



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Silsoe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Lower School

High Street, Silsoe, Bedford MK45 4ES

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Bedfordshire

Dates of inspection: 11th June 2014

Date of last inspection: 25th March 2009

School's unique reference number: 109605

Headteacher: Mrs Susan Purdue

Inspector's name and number: Lilian Weatherley 42

School context

Silsoe is a small school in a rural area of Bedfordshire. The majority of the pupils are white and British. Situated in the parish of Silsoe, the school works in partnership with the parish church of St James. There are 137 pupils on role but this is set to rise when the planned for new school is built. The school has a local authority special needs provision on site catering for six pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. There is also an attached Ofsted registered pre-school where pre-school children play with the Early Years Foundation Stage pupils in a shared playground.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Silsoe VC Lower School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- The impact of the school's Christian values programme on standards of achievement, pupil progress and behaviour
- The high profile given to prayer, worship and religious education and the significant impact this has on pupils spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- The highly inclusive nature of the school and its excellent record of meeting the needs of all pupils supported by robust procedures for monitoring and self-evaluation

Areas to improve

- Improve the school website, so that it fully reflects the outstanding nature of the school and pupil achievement
- Ensure that plans for the new school to create space to enhance the spiritual environment for prayer and worship and the distinctive Christian character of the school
- Ensure that all those connected with the plans for the new school are able to articulate fully the distinctive Christian character of a Church school and the impact on its pupils

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

At the heart of the school is its Christian values education programme and the impact that this has on pupil achievement, progress and pupil behaviour.

Standards of achievement and progress are high and well above the national average across each year group and for all pupils. Gaps between girls and boys are constantly being addressed. Behaviour in classes and around the school is exemplary. Attendance is above the national average. Pupils are happy, feel safe and enjoy school. They are well motivated, have positive attitudes, and speak with pride and enthusiasm about their school, their teachers and their learning. They are taught through the values programme to understand that all work can be developed and improved. Pupils evaluate each other's work with rigour in a caring and supportive environment. For example, pupils in Year 3 were debating the moral dilemma of whether it would be right to steal a loaf of bread if your family were starving. Pupils were eager to discuss the issue, put the points for and against and then engage in a lively debate. Pupils then evaluated each other's performance. The school has a strong record of providing for the full range of abilities and those who have additional needs make excellent progress. Pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties join in with mainstream lessons when possible and are eager to explain how they feel happy and enjoy being at Silsoe compared with their previous experiences of school.

The incumbent plays a key role in the values education programme, having written a nationally-recognised book for church schools on Christian values. Gospel values such as love and forgiveness underpin every aspect of the school and its distinctive Christian character. All involved with the school praise this values programme. In July 2010 the school was awarded the 'Values Mark' in recognition of its work. Pupils were eager to talk about the values leaves awarded for exemplifying a value and show with pride, the values tree display. Pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is outstanding across the school. All relationships are excellent and staff work hard to give pupils the best education possible. Lesson observations show that the quality of teaching is at least good with much outstanding practice. The displays around the school are exemplary and reflect the time and effort given by the staff to ensure that pupils work in an inspirational and reflective learning environment. From the early years to year 4 pupils' work displayed reflects the high standards expected of pupils and staff alike. Pupils also speak positively about the school spiritual garden where they can go, sit quietly and reflect.

The school won a healthy schools award in 2007. This has been regularly reassessed and in June 2014 the school's self-evaluation commended. The school also achieved international school status in 2011 in recognition of its work on social cohesion and work with the global community. The school has close links with a teaching school in Tanzania. Staff exchange their expertise and pupils communicate by letters with the children. Pupils also take part in regular charitable giving such as Sports Aid and Children in Need. This is often the result of a pupil initiative. When talking to the pupils about what they liked about their school one pupil thought for a while and then said, 'That's really difficult. I like everything'.

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

Collective Worship is central to the life of the school and of a high quality. It is inclusive and engages all the pupils and staff. The whole school worship is carefully planned with the incumbent to give it a liturgical framework. The core of the worship is linked to the Christian values programme and Biblical teaching. The worship observed was linked to the value of 'understanding' and focused on the first line of the hymn 'Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here'. Pupils show extreme reverence entering and leaving and staff use the interactive white board and lighting effectively to create an atmosphere for spiritual development. Pupils enjoy their worship and have positive attitudes. They particularly enjoy those times when they are able to take an active role. For example, on the day of the inspection the music, dance and poetry readings were all delivered by pupils in years 3 and 4.

The singing was exceptional and together with the reflection time played a key role in the liturgy and pupils' spiritual development. Pupils also spoke enthusiastically about the Pentecost worship delivered by the incumbent on the previous day and were beginning to articulate the concepts of Holy Spirit and Trinity. The separate worship budget provides a wide range of stimulating resources. These are used effectively to create class worship corners and encourage worship and reflection at other times of the day. Pupils understand the importance of worship in their lives and several were observed reading quietly in their class reflection corner. Worship is regularly monitored and evaluated by adults and pupils. All pupils know the Lord's Prayer and the Grace and appreciate the importance of prayer in their lives and the lives of others. The church year and the major sacraments are included in the worship planning. The themes selected are child-centred and link in to areas of the curriculum where possible. The church is used for key events such as Christmas and Easter and pupils and parents regularly join in the worship of the church, for example Mothering Sunday and the Good Friday Procession. Pupils and parents speak fondly of these times when they are able to share worship because space in the school is at a premium. Staff, pupils, parents and governors are aware that a new school creates greater opportunities to develop what is already outstanding practice. Governors are currently considering ways in which the new build might offer additional worship opportunities for the school and the whole community.

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

This is a school that is constantly moving forward. The high aspirations, vision and drive of the headteacher and the governing body has led the school to be an example of outstanding practice where all the issues from the last inspection have been addressed. Underpinned by the successful Christian values programme, the Christian vision is clearly articulated by all connected with the school. With the strong Christian leadership of the headteacher, the support of staff, parents, governors, clergy and members of the parish, the school offers its pupils inspirational teaching and learning in an inspirational and safe environment. One parent explained how she and other parents are happy to drive their children some distance because of the distinctive nature of the school and its impact on the pupils. The dedication, hard work and high expectations of the staff make the school a fun, inclusive learning environment matched by rigorous monitoring and challenge. The effective and detailed systems in place for pupil tracking ensure that all pupils make rapid progress. Links with the church, the Diocese and the local church community are excellent. The incumbent has a high profile in the school. He is chair of governors and takes a leading role in the values programme. He supports worship and religious education and his work has had a significant impact on pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Christian Gospel and its values.

Religious education and worship have a high profile in the school. The RE subject leader is a member of the senior leadership team and ensures the pupils receive a rich experience. Future leadership is high on the agenda. Staff are encouraged to go on additional training and regularly model their practice to other schools.

The governors are aware of the inadequacies of the school web site. Although this is being updated, at present it does little to reflect the excellence of the school in practice. The school is now moving into a new and exciting phase of development. The challenge for those connected with the school is to create a new building and improve the website to adequately reflect and support the distinctive nature of this school and its impact on the pupils.

SIAMS report 11 June 2014, Silsoe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Lower School, High Street, Silsoe, Bedford MK45 4ES