risk-taking within a culture of support is how many learn new skills, even as adults.
14. Inspection evidence, taken as a whole, however, indicates a worrying trend in which the culture that has grown up around inspection appears to be preventing adults in schools from admitting the need to take a risk in a supported manner; to ask for help; to have a go; and to learn something new about leading or working in a Church school. The risk of failure within a regime of accountability appears to be a key factor within this reluctance to engage with the zone of proximal development - a risk that only the most secure appear able to take.
15. Failure is not to be encouraged with a ‘devil may care’ attitude, as failures of educationalists have a direct impact on the lives of pupils. However, when surrounded by known, trusted, proven, and knowledgeable partners who reach out across the gap and offer expert support and knowledge, risks can be taken, and learning/development/growth within the zone of proximal development can occur.
16. There are numerous valuable such zones in most areas of life, and they enable people to move from where they are to where they might be with help – as long as they have a preparedness to take a risk. However, if leaders of Church schools believe that they are to be judged by a standard of *perfection*, risks will never be taken and growth will rarely be seen.
17. In other words, as long as schools believe that inspectors are seeking perfection, and that they will judge anything that falls short of perfection in a harsh and punitive manner, the beauty and benefit of the zone of proximal development will remain the domain of children. Consequently risk-taking will remain rare, and development and growth within and across Church schools will be limited.

Appeals and complaints from schools

1. In the academic year 2022-2023, there were appeals or complaints from schools in relation to 10 out of 598 completed inspections. Each one was referred to the independent adjudicator.
2. Of these, three were appeals against grades, three were complaints about the conduct of the inspection, and four were combined appeals and complaints.
3. The table below sets out the outcomes.

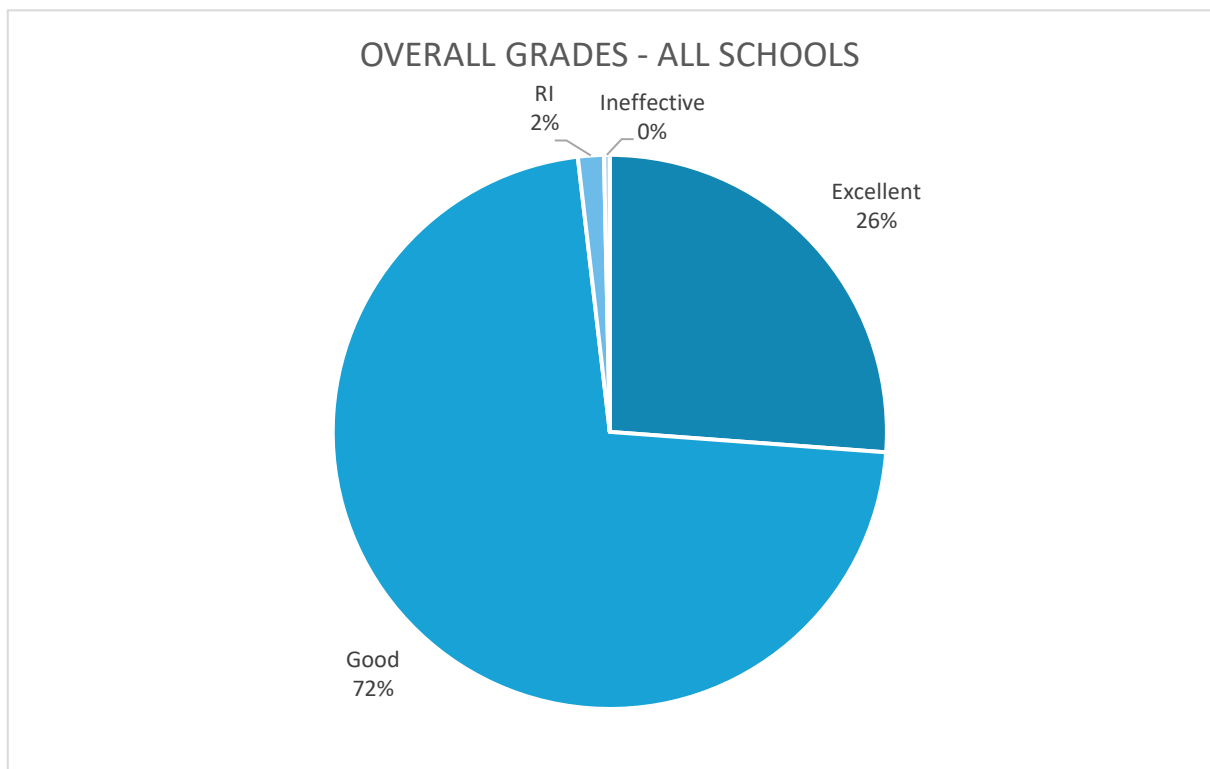
	Upheld (found in favour of school)	Not upheld (found in favour of inspector)	Total
Appeal	0	3	3
Complaint	0	3	3
Appeal/ complaint	1	3	4
Total	1	9	10

