



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Essendon Church of England (VC) Primary School

School Lane, Essendon, Hatfield AL9 6HD

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 3 February 2015

Date of last inspection: 23 November 2009

School's unique reference number: 117393

Headteacher: Barbara Young

Inspector's name and number: Chris Westgarth 44

School context

Essendon is a smaller than average sized rural primary school. The school building, although built after the 2nd World War, was awarded Grade 2 listed building status in 1993. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is above average. Just under 20% of pupils are from the travelling community. The number of pupils with special educational needs is above average. Recently the school has seen a 75% turnover in staff and the headteacher has been in post since 2013.

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

- The inclusive, integrated approach to learning is underpinned by Christian values
- The strong Christian environment of this school develops in pupils a positive attitude and helps them become confident learners keen to achieve their best
- The excellent relationship with the incumbent and the good links with the church have had a significant impact on pupils' understanding and knowledge of Anglican traditions

Areas to improve

- To develop a strategy for pupils to prepare and lead worship regularly to strengthen the whole school ownership of collective worship
- Ensure that all stakeholders understand the SIAMS framework in order to strengthen monitoring and evaluation and increase improvement
- To increase opportunities for spiritual development by further using the outdoor environment

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

Essendon School provides a good learning environment grounded in Christian values. The recently implemented Christian vision and values programme is already having a significant impact on achievement and attendance. This makes pupils proud to belong and as one pupil said *'I love school and I always try to do my best'*.

There is a high visual profile through symbols of the Christian faith and motivational displays. These vibrant displays enhance the learning environment as well as the delightful new corridor spaces, the cabin and the castle. Pupils are eager to show visitors what they are learning. They speak confidently about their work and the learning displays and how they love to care for their school. This reinforces their understanding of caring for God's world. The outdoor area is being transformed and this and the opportunities for reflection and appreciation of the wider environment excite pupils and staff.

Using Christian values of love, hope and forgiveness the school seeks to promote equality, integration, gratitude and generosity. As a consequence, Essendon is an inclusive school where all are valued and appreciated, staff and pupils alike. Children are well integrated whatever their ability and this reinforces the inclusive nature of the school. Pupils are well nurtured and feel safe; they know who to go to if there was a problem. As a result pupils feel confident and happy. The Christian values of love, justice, forgiveness, generosity and truth are woven into the motivational awards such as 'Stars of the week', 'Random Acts of Kindness' and 'Behaviour leading to the Golden Cloud Award'. The impact is clear to see and as a result behaviour is good and attendance is rising because pupils want to come to school. Behaviour observed was good although in the hall the impact of the high ceiling and the large glass windows results in increased volume. There is a strong family feel at the school, based on Christian values, with older pupils helping younger ones. Pupils are kind, courteous and helpful. The example of a pupil stopping to help another who had fallen in the cross-country race confirms the ethos... *it's not ALL about the winning... We like to help!*

Charitable giving is also strong with pupils wanting to help others, locally, nationally and internationally. The visit of the Watoto Children's choir last year has had a profound influence, not only on charitable giving but an understanding of how children from another country enthusiastically live out their Christian faith. The school, church and village community and pupils are still talking about the impact of the visit.

Religious education makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development, especially their understanding of other faiths and cultures. Standards in RE are good with pupils showing good knowledge and understanding of Christianity as a world faith and also other faiths. Pupils are able to bring aspects of their learning from RE into everyday life. This impacts positively on their emotional well-being.

Data shows a significant dip in attainment in 2014, the school is aware of the reasons for this and measures have been put in place. This year the cohort is on track to do well. The year 5/6 teacher is already using a variety of interventions and inspiring strategies with positive outcomes. The school council is rightly proud of their school and enjoys talking about the changes that they have been involved in, they recognise the responsibility of this. They are always planning and thinking about the next 'project' and how to make their school *'special as a Christian school'*.

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

All members of staff attend worship and comment on the positive benefit of worshipping together.

Pupils speak positively and enthusiastically about worship and enjoy the regular visits by Reverend Pauline. *'I love it...we can all come to the hall and sing not only to God but to everyone there...'* and another commented *'It's good to learn about Jesus and how he lived...so that we can be better at helping others'*. In the worship observed there was a good balance of singing, quiet, prayer and pupil participation. The theme of courage looked at the lives of Anna and Simeon

and how they believed that God keeps his promises. Worship is well planned, monitored and evaluated. As a result collective worship has a significant impact on pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Anglican tradition, responses and the Trinity. The three wick candle strengthens the understanding of the Trinity, as one pupil explained *'it's a candle with three bits... just like God is one God, with three parts... Father, Son and Holy Spirit'*. Grace is said in classrooms and the school prayer, created by pupils and staff, in worship. This reinforces the understanding that prayer can be said together as well as individually. There is a good variety of worship with different styles and leaders. However, pupils commented that they would like to be involved in the leading of worship; this would strengthen the whole school ownership of worship. Prayer is having an increasing influence on the school, since the autumn term there has been a monthly church/school prayer time. This is strengthening the church and school partnership as well as a creating a time when the needs of the school can be brought before God in prayer. The recent Diocesan training on sacred spaces in schools is already benefitting pupils and staff alike. As one pupil explained *'You can always talk to God about things and stuff and he always listens'*. Year 6 pupils are responsible for preparing the hall for worship and then other pupils help prepare the worship table by adding the coloured cloth and lighting the candle. *'It's good to be involved with setting up for worship... sometimes it's a bit scary when the computer goes wrong... but everyone is so friendly... and they just wait for us to sort it'*. Pupils comment that they would like to lead worship in school and choose the songs and write the prayers. Links with and visits to St Mary's Church are strong and pupils enjoy special services such as the Harvest experience.

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

The relatively new headteacher is having a positive effect. She is a good team leader as well as a team player. The headteacher along with the senior leaders have put practices into place to ensure that the Christian values and ethos, which lie at the heart of this school, are upheld. Senior leaders have addressed inconsistencies with teaching standards and this has resulted in a stable, secure and calm staff. The impact of the Christian ethos is visible for everyone to see. It is because of this Christian ethos that the school is reaching out to the community and parent group, it is as the mission statement says *'a small school with a big heart'*.

Senior staff and governors make sure the Christian commitment to nurture each individual child is made possible through good systems for pastoral care and well-being. Governors are committed and knowledgeable. They have robust systems in place for ensuring the impact of the Christian character of the school is constantly reviewed. Although the school is clear about its future direction, not all stakeholders have a clear understanding of how the requirements of the new SIAMS framework might support these initiatives. The school places great importance on the personal, professional and spiritual development of all staff and governors. However, due to the recent changes in staffing this is not fully linked with succession planning. SMSC development is good in worship, religious education and across the curriculum. The statutory requirements are well met as a result of strong support for these areas by senior leaders. This is demonstrated by the fact that RE, worship and the distinctive Christian character of the school are included in the school improvement plan and regularly discussed at senior leadership meetings. Consequently all development areas from the previous inspection have been met and the school has created a 'spiritual' journey document to record developments in these areas. Parents report that they are proud of Essendon School and the impact of Christian values and ethos. They enjoy attending celebration worship and comment on the warmth and security in school. They feel welcomed and contribute fully to school life so that pupils benefit. The school regularly seeks the views and opinions of parents, pupils and staff. This ensures that self-evaluation is robust and accurate.

The vision for the school as a Church of England school has been clearly shared with staff, parents, governors and pupils. The school is on a journey, a necessary and ambitious journey but one the whole school and church is committed to.