

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Woodham Walter Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

The street, Maldon, Essex, CM9 6RF

Current SIAMS inspection grade: 2

Good

Diocese

Chelmsford

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Local authority

Essex

Date of inspection

28 February 2017

Date of last inspection

January 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Controlled - 115123

Headteacher

Sue Dodd

Inspector's name and number

Debbie Rogan 850

School context

Woodham Walter is a much smaller school than average and teaches pupils in mixed aged classes. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities is well above the national average. There are no pupils on roll who have English as an additional language. The majority of pupils are White British. The school has had significant external involvement and scrutiny recently including an OFSTED inspection. The school met the national expectations of achievement (floor standard) at the end of KS2 in 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Woodham Walter Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary school as a Church of England school are good

- The inclusive and caring ethos, led by the headteacher and based explicitly on the school's Christian values impacts on all members of the school community. As a result they feel valued. This leads to positive contributions to school improvement and pupil behaviour which is excellent.
- The worship committee provides effective leadership, headed by pupils who regularly monitor it in order to bring about further improvements.
- The governors are acting swiftly and strategically to ensure that this very small school explores options that will lead to future improvements and sustainability as a church school. This includes close collaboration with the parish community, other schools and with the Diocese.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a Church of England school is highlighted and strengthened through the introduction of structured and robust systems for monitoring and evaluating its impact on school life and work.
- Improve worship by providing deeper opportunities for exploring key Christian beliefs and concepts such as that of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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

The school's key Christian values are justice, compassion, endurance, forgiveness, thankfulness and friendship. These were agreed in consultation across the school community, including with pupils and have a high profile across the school. Staff, pupils and parents discuss these values knowledgeably and see them as important expressions of the school's Christian foundation. The values have a clear and positive impact on pupils' learning and behaviour. Pupils demonstrate positive relationships with each other and the staff with, for example, older pupils caring for younger pupils at lunch time. Knowledge and understanding of the school's Christian values is enhanced through classroom display and the way in which adults refer to them and how they apply to life appropriately in lessons.

There is a pervading sense of community and care which is rightly recognised by pupils, parents, staff and governors as springing from the school's Christian foundation. The link with a school in Kenya has developed further since the time of the previous denominational inspection. This impacts positively on pupils' and staffs' understanding of the Christian world beyond their school. Links with a school in London which is more culturally diverse than their own also gives pupils an understanding and deep acceptance of others.

The school has responded well to the recent OFSTED inspection and has improved and refined assessment systems so that leaders are clear that pupils are now making good progress and as a result attainment is improving.

There have rarely been exclusions of pupils. The headteacher and senior staff believe that it is their responsibility to provide compassion and forgiveness for transgressions and have effective support systems in place to manage times when pupils are having difficulty. They link this well with their key mission as an inclusive, accepting, compassionate and forgiving school. As a result, pupils feel valued and parents confirm that the uniqueness of all pupils is treasured. Parents of pupils with additional needs reflect on the care provided for them and their children by the school and link this with the caring and inclusive ethos. They particularly highlight the compassionate nature of the community and the feeling that all pupils are treated as unique. Small crosses shaped for pupils to hold are used by many pupils. There is one in each classroom and in some other rooms around the school. These 'holding crosses' contribute positively to pupils' spiritual development. This is because they are used spontaneously to aid reflection as well as prompt independent thought. Spirituality is built into the curriculum with approaches which give an emphasis to reflection and thankfulness carefully planned for. This results in highly developed discussions and thought. For example, when pupils support each other to stay healthy in science, or in art when they talk about the patterns at Stonehenge, or during outdoor learning sessions when they develop risk taking. They also reflect on how relationships are challenging and how sometimes you take risks in forgiving people so that trust can be rebuilt. One pupil talked in detail about e-safety learning and the choices being made around the dark web or golden path. This wealth of opportunity impacts well on pupils' good social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) development. The school supports all pupils well but for some vulnerable groups such as those in receipt of the extra pupil premium funding pupils' attendance is not good enough. This means that attendance is currently below the national average. The school is working appropriately with the local support services to address this issue.