4. In the case of the combined appeal and complaint that was upheld, the grade was changed from Good to Excellent.
5. Follow-up QA work was carried out with each inspector whose practice was subject to an appeal or a complaint. Some no longer inspect as a result.
6. We will continue to work towards a place in which SIAMS outcomes are comprehensively accurate, and in which the conduct of all inspections is fair, robust, and reliable.
7. The appeals/complaints data reassures me in general terms that the overwhelming majority of SIAMS grades in 2022-2023 can be regarded as being accurately in line with the Evaluation Schedule criteria and rooted in robust evidence-bases. It also reassures me that most SIAMS inspectors understand the principle of inspecting in a Christian manner, and that they apply this to their work.

National SIAMS inspection grade data 2022-2023

Overall grades – all schools

All grades - all schools	598	
Excellent	156	26.1%
Good	431	72.1%
Requires Improvement	9	1.5%
Ineffective	2	0.3%

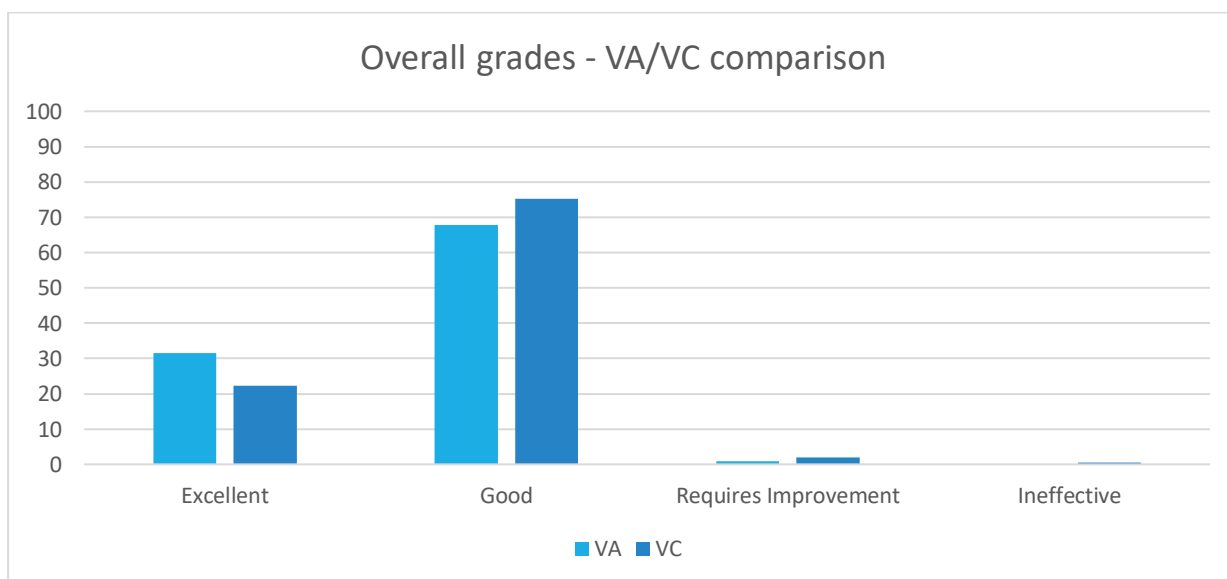


- Nine Joint/Methodist schools are included in this data - five VA and four VC. Six were graded as Excellent (five VA and one VC) and three VC schools were graded as Good.
- Whilst Excellent grades account for just over 26% of the total number of overall grades awarded, the top two grades combined equate to almost 98% of all inspections.
- This grade profile is similar to that of 2021-2022, albeit with Excellent grades being 4% higher and Good grades being 3% lower in 2022-2023.

- The data set is approximately 2.5 times larger this year and the grade profile for the top two grades combined is almost identical.
- Two schools were found to be Ineffective, whereas none were last year.

