

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

### Wittersham Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

The Street, Wittersham, Tenterden, Kent, TN30 7EA	
<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Canterbury</b>
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Kent
Date of inspection	13 June 2017
Date of last inspection	March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary – Voluntary Aided - 118740
Headteacher	Claire Frost
Inspector's name and number	Pamela Draycott - 161

#### School context

The school is smaller than average. Pupils, apart from Year 6, are taught in mixed-age classes. The vast majority are White British. The percentage for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage is above the national average and on a rising trend. Since the previous denominational inspection there has been a difficult period when standards of attainment and progress fell. In September 2015 the current headteacher came to provide support. She was made headteacher in March 2016. The school has stabilised and made improvements. 54 percent of the families of pupils identify as coming from Christian backgrounds.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Wittersham CEP school as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The effective and collegiate leadership of the headteacher successfully promotes high academic outcomes and accelerated progress alongside strong personal development. This closely reflects the school's Christian aspiration and care for all its pupils.
- Worship contributes deeply to the school's strong Christian ethos and values and to the spiritual life of both the pupils and adults involved.
- Pupils' excellent behaviour and respectful relationships in and around school are built on and surely reflect the school's Christian values and positively express their impact on the school community.
- Links with the parish church are strong and display both the school's and the church's vision of service to the local community.

#### Areas to improve

- Improve religious education (RE) provision by:
  - ensuring that the new assessment practice consistently refines planning and teaching and guides pupils clearly in the next steps they need to improve work further
  - embedding the active approaches to teaching RE recently introduced which enable pupils to enquire into key questions, beliefs and practices related to the topic under consideration.

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

The school is a nurturing and supportive community well focused on enabling pupils to reach their full potential both academically and personally. This means that pupils of all ability levels make at least good and often accelerated progress from their various starting points. There are no significant long-term overall gaps in progress between different groups. Pupils attain well, especially in Key Stage 2, where results are now above both local and national averages. The school is building firm foundation across Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2 to ensure continued improvement. The school's Christian values of respect, self-worth, perseverance, forgiveness, kindness and love permeate its life and work. They are explicit and clearly expressed. Pupils and adults can consequently relate them confidently to life in school and beyond. As a result they impact positively on its climate for learning, the exemplary behaviour of pupils and the strong relationships in evidence. As a member of staff reflected, 'Christian values are part of the fabric of this school'. Pupils are well known and their individual strengths, aptitudes and areas for development closely addressed. This means that safeguarding and wellbeing are important and managed effectively. It results in, for example, attendance being above the national average because pupils feel happy and safe in school. There are very few occasions when poor attendance or behaviour is a barrier to learning. In those instances, the school works, in keeping with its Christian vision, compassionately and fairly with pupils and their families. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is taken seriously by the school which provides a very good range of activities and opportunities for enriching pupils' experiences. Trips outside of school both locally and further afield expand pupils' horizons. RE is enjoyed by pupils who see its relevance in helping them understand the importance of faith in the world today. As a pupil said, 'learning about Christianity and other faiths is interesting because it helps you see that people have a lot in common as well as some differences'. Pupils are confident in expressing their thoughts, views and beliefs within a supportive learning environment. Through RE's focus on Christianity, pupils are beginning to appreciate something of its variety and multi-cultural nature. The school's link with a mission school in Kenya also supports this understanding. Both RE and worship contribute effectively to helping pupils express the significance of the school values to decision making and to situations they hear about in the world today.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Worship plays a very important part in the school's life. It provides valuable opportunities to reaffirm its Christian ethos and values and effectively supports the spiritual and religious development of the school community. As a pupil reflected in a recent questionnaire, 'When I'm sad God brings a smile to my face'. Similarly, a member of staff wrote, 'There is a great culture of reflection in the school that has certainly impacted on my spiritual development'. Worship is very well planned. It explores the significance of central Christian festivals including Christmas and Easter as well as key Christian beliefs such as that of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This means that pupils develop a detailed and age-appropriate understanding of key beliefs about Jesus and the Bible and their importance for Christians. Worship is delivered by a variety of people including the headteacher, members of the teaching staff, by class groups and by local clergy. This leads to variety within the programme which helps pupils experience a range of different styles of worship and enhances their engagement and involvement. As a pupil said, 'I enjoy the singing and the prayer because it gets you up and running for the day'. Another pupil reflected, 'worship helps our minds to grow'. Aspects of Anglican worship practices such as using opening and closing sentences and psalms with responses and lighting candles during worship are well embedded into school practice. Prayers, including the Lord's Prayer and key prayers from the Anglican Prayer Book are regularly said. This provides a strong basis for the prayer life of the school which is appropriately extended by the use of pupils' own prayers on given topics. This is widened further by prayers being said at different times of the school day, including at lunch time and before going home. Prayer and reflection areas around the school are well used and effectively provide outlets for prayer. Pupils are well aware that prayer, 'is speaking and listening to God'. They know that there are different types of prayer including, 'thanking, praising and asking prayers to God.' Some pupils relate prayer to their own lives. As a pupil said, 'I pray at home in bed as well as at school. It makes me feel closer to God'. Through worship pupils are regularly encouraged to think about the needs of others. This they do through prayer and through charitable giving. Pupils are appropriately involved in planning and leading worship and respond sensitively during acts of worship. Senior staff, governors and pupils play a regular role in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the worship programme. There is clear evidence that views are taken into consideration and refine practice appropriately.