Religious education (RE) contributes positively to the Christian character of the school. However, its contribution to SMSC development is not well planned for across the curriculum. Pupils discuss the range of religions in their school and some of the differences that there are between pupils as a result. These differences do not impact on the very positive relationships because "we all get on well... like a family." However, whilst pupils accept and respect diversity their knowledge of key aspects of different religions studied through RE is not deep enough.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The school values its daily collective worship highly. An expression of this is that the worship co-ordinator is the headteacher. She rightly recognises its importance in bringing about a sense of belonging to all members of the school community. Worship is well planned and effectively supports the embedding and understanding of the school's Christian values. Worship also makes appropriate links with biblical material and thus supports pupils' understanding of the importance of the Bible for Christians. Prayer, including saying the Lord's Prayer, is central to the worship programme and enables pupils to consider religious, spiritual and moral issues well.

Parents, pupils, governors and the parish community share worship regularly in a variety of settings including outside and talk about the sense of pride and joy it brings. This togetherness, friendship and thankfulness impacts on community and school relationships well. In turn this positively influences pupils' behaviour because pupils feel safe and secure and cared for by a range of adults and each other.

Pupils are supported in their understanding of Anglican worship practices, for example, by celebrating key Christian festivals and Saints' days. This enables them to develop a good, age-appropriate understanding of the Christian year. This is further enhanced by exploring the symbolism of the different colours used in church at different times. It also

enables them to reflect appropriately on various saints' lives. For example, a focus on St David provides opportunity to reflect on the simple life that he led in a monastery and the differences between this and modern life in England.

Pupils are highly engaged in the planning and delivery of worship through the worship committee. There are good systems to aid this including the assembly prayer board to which all pupils can contribute. The prayers, developed by the worship committee and based on the prayer board, are linked effectively with the themes and values being explored. This results in pupils and parents talking about the value of prayer in school life and being thankful for their school and proud of it. Worship has also led to social action such as charitable giving which is seen as a clear expression of the school's Christian ethos.

The pupils enjoy prayer and the opportunities to write their own. They feel that they 'own' the prayers in school and as a result often spontaneously write them, using the holding crosses. They say that this helps them think about 'what help they need or what they are thankful for'. Pupils talk with pride of their school creed which is unique to them and read frequently and as a result feel pride in their school and the specialness of its ethos as a church school.

The worship committee monitor worship well and as a result improvements have been made. This includes how pupils sit and linking prayers with the theme of the act of worship. The current membership of the committee is not able to readily and regularly link worship with more difficult Christian concepts. For example, exploration of the idea of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is underdeveloped through the worship programme. This has been recognised by the school and plans are in place to broaden membership of the group to address this. The parish community has been very supportive during the time the parish is without a vicar and have contributed positively to ensure that the quality of the worship programme has been maintained. This includes the ongoing support from other local clergy and the commitment to the inclusive and friendly community that the school has.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good

The headteacher leads the school with its Christian values at the forefront of her thinking and planning. Staff, pupils and parents feel part of a cohesive, Christian community as a result. All staff including new staff can see the benefits that the Christian ethos brings. They and governors have responded positively to the recent OFSTED inspection in December 2016 where a grade of 'requires improvement' was given. Despite the disappointment it brought, and based expressly on the support provided by the school's Christian foundation, they are, 'carrying on and working on the improvements needed'. The self-evaluation as a church school is accurate. However, it is largely written by the headteacher and therefore a range of stakeholders are not involved in it. Neither is it monitored regularly or robustly enough by governors in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for pupils. The effective leadership undertaken by the worship committee has resulted in proactive monitoring and improvements and positive links with the school's Christian values so that they are accessible to pupils. Issues from the previous denominational inspection have been well addressed. For example, the spiritual development of pupils has been enhanced further as a result of the work of the worship committee and the opportunities given through outdoor learning and the rest of the curriculum to reflect and discuss. The new RE leader has developed an appropriate action plan for improving RE. She is well supported by the school and by the recent training provided by the Diocese. She is also aided by a more experienced member of the school's staff who was the school's RE leader. She has been able to provide capacity for the accelerated development of the subject. The new RE leader has also formally collected pupil views on RE and has built the responses into the action planning well. The strong sense of community and the variety of visitors, leaders of worship and links with other communities, including global ones, is a real strength. These links bring a powerful sense of acceptance of diversity and difference because pupils and staff plan for these well and engage beyond their school with people of different views and backgrounds.

SIAMS report (February 2017) Woodham Walter CE (VC) Primary School, Maldon, Essex, CM9 6RF