Overall grades – all voluntary aided/former voluntary aided and voluntary controlled/former controlled schools – comparison

All voluntary aided/former voluntary aided and voluntary controlled/former controlled schools				598
Grade	All VA (251)		All VC (347)	
Excellent	79	31.5%	77	22.2%
Good	170	67.7%	261	75.2%
RI	2	0.8%	7	2%
Ineffective	0	0%	2	0.6%

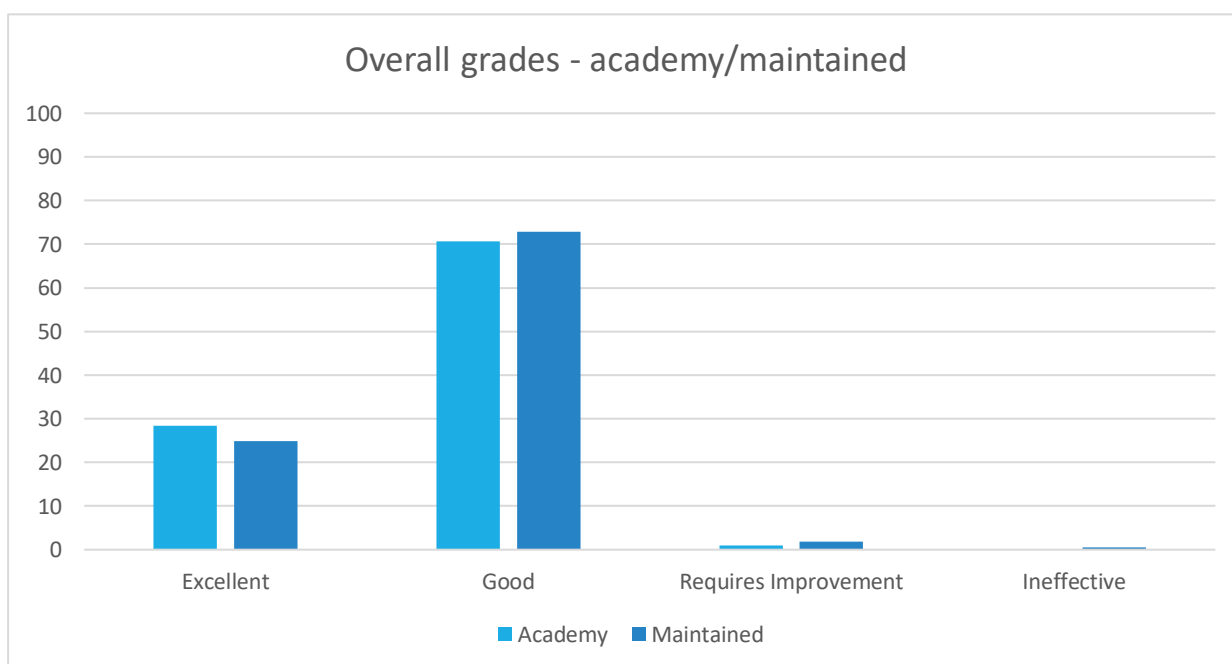


- As in 2021-2022, VA schools tend to perform better than VC with 31.5% of the former being graded as Excellent as opposed to 22% of the latter. However, it should also be noted that the percentage of Excellent grades for VA school is 0.5% lower than last year, and for VC schools it is 8.5% higher.
- The gap between VC and VA schools is smaller than it was last year. This is worthy of note for dioceses and for leaders and governors both VA and VC schools.
- The percentage of VA schools judged to be Excellent is approximately 5% higher than VA and VC schools combined, down from 10% last year.

- In turn, the percentage of VA schools judged to be Good is correspondingly almost 4.4% lower (7.5% last year) than VA and VC schools combined (3% higher for VC schools).
- The percentages of combined Excellent and Good grades stand at 99.2% and 97.4% respectively, with VA schools again outperforming VC, but both showing an improved picture when compared with last year.
- The figures for RI judgements remain very low, although the percentage of VC RI judgements is slightly higher than for VA schools. It is down on last year. However, two VC schools were also graded as Ineffective this year, whereas last year no schools were given this grade.

