



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Wilden Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School

High Street
Wilden
Bedford
MK44 2PB

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Bedford Borough

Date of inspection: 22 October 2014

Date of last inspection: 21 October 2009

School's unique reference number: 109627

Headteacher: Vanessa Young

Inspector's name and number: Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

Wilden Lower School serves a community from the village of Wilden and the surrounding area. Currently there are 61 pupils on roll in this small, rural school, who are mainly from a White British background. The school enjoys good links with the parish church of St Nicholas which is currently in an interregnum. The headteacher has been in post for four years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Wilden Lower as a Church of England school are good.

- The strong sense of a supportive close-knit Christian family community is grounded in Christian values which are embodied by everyone.
- The welcoming and worshipping Christian community enables positive attitudes amongst its young pupils, who become confident learners and achieve highly.
- The growing importance of prayer in the life of this church school nurtures pupils' spiritual development.

Areas to improve

- Enhance opportunities for pupils to evaluate worship in order to increase their engagement and sense of ownership.
- Embed the assessment of religious education [RE] so that there is a good understanding of pupils' attainment and progress which can be used to inform planning.
- Ensure the school's distinctive Christian character maintains a high profile at every governing body meeting so that evidence of its impact on pupils' learning is securely gathered.

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

Wilden Lower School provides a very positive learning environment for its young pupils, who are proud to belong, feel valued and achieve highly. This is because the school is an inclusive, happy and family community, rooted in the Christian faith. More importantly, the whole school community lives out the school's chosen Christian values. Such young pupils place great importance on 'putting people before yourself, like supporting your friends'. They articulate the value of patience as 'loving and supporting one another' and love as 'caring about others, like sacrificing'. This school values the dedicated family support advisor for the Alban cluster, who is an important member of the school team, and provides a vital link between families and the school. Attendance is carefully monitored, showing an improving picture and there have been no exclusions. This is because the school works hard with individual pupils and their families, with the support of staff committed to ensuring that pupils' needs are met with tailored and personalised learning. Attendance is celebrated and shared at the end of year service with parents when book tokens are given to children who have achieved 100% attendance over the entire year. Achievement is well above national average, and Wilden Lower is one of the highest achieving schools in the borough for reading. The school attributes this to their high targets and the way the children are involved in their own learning and assessment. All achievement is celebrated and linked to the school's values. Pupils feel able to make a positive contribution to school life and experience the Christian values of service and generosity through their fundraising. Such values enhance their understanding of their place in the world and their responsibility to others. Pupils show respect for the diverse community they belong to. This is enriched by visits to places of worship belonging to the faith traditions in Bedford. However, the school has rightly identified the need to deepen pupils' understanding of different faith communities through such RE multi faith tours so they can appreciate what unites different faiths. Displays throughout school focus on the school's core Christian values and nurture pupils spiritual development. Learning is aspirational, not just academic, with a wide range of achievement valued, including music which is strength of the school. In addition, pupils appreciate the weekly Christian club, when 'we learn more about God and Jesus'.

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

The attitude of pupils to collective worship is good because the quality of worship offered to them is making a real difference in their lives, contributing greatly to their spiritual development. All staff attend worship, which is recognised as an important part of the day as it helps to build community. Pupils and parent speak highly of worship, and are able to make links between Jesus' teaching in the Bible and everyday situations. Harvest, Christmas and Easter are celebrated in church, with the Bishop of Bedford recently leading a family Eucharist. These young children say they find church even more reflective and quiet than worship held in school. Collective worship varies in its approach, enabling pupils to become independent worshippers. Worship involves, engages and challenges pupils, with prayer an important part of school and home life. Parents say their children pray by their bed at night and read the Bible at home. Some pupils say 'when I'm at home every night before bed I put the candle on the table by my bed and say a prayer' They like acting and praying to God so 'we can communicate with him'. They understand The Holy Trinity as 'the three names you can call God'. Well used class reflective areas support pupils' spiritual development. Good examples include pupils saying, 'in our prayer corner inside the classroom I wrote some prayers for people who are poorly in other countries'. In addition, the school garden and outdoor reflective area have raised beds in the shape of a cross, chosen by pupils to show they are a church school. Pupils acknowledge, 'the cross which Jesus died on reminds me of Jesus and I want to say thank you for dying for us'. An outdoor nativity is held in the garden every year. Pupils go on to cite, 'the big tree where we can go and reflect and pray to God. We go under the tree to pray to God if we have any worries'. Pupils are starting to lead worship in church, with one led by Year 4, which included dance and prayers. Currently, pupil evaluation of worship is gathered through annual questionnaires for Years 1 to 4. In addition, staff complete evaluations very regularly and, as a small school, discuss these in the staffroom. However, foundation governors and pupils recognise the

