



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Northill C of E VA Lower School

Bedford Rd, Northill, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, SG18 9AH

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Central Bedfordshire

Dates of inspection: 20th May 2015

Date of last inspection: 18th March 2010

School's unique reference number: 109621

Headteacher: Mandy Reddick (Federation Headteacher), Alison Barden (Head of School)

Inspector's name and number: Juliet Lyal NS 829

School context

Northill C of E VA Lower School is a small, village school with 63 pupils. In April 2013 the school entered into a 'soft' federation with a nearby C of E middle school. The Federation Headteacher oversees both schools, and there is a Head of School based at Northill, who was formally appointed in September 2013. Pupils are mainly White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils for whom the school receives additional funding by the pupil premium. Ofsted judged the school to be good in November 2014.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Northill C of E VA Lower School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The commitment, drive and vision of the headteachers, staff and governors have energised the distinctive Christian character of the school and the impact on behaviour, attitudes to learning and pupils' enjoyment of school is very strong.
- The impact of the Christian character and values on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all learners is very strong.
- High quality acts of worship, shaped by Anglican tradition and valued by all, are creative and inspirational and influence behaviour in and beyond the school.

Areas to improve

- Increase the rigour of monitoring and evaluating religious education (RE) so that targets become focused and ambitious and included in the school improvement and development plan to ensure the attention of senior leaders and governors.
- Enable governors to fulfil their statutory responsibilities in relation to the distinctive Christian character of the school by ensuring this is regularly included as an agenda item in their programme of meetings.

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

The distinctive Christian ethos of this school runs through every area of school life and every person who is a part of it. Its impact on the school and local community is strong. The broad curriculum, powerful ethos and links between religious education (RE) and worship have a significant impact on the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) as well as on their behaviour, progress and attainment. Whilst the pupils with special educational needs do not meet the national average of attainment, they progress well to meet their individual targets. All other pupils make good or excellent progress and their 2014 end of year Key Stage 1 attainment results were well above the national average. Pupils are confident and articulate, and know they belong to a Church school explaining that 'everything we do is Christian.' They are aware of the diversity that this brings because 'you don't have to go to church to be a Christian.' They can explain the school Christian values and give examples of how these help them both in and out of school, as well as link them to stories they know about God and Jesus. Through the teaching about inspirational leaders in RE, older pupils are excited and challenged when identifying commonalities between Sikh and Christian values, whilst at the same time pointing out the uniqueness of Jesus. There is a high degree of respect and understanding from all members of the school community towards those in the wider community from other world faith beliefs or non-belief. The school's eight Values Ambassadors, appointed in January 2015, take their role to 'help show others in the school what the values are' seriously which has a clear impact on all. Pupils understand what is meant by 'spiritual'. They are keen to share their ideas and design, based on the school Christian values, for the new spiritual garden to surround the 'outside cross' which pupils say they like to sit next to when they want to be quiet or to pray on their own. Parental involvement in the school has increased dramatically since September 2013. They say that they feel welcomed to collective worship, social and curricular led school events and that the transition to a 'soft' federation has reinforced and hugely developed the school's Christian ethos. Relationships between everyone in the school community are excellent because of the shared and deeply embedded Christian values.

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

Worship is central to the life of this school and gives everyone the opportunity to learn about God and Jesus, to pray, reflect and develop spiritually. Following Anglican practice and liturgy, worship is based around the school's Christian values and linked through Bible stories, with a strong focus on the person of Jesus. Teaching the Trinitarian nature of God is ongoing and enjoyed by the pupils whose natural response is 'It's quite easy to understand'. Older pupils can express its meaning with understanding appropriate to their age. Pupils can explain how school displays illustrate Christian values and Bible stories, and are used in learning and worship. They are excited about the centrality of the old school bell, hung above a model of the church, which they ring to announce and celebrate an achievement, encouraging praise for each other. Acts of collective worship are led daily by school leaders and weekly by the incumbent. Invited visitors and children also lead worship which develops the understanding of diversity within Christianity. Half termly church services and weekly visits to Reception class by the curate enable pupils and adults to experience time for reflection in different settings. Art work and pupils' prayers display the impact this makes. Pupils respond confidently commenting that they 'learn a lot about Jesus and being a Christian'. From the very youngest, pupils can sit in silence to reflect or pray. Most children know the Lord's Prayer which is taught and explored through RE and worship. Following the previous inspection, all pupils fully participate during times of prayer and reflection. Each class has a spiritual or quiet area where pupils say they go to and which includes a values display, art work, music and quotations to aid reflection. Pupils' own prayers are selected from the class prayer book for prayer before lunch and at the end of the day as well as in collective worship and church services. Regular monitoring and evaluation by foundation governors and senior leaders of the impact collective worship has on pupils, is discussed with all staff. Outcomes include different classes helping to plan and lead the church services, and groups of children are increasingly working with the incumbent to plan and lead collective worship in school. A recent mixed ability Yr 4 group chose Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his disciples when writing their own script and prayers, and choosing relevant hymns to sing. The impact of this on the whole school was reflected in the good listening, stillness during prayer and singing with spontaneous actions. Parents say