Overall grades – all academies and maintained schools – comparison

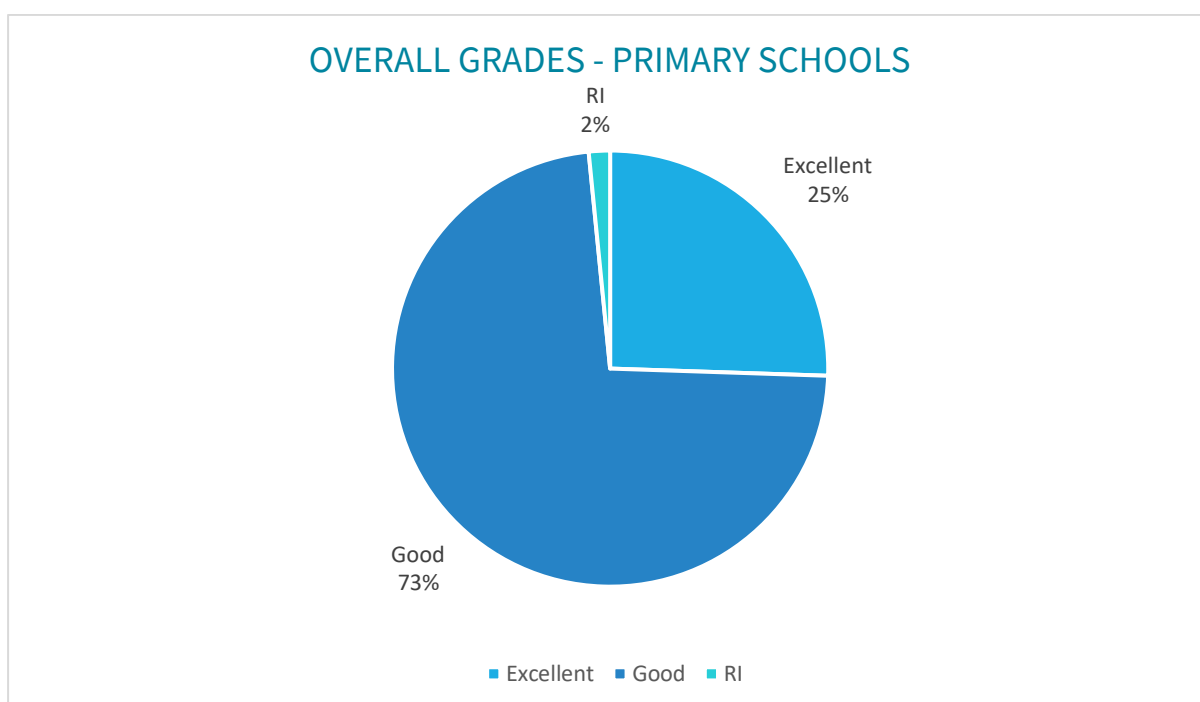
	Total no/% of academies achieving each grade /215		Total no/% of maintained schools achieving each grade /383	
Excellent	61	28.4%	95	24.8%
Good	152	70.7%	279	72.8%
Requires Improvement	2	0.9%	7	1.8%
Ineffective	0	0%	2	0.5%



- The difference in grades between academies and maintained schools is small. However, academies tend to slightly outperform maintained schools for Excellent grades.
- The two Ineffective grades were both awarded to maintained schools.

Overall grades – all primary schools

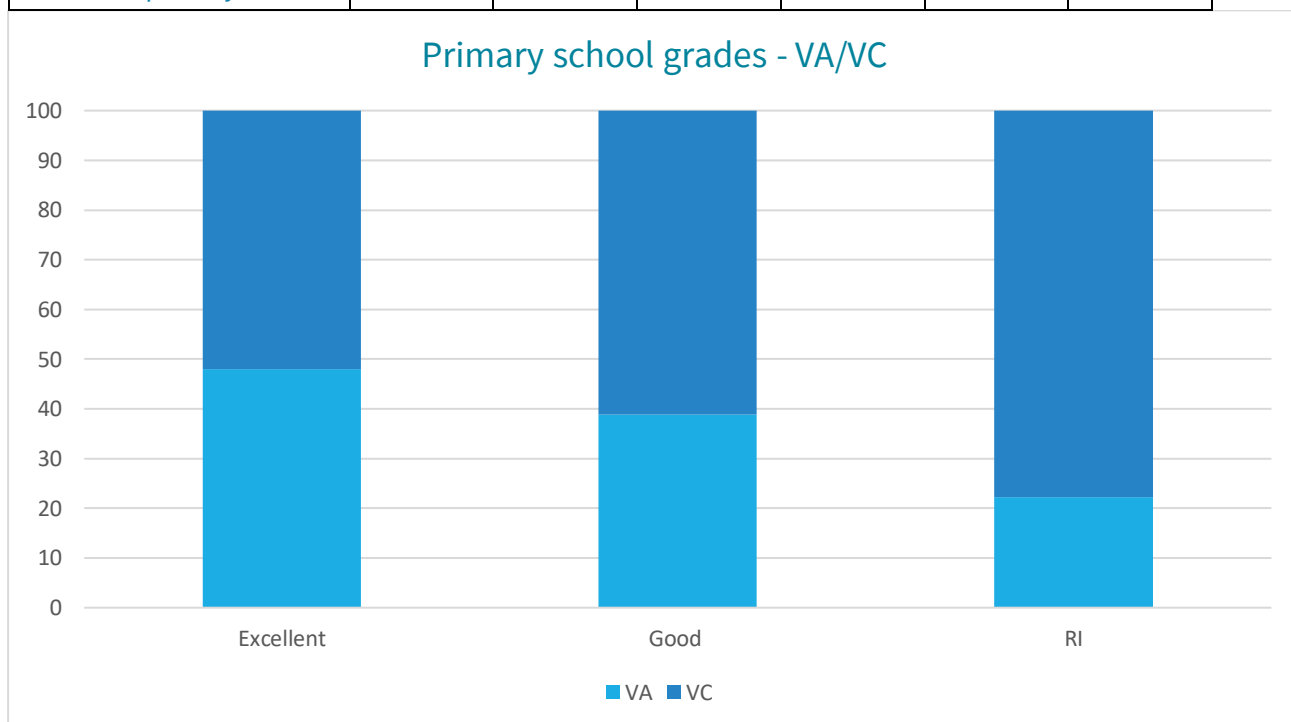
All primary schools (Including first and infant)	574	
Excellent	146	25.4%
Good	417	72.6%
Requires Improvement	9	1.6%
Ineffective	2	0.3%



