



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Christopher Reeves Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower school

Hinwick Road, Podington, Wellingborough NN29 7HU

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Bedford

Date of inspection: 22 May 2015

Date of last inspection: November 2009

School's unique reference number: 109622

Headteacher: Sue McNally

Inspector's name and number: Alan Thornsby 137

School context

Christopher Reeves Lower School is a small school with 68 pupils on roll. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin with a large number from the nearby town of Rushden. The proportions of pupils eligible for pupil premium and those with special education needs are below average. Following a period of significant staff turnover, there is now a stable staff team.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Christopher Reeves as a Church of England school are good.

- The headteacher has a strong commitment to Christian education that drives the on-going development of the distinctive Christian character of the school
- A strong sense of Christian duty results in a commitment on the part of leaders to ensure that the needs of each individual child are met
- Christian values have a significant impact on the academic and personal development of children

Areas to improve

- Ensure that staff and governors fully understand the implications of the identified Christian values for their roles in order to continue effective school development
- Create a group of adults and children to plan, deliver and evaluate formally the impact of worship to raise the profile and involvement of pupils
- Ensure that children are challenged in religious education through differentiated tasks and their next steps of learning are recognised in marking comments

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

The school has an inclusive values based ethos that has been securely developed into a Christian ethos, with links to Bible verses and the teachings of Jesus. Everyone in school recognises how the school motto 'living our values' encompasses the range of values they share. The school is continuing to establish further these as distinctively Christian values that permeate the life of the school, resulting in good behaviour, relationships and attitudes. Children use their knowledge of the Bible and life of Jesus to illustrate the Christian background to the school values. They are articulate and confident with a clear understanding of the impact of the school ethos, commenting 'we talk about things like love and hope; a new value each month.' Children know they are valued and trusted by their teachers and recognise that 'our teachers show Christian love to us by taking good care and want to give us a good education.' In return children recognise their respect for adults in school, so they are polite, listen to them and do their best. They enjoy coming to school and want to learn. This, with effective teaching strategies, ensures that progress and achievement are in line with national expectations. Tracking procedures indicate that pupils are meeting more challenging targets. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is a strength of the school, supported by a range of cross-curricular links, visits and out of school activities. The Christian character of the school underpins life in and out of the classroom. For example, a joint project between the school council and Parent Teacher Association 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' has successfully achieved its goal 'To make our outdoor environment an irresistible place for learning, playing and reflecting'. Each house team in the school has the name of a Biblical character whose qualities are reflected in the types of plants used in each garden. Children have a good awareness of the impact of religious education and knowledge of Christianity and other faiths. They explain being in a Christian school helps them to understand that 'it is good to be different, but we must have respect and tolerance for other religions and share values with them.' Links with a school in Ghana give pupils a good knowledge of the global nature of faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Collective worship is a key element that reinforces the distinctive Christian character of the school. Themes are based on 'Christian Values for school', the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and the liturgical year. The range of themes furthers pupils' SMSC development. Although the local church has been without a vicar for several years, the school has good links with the church community. This enables children to enjoy a range of worship and formats. School worship clearly reflects the Anglican pattern of gathering, engaging, responding and sending. They value the impact of worship on their lives, commenting 'if we did not have worship, it would ruin our day because we would not have prayer or be ready for church.' They enter the hall with sense of anticipation and respond to the greeting 'The Lord be with you'. They are engaged by the lively delivery. For example, a puppet was very effectively used to introduce the story of Daniel and the writing on the wall. Although pupils showed their enjoyment of the retelling of the story, with other props and Biblical links, they quickly returned to a reverent atmosphere when necessary. Children take the opportunity to reflect on the theme that is the focus of the dismissal. Children have a good knowledge of the life of Jesus and a developing understanding of the Trinity through the lighting of a candle 'in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit'. They have a good awareness of Christian symbolism and describe prayer as 'the way Christians talk to God.' The Lord's Prayer is sung in a joyful and thoughtful way. Children recall well-presented stories and can talk about the Christian values they illustrate. For example, they describe the lame man and the friends who took him to Jesus as having 'courage and faith in God.' The links with church are maintained through festival services, celebrated with songs and performances, 'Messy Church' being held in school and a number of pupils singing in the church choir. This creates a sense of belonging to a wider worshipping community. Children are responsible for the organisation of worship resources and for the greeting and dismissal. However, they currently have little opportunity to plan and lead worship. Foundation governors make some formal observations of worship although much of the monitoring of worship is informally gathered. However, the school has identified the benefits of creating a 'worship group' of adults and children with responsibility for the planning, delivery and monitoring of worship in order to give greater pupil involvement and further raise the profile of worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Religious education has a high profile in the life of the school, with a comprehensive policy agreed in 2013 by the governing body. An enthusiastic subject leader supports staff knowledge and confidence. The development points from the previous inspection have been addressed and a range of monitoring procedures has identified further developments that have been introduced. The trialling of new assessment procedures, linked with the network of other local church schools, is part of the school development plan. However, these are still at an early stage. Children are engaged by good questioning skills of teachers, pace of lessons and good classroom management. They enjoy paired and group discussion as ways of exploring ideas, and understand that there is often no right or wrong answer. They listen to and respect each other's points of view. Although attainment is judged to be in line with national expectations, the school recognises that some pupils achieve better in RE because of greater opportunities for thinking and reasoning skills. It also provides opportunities to enjoy moral and ethical discussion, for example, 'When there is little food do you feed the oldest or youngest sibling?' Children learn about, and from, religion and make comparisons between Christianity and other major faiths. Children discussed 'What makes the Bible and the Qur'an special?' before exploring how believers learn moral values from religious stories. Children recognise the symbolism of the story of Noah. They are able to prioritise, with reasons, key points of the story. Lessons are supported by the effective use of teaching assistants. Although there is clear evidence of learning about and learning from RE in pupils' books, there is a lack of evidence of tasks with varying levels of challenge to meet different abilities. Learning objectives and success criteria are shared in lessons and in pupils' books. However, teachers give no indication in their marking how children have met these or the steps needed for the next stage of learning. Regular RE days provide opportunities for focussed and in depth learning and are reflected in prominent displays of work that reinforce the distinctive Christian character of the school.