that attendance at the church services has increased hugely, that 'church is packed' and comment on the strong impact of worship on their children.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Religious education (RE) in this school is good. It is valued by all members of the community. Teaching is consistently good or better and as a result the pupils make good or very good progress. Standards of attainment for a large majority of pupils are in line with or higher than national expectations. Pupils say that they 'love RE' and 'we do a lot of it!' They make links between the school's Christian values and the Christian areas of learning in RE, as well as with practices and beliefs of other faiths. Lessons are lively and inspirational, enabling pupils to be imaginative and reflective. A new RE syllabus has been implemented since the last inspection. This has supported the focus for development (SIAS, 2010) of planning for differentiated activities which were clearly evident in the two lessons observed as well as in the whole school RE plans and work in pupils' RE books. The level of challenge for all has increased, partly as an outcome of the latest Ofsted inspection. Pupils question and are questioned and say that some questions cannot always be answered. They enjoy exploring ideas together and with adults. Whilst learning is clearly underpinned with values and SMSC development this is not yet recorded in the planning or in the annotated comments. The school acknowledges that whilst its evaluation identifies strengths and areas for improvement in RE teaching and learning, evaluation could be more rigorous and ambitious. RE benefits from the leadership of a dedicated and enthusiastic co-ordinator who, with many other staff, demonstrates good subject knowledge. The coordinator attends courses within the local authority and diocese and is a member of the RE and Collective Worship Liaising group with other schools in the Biggleswade Community Union of Schools. The effectiveness of these meetings is evident in the planning and teaching across the school. Senior leaders, governors and staff are informed of the teaching and learning and make regular visits to RE classes although how the outcomes of these visits relate to the action plans are not always made clear.

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

Throughout the transition of the school into a 'soft' federation with a nearby C of E middle school, the leaders have ensured that the Christian ethos is both sustained and re-energised. The impact is that the church is a crucial part of school life, reinforced by a strong relationship between all leaders and the firmly established links with the wider community. The foundation governors say they are 'excited' to be part of this journey and appreciate the inclusivity it has brought, increasing their visits and involvement in self-evaluation. The senior leaders value the ongoing and outstanding work by the governing body during the federation process. Parents say that the transition appeared 'seamless', has reinforced and hugely developed the school's Christian ethos, and feel that the senior leadership is far more accessible and that the school's Christian ethos is a 'whole part of your life'. They sense the commitment of all leaders to the growth of the school as a church school and appreciate the welcome they receive from all staff. The staff are a close team and the teaching and support role is now clearly defined. Training given by the Diocese and Local Authority has been undertaken by all staff as part of the continuing professional development programme. The whole community is aware that Northill and its federated school share Christian values and ethos. Joint productions, events and subject leadership meetings show the impact of this and parents confirm that it contributes to the smooth transition of their Yr 4 children. Recent data from the middle school shows that pupils from Northill make better progress than those from other feeder schools. Northill's Christian values are practised beyond the school gate, impacting the pupils' behaviour at home and their attitude towards school. This has contributed to a rise in attendance both of Traveller family pupils in school and of parents at church services. Leaders agree that the Christian distinctiveness of the school is paramount to its effectiveness as a church school and contributes well to pupil behaviour, attitudes and SMSC development. Even though this is central to discussions, currently there is no indication that governors are regularly considering how this is maintained. Whilst there is strong evidence of governor discussion in meetings about RE, it does not yet feature in the school's improvement and development plan.