- Whilst a similar grade profile to last year, the percentage of Excellent grades is just over 5.5% higher and that of Good grades is 5% lower this year.
- Although the percentage of RI grades is slightly lower than last year, this is balanced out by there being two primary schools that were awarded the grade of Ineffective this year. Last year, there were none.

All primary schools overall grades – distribution of grades comparison

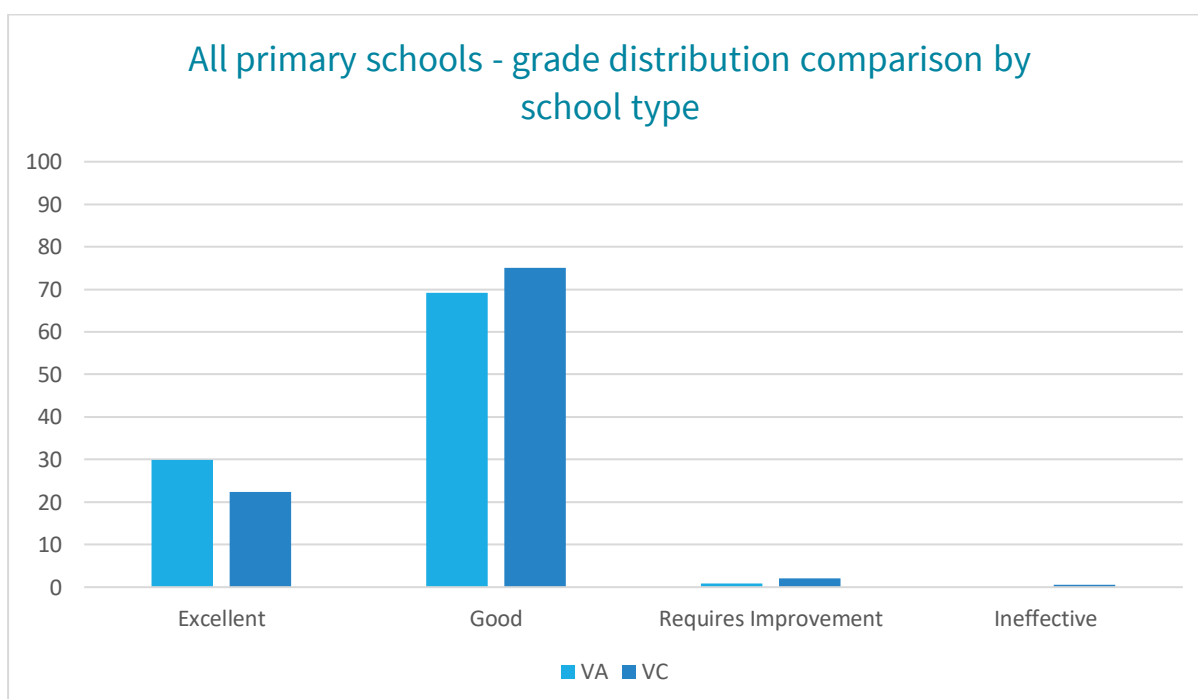
234 VA/340 VC	Excellent		Good		RI	
Nos/% of each grade achieved by VA and former VA primary	70	47.9%	162	38.8%	2	22.2%
Nos/% of each grade achieved by VC and former VC primary	76	52.1%	255	61.2%	7	77.8%



- There is a much more even split between Excellent grades for VA and VC schools compared with outcomes from inspections last year.
- There is a higher percentage of Good grades for VC and former VC primary schools compared with VA and former VA (just over 20% higher).
- RI figures are too small to be statistically reliable but are interesting.
- Two VC primary schools were also graded as Ineffective, data that is too small to be statistically reliable.