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

The head has passion and determination to continue to develop the distinctive Christian character of the school. All are aware of the Christian ethos and the Christian character of the school and the contributions of RE and worship. However, some people often still find it difficult to articulate this in practical terms. The headteacher has recognised the opportunities to address this further through the use of 'Christian Values for Schools'. Changes in staff and governance have resulted in greater focus to revisit, explore and re-state the values of the school in explicit Christian terms. The school development plan has a focus on the well-being of everyone in school. The head and chair of governors ensure that a Christian vision is at the heart of every decision. This gives strength to the 'no excuses culture' that explains 'all pupils can achieve given the right support and challenge'. The Christian ethos results in staff striving to 'do the right thing for every child and ensuring that effective teaching enables all to achieve their potential'. Staff recognise that the caring and respectful Christian ethos of the school creates a skilled team that understands that 'the needs of the children are paramount'. They comment 'We take care to know and understand children to realise their potential in all aspects of school'. They are supported by appropriate curriculum and personal training opportunities. Governors, showing Christian care, ensure the best opportunities for children, for example, through ensuring 'best value is not always the cheapest in staff recruitment'. Foundation governors actively maintain the Christian ethos and the profiles of RE and worship as well as the links between school and church. They comment on how all members of staff 'exceed the call of duty to care for children'. Self-evaluation as a church school is accurate. Parents speak very positively about the impact of the school and its ethos on the academic and personal lives of their children. Typical of their many comments are 'Our children come home and discuss what God does, what Jesus did and how these relate to life today' and 'All of the children are known by all of the staff, who give them a good foundation for life, with respect and understanding of other faiths'. The school has strong links with the village and church communities, through shared events.