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

RE has a high profile across the school. Pupils and staff readily articulate its importance within school life. Pupils see its relevance to their daily life as reflected upon by a pupil who said, 'RE is good because it helps you think about things like God and what is right and wrong'. It makes a strong contribution to SMSC development through both the curriculum content and the teaching and learning activities provided throughout the curriculum. There is an appropriate balance between content that focuses on Christianity and that which focuses on other world faiths. The curriculum is carefully planned. It helps pupils develop both knowledge and understanding of the religion under consideration and its significance for believers and for themselves, irrespective of their personal beliefs. Pupils enjoy RE and find it stimulating and challenging. As one pupil said, 'We have some thoughtful debates in RE' with another saying that lessons are, 'fun but serious'. Effective links are made between RE and other areas of the curriculum. For example, in Year 6 in English pupils study 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas' and in RE, Judaism. During this they discuss the religious, moral and ethical issues raised through the events of the Holocaust. The subject leader took up her responsibilities in September 2016 and has introduced a new approach to teaching the subject. This is based on enabling pupils to enquire into the content and respond to 'big questions' as the basis for their work in RE. There is clear evidence that this approach is impacting positively on pupils' and teachers' engagement and appreciation of the subject. She has also refined assessment practice in RE which has improved significantly. Both these developments are in the early stages of development and are not embedded across the curriculum. Robust monitoring and evaluation of the subject area has led to effective action planning for further development.

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

Following a period of instability and falling standards the current headteacher has worked effectively to reverse the declining situation. This she has successfully achieved, ably supported by her senior leaders and governors. This is evidenced by the much improved Key Stage 2 results in 2016 which were well above the national and local averages. Although not externally verified, current in-school' data shows that this is set to continue in 2017. Under the headteacher's strong guidance staff and governors are ambitious for their pupils. They see high academic standards and progress and personal growth and development as the fundamental ways in which the school expresses its Christian service to the pupils. This means that the school's strategic development is directly and effectively driven by its Christian vision. This, in turn, is closely focused on meeting the needs of the individual both academically and personally. Governors are strategically and practically engaged in school life with many of them seeing their involvement as a reflection of their Christian commitment. Governors have secured effective church school leadership. RE and worship are very well led and both meet statutory requirements. Key issues for improvement from the previous denominational inspection have been effectively addressed, particularly since September 2015. The school's self-evaluation of itself as a church school is robust and has led to a detailed action plan for sustaining and improving practice further. Professional development is well focused on enhancing the Christian character of the school, including a regular focus on RE. This means that staff are well supported for working within the church school context. Relationships with parents are strong and parents are supportive of the school's Christian ethos. They recognise that, 'children are happy and live out the values in school and at home'. The school is very much part of its local community. For example, a number of local villagers and parents attend a weekly lunch at the school and Harvest gifts are distributed by pupils to local elderly people. Links with the parish church are strong and include a monthly act of school worship being held in church. A number of the older pupils asked about the possibility of confirmation. As a result the vicar led a class and five pupils are shortly to be confirmed. Members of the parish church and other local people volunteer to hear pupils read. The school draws appropriately on the expertise of the Diocese in sustaining and developing its Christian foundation through, for example, regular attendance at courses for staff and governors.

SIAMS report [June 2017] Wittersham CE (VA) Primary School, Tenterden, Kent, TN30 7EA