All primary schools overall grades – grade distribution comparison by school type

	Total no/% of VA and former VA primary schools achieving each grade /234		Total no/% of VC and former VC primary schools achieving each grade /340	
Excellent	70	29.9%	76	22.4%
Good	162	69.2%	255	75%
Requires Improvement	2	0.9%	7	2.1%
Ineffective	0	0%	2	0.6%



- Grade distribution is showing a fairly even distribution between VA and VC primary schools. VA and former VA primary schools have a slightly higher percentage of Excellent grades, whereas this difference is reversed for Good grades.
- VC and former VC primary schools have a slightly higher percentage of RI grades.
- In general terms, inspection outcomes for VC primary schools are showing an improving picture, whilst VA outcomes are reasonably stable when compared with last year.

Secondary schools – maintained and academies combined

All secondary schools (Including middle deemed secondary)	21 - of which 15VA/6VC	
Excellent	9 (8/1)	42.9%
Good	12 (7/5)	57.1%
Requires Improvement	0	0%
Ineffective	0	0%

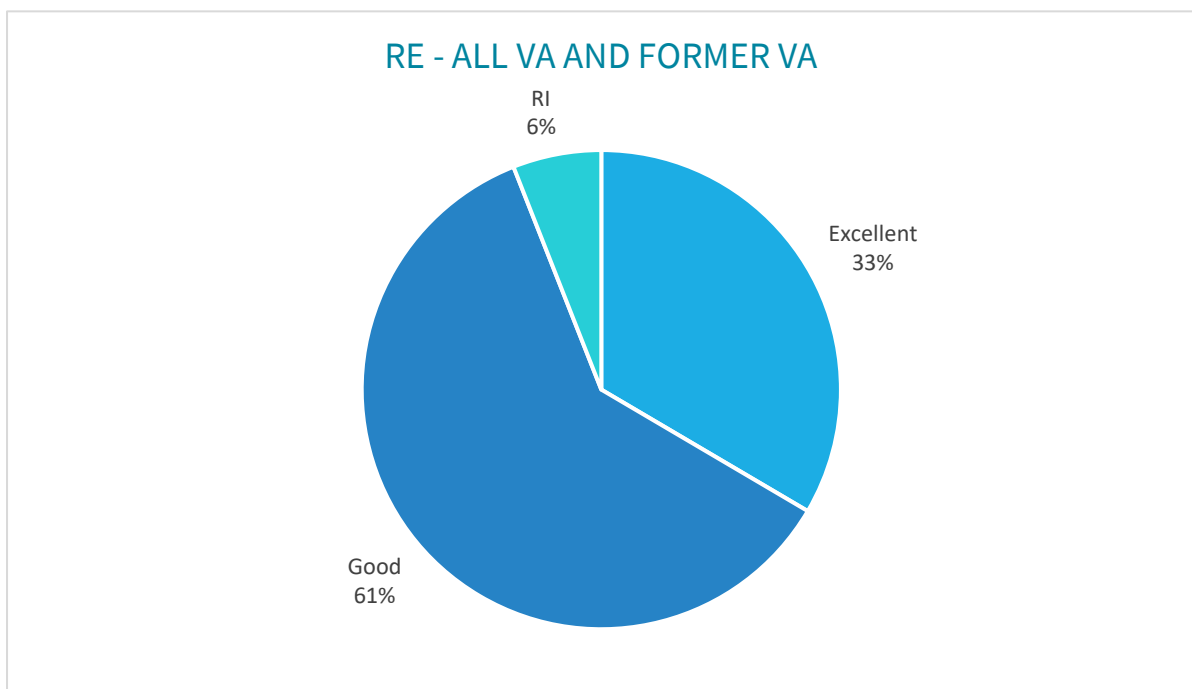
- Numbers of secondary school inspections are relatively low at 21 in total, with separate VA/VC numbers too small to be statistically useful or reliable for analysis.
- It is interesting to note that no secondary schools have been judged to be less than Good.
- The percentage of Excellent grades is almost 20% lower than last year – but note the statistically unreliable nature of the data.

All through schools

- 3 schools were categorised as All-through and so were left out of the analysis for primary and secondary results. The numbers for these schools were too small to be statistically useful or reliable for analysis.

