



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Dunton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Lower School

High Street, Dunton, Biggleswade SG18 8RN

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Central Bedfordshire

Dates of inspection: 10 June 2015

Date of last inspection: 3 February 2010

School's unique reference number: 109599

Headteacher: Heather Curry

Inspector's name and number: Shirley Whales 830

School context

Dunton is a small village school that sits on the eastern edge of Bedfordshire and close to the borders Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. Pupils, who are mainly White British, come from the local area and the nearby town of Biggleswade. The school was federated with Wrestlingworth CE VC Lower School in 2005 and became a hard federation in 2010; there have been few staff changes since then. Recent bereavement and ill-health issues have impacted on the community but strong partnerships in school and the wider community have supported the well-being of both staff and families.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Dunton CE VC School as a Church of England school are good.

- The headteacher provides strong Christian leadership and ensures that the school's Christian character makes a difference to pupils' academic achievement and well-being.
- Christian values are clearly expressed and demonstrated by pupils and staff. They underpin the excellent relationships between all members of the community and the very good behaviour of the pupils.
- Worship is an integral and important aspect of school life. Everyone values its contribution to the Christian values and the school's Christian distinctiveness.

Areas to improve

- Provide regular opportunities for pupils to engage in planning, leading and evaluating worship in order to develop their ownership of worship.
- Ensure that formal procedures to monitor and evaluate the impact of the school's Christian character involve all members of the school community in helping leaders to develop an insightful and accurate identification of areas for improvement.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching, formal monitoring and assessment procedures in religious education so as to ensure an accurate picture of pupils' progress.

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

The school's strong Christian ethos endorses positive relationships, good attendance, achievement and behaviour. Attainment is mainly above the national average. Having introduced Christian values less than two years ago, the school has made good progress in ensuring they are embedded in every aspect of school life. They are 'more overt' and occupy a 'higher profile' within the school. Consequently, pupils learn in a safe environment where they are taught to reflect on their own attitudes and conduct. The values are shared with the parents and the community and underpin the excellent relationships and behaviour of the pupils. One parent commenting that her son had shown 'compassion' when he explained how he had 'been thinking about other people's feelings'. The school now plans to evaluate how the Christian values link to Biblical texts and underpin the Christian ethos. Pupils' personal and spiritual development is good as they have many opportunities to express their ideas through music, art and the 'enrichment' curriculum. Music is a particularly strong feature in the curriculum; pupils willingly take up opportunities to be involved in distinctively Christian worship as part of choral ensembles in Cambridge and St Paul's Cathedral. Pupils explain enthusiastically how they appreciate the quiet places outdoors that encourage personal reflection. However, the quality of indoor spaces for prayer and reflection is limited as classroom reflection areas are underdeveloped. Pupils' excellent social and moral development is as a result of consistent, hard work of the staff and the way in which the values have been expressed. Pupils are confident and happy; they feel listened to and supported at all levels. The school has a good reputation amongst parents for being a supportive and nurturing Christian environment, resulting in respect and integrity as seen throughout the community. One parent explained that the ethos was 'an important part of the jigsaw'. Parents especially like the way older pupils look after, play and work with younger pupils especially in their 'family groups' and the care that is shown in the playground. Pupils recognise that Christianity is a world-wide faith and they are beginning to understand and respect diversity. This is enhanced by visits to the gurdwara and mosque, which have made a contribution to pupils' cultural development and supported their emerging understanding of diverse faiths and traditions. This contributes richly to the school's Christian commitment to the belief that all people are of worth in this increasingly diverse community. Religious education (RE) makes some contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) and some pupils are able to recall an amazing number of facts about the topics covered. Work in books does not always reach the same high standards that are evidenced elsewhere in the curriculum. The school has rightly identified that this is an area for development.

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

Since the last inspection, the programme of collective worship (CW) has been inspired by the introduction of values education. 'Meaningful' worship is well planned and delivered by school staff, the vicar and visitors, including the pastor from the local Baptist church. This ensures that themes have both continuity and variety, which are deeply rooted in Christian beliefs and Christian values and enable pupils to have a deeper understanding of the Anglican traditions and practice. The values are linked to Bible stories and shared through a range of stimuli, styles and content such as music, drama and poetry. This enables pupils to engage in a variety of ways. Monitoring the impact of the values has been mainly the responsibility of school leaders who have established that the values now need developing in greater depth so that pupils' understanding of them grows as they move through the school. Children know and sing the Lord's Prayer; they also respond well to opportunities to prepare and express their own personal prayers, sometimes spontaneously, often reading them in worship. Pupils understand and respect these opportunities for spiritual reflection and the purpose of prayer. However, although pupils are regularly involved in contributing to some aspects of worship, they have limited opportunities to plan, lead and evaluate worship on a regular basis. The lighting of three candles at the start of worship reminds the children of the Trinity and the 'tranquillity of worship' that follows. Pupils respond well to this with appropriate respect and reverence. The

pupils' enthusiastic singing serves to enhance the worship experience. Pupils are able to explain their developing understanding of God, Son and Holy Spirit. As one Year 4 child explained, 'God will always be with you.' Pupils' knowledge of Bible stories is impressive and their understanding of theological beliefs is explored at the right level for their ages. Whilst leaders and governors are making some progress on the 'monitoring of collective worship', which was the focus for development from the last inspection, this area has not yet been fully addressed.

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

All members of Dunton's 'integrated and inclusive community' are able to articulate the school's Christian vision through the distinctive Christian values. These permeate all areas of school life and families benefit from the unwavering support that is given on a daily basis. Parents speak highly of the school and praise the 'relaxed, considerate atmosphere' in which everyone is valued and respected. They recognise the Christian aspects of the school and feel that the Christian values promoted by the school are important. This collaborative practice supports pupils' SMSC development, which is excellent, and they achieve well. Recent bereavements and illnesses within the community have impacted on the contributions by key stakeholders. Whilst a nurturing Christian ethos has supported everyone's well-being, not all stakeholders are involved in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's Christian character. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the school's effectiveness as a church school, school leaders have recognised the need to embed a systematic evaluation programme. Governors have focussed on securing the hard federation with Wrestlingworth CE VC School and have embedded 'a friendly and effective interaction' between both schools. Governors of the schools support the headteacher in the professional development and succession planning of staff. Members of staff have attended diocesan training and this has been influential in the development of displays areas, enrichment and adopting agreed Christian values. Issues from the previous inspection have been not yet been addressed and governors recognise that further improvements are needed in order to be outstanding. RE and CW comply fully with statutory requirements and school leaders are effective in providing appropriate support for RE and CW leaders. The recently researched 'Inspire' curriculum was introduced at the beginning of the school year and the 'enrichment' curriculum, which sits alongside provides powerful opportunities for 'family learning'. The value of 'thankfulness' was explored in 'enrichment' classes using the placing of painted pebbles in the spiritual garden, thus enhancing the spiritual experiences for all pupils. The vicar, who is also a governor, is a welcome visitor and is highly respected and influential in the development of worship and the Christian character. Governors and parents speak of the 'dynamic way in which the vicar has developed links so that the church is actively feeding into the life of the school'. This effective partnership between the school and the church has formed a strong foundation upon which many linked activities with church and community have been developed. Parents, who are also governors, lead 'Open the Book' sessions with the pupils in their network of schools and churches, which shows the good partnerships between the school and the community.

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