importance of sharing their viewpoints as well as extending pupil opportunities to lead worship, even for the very youngest children, as currently this does not happen, so that its integrity and quality continually enhance pupils' spiritual development.

The effectiveness of religious education is good.

Pupils clearly enjoy their RE lessons in this school where RE is important and teaching is consistently good, and in line with other core subjects. The progress of these young pupils is good in relation to age related expectations. They are aware of their targets and know how to improve in their work, using 'I can' levels from Year 2 upwards. Marking indicates reflective comments which pupils readily respond to. For example, pupils say, 'if we have achieved one of our targets, the teacher ticks it and highlights it. They write comments and questions and how to improve in our books. We get a chance to answer questions'. The headteacher has led RE for just under a year, and ensures that higher order thinking skills, creativity and challenge are planned for when following the Bedford syllabus. In addition, the school uses its own module on worldwide Christianity to enhance these young children's spiritual and cultural development. Children talk confidently and knowledgeably of the Christian narrative, making links with Christian values saying 'Jesus sacrificed himself for our sins, all of us. Jesus was trying to teach us love and patience'. The school uses forest schools links well, with pupils articulating 'life is like a plant which never stops growing'. Year 2 pupils experience the symbolism of baptism in St Nicholas Church and are enabled to understand what confirmation and sanctified mean in their own words. Year 4 pupils are able to reflect on how and why believers show commitment in the journey of life, drawing on their own and other's experiences. However, the school acknowledges that assessment in RE requires time to become embedded in order to continually inform planning and consequently, pupil progress and standards.

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

This school's Christian foundation is effectively promoted by the headteacher, supported by the staff and governors. It is also welcomed by pupils and parents so that the Anglican foundation is celebrated and secure. Staff and governors live out the school's Christian values in a spirit of love and patience. Parents speak highly of how their children's needs and abilities are well met and how the wellbeing of pupils is given the highest priority. Collective worship and RE have an equally high status, as the headteacher holds these two important portfolios. Parents speak highly of this close knit community, saying all the children and staff know each other very well. They appreciate the level of care for their young children, valuing this sense of security and say they too feel welcome. This inclusivity shows the school's good commitment to involve parents in their young children's education. The children have a voice through the school council, making suggestions for charity fundraising, giving them leadership responsibilities, which is good. Areas from the last inspection have been addressed, showing how the school has moved on, with clear priorities for future action. The interregnum presents challenges of its own, but members of the parish community help to lead worship and are very much involved in school life. Many of the governors are new, but view this as an exciting time in the life of the school at the beginning of the next part of its journey. The school's distinctive Christian character is discussed at every governing body meeting, which raises its status with new and experienced governors alike. Currently, they are not explicitly linking standards to the school's Christian character. However, they are all committed to monitoring the performance of the school and to embed this monitoring with the school's values. Staff in this small, rural school take on many roles and responsibilities and benefit from the training and support offered to them by the diocese. Community links with local villages are strong, with good examples including May Day and the summer fair. The school also features in 'The Rural Grunch', the magazine communicating news and events for all the local villages. This raises the school's profile and shows how the school works hard to reflect its Christian foundation through its commitment to serving the children of Wilden Lower and their families.