Religious education grades – all phases – all VA and former VA

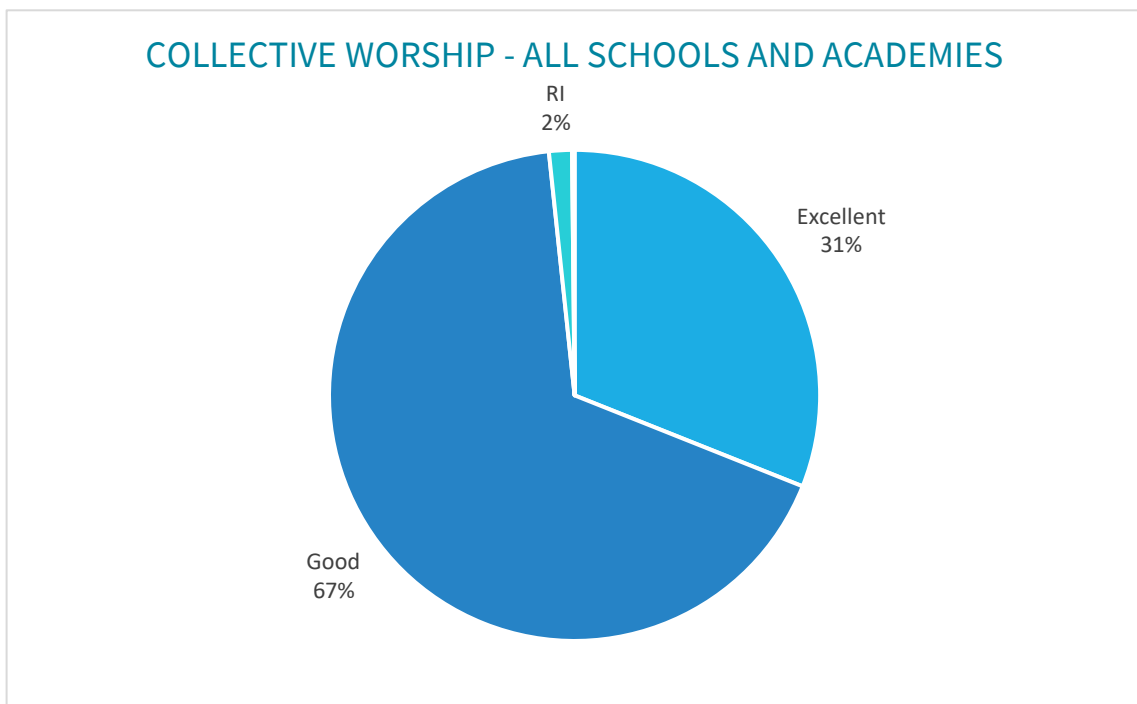
	251	
Excellent	84	33.5%
Good	152	60.6%
Requires Improvement	15	6%
Ineffective	0	0%



- RE data remains encouraging, with well over 90% of VA schools being awarded either Excellent or Good. However, percentages of the top two grades are slightly down on last year at 94.1% compared with 96.6%.
- No schools were graded as Ineffective for RE.

Collective worship grades – all schools

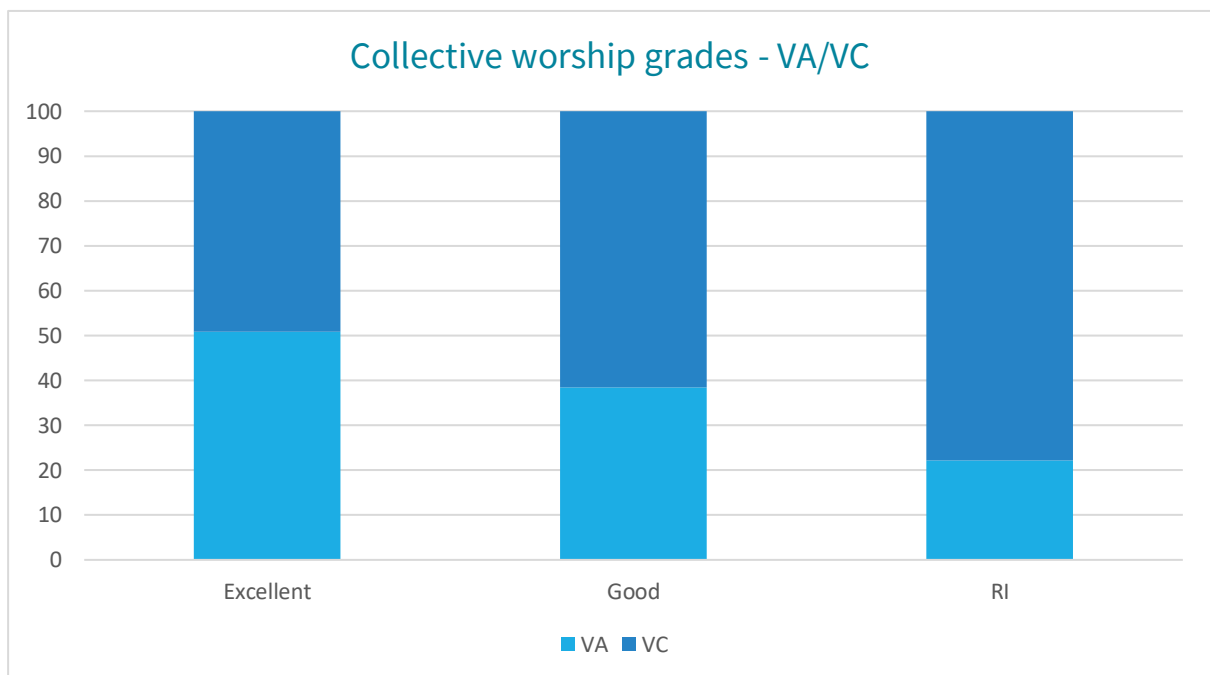
Collective worship – all schools and academies	598	
Excellent	185	30.9%
Good	403	67.4%
Requires Improvement	9	1.5%
Ineffective	1	0.2%



- Grade data for collective worship is slightly better this year when compared with 2021-2022.
- One school was missing grading and so was left out of the analysis.

All schools collective worship grades – distribution of grades comparison

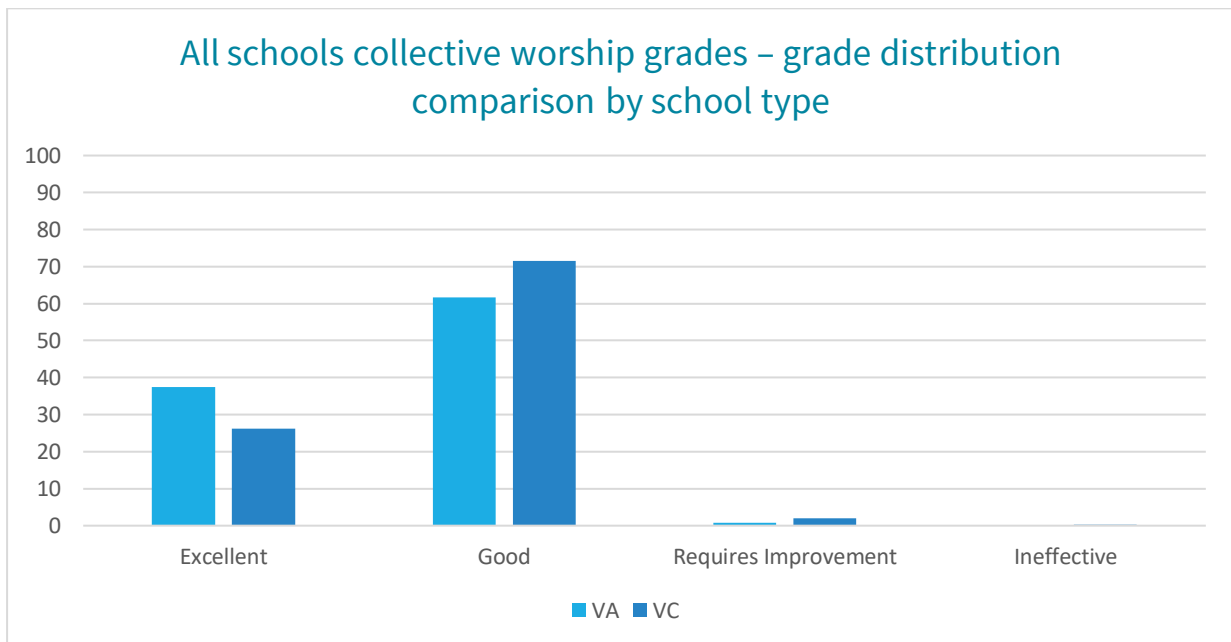
251 VA/347 VC	Excellent		Good		RI	
Nos/% of each cw grade achieved by VA schools	94	50.8%	155	38.5%	2	22.2%
Nos/% of each cw grade achieved by VC schools	91	49.2%	248	61.5%	7	77.8%



- Excellent grades are fairly evenly split between VA and VC schools for collective worship. This is a significant improvement for VC schools compared with 2021-2022, at which time there were almost twice as many Excellent grades for VA schools than for VC.
- There is a higher percentage of VC schools with Good grades compared to VA schools. Again, this is an improved picture compared with last year.
- RI figures are too small to be statistically reliable but are interesting. The percentage of RI grades for VA schools is lower this year, and that for VC schools is higher.
- One VC school was rated as Ineffective for collective worship.

All schools collective worship grades – grade distribution comparison by school type

	Total no/% of VA schools achieving each cw grade (251)		Total no/% of VC schools achieving each cw grade (347)	
Excellent	94	37.5%	91	26.2%
Good	155	61.8%	248	71.5%
Requires Improvement	2	0.8%	7	2%
Ineffective	0	0%	1	0.3%



- Note again, grades for VA and VC schools are fairly evenly split. VA schools slightly outperform VC in collective worship for Excellent grades, whilst the reverse is seen with Good grades.
- Note also the slightly higher percentage of RI grades in VC schools.
- Again, we are seeing an improving picture in VC schools.