

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Hormead Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Great Hormead, Buntingford, Hertfordshire, SG9 0NR	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese / Methodist District	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Date of inspection	18 May 2017
Date of last inspection	27 April 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided First 117439
Headteacher	Philip Asher
Inspector's name and number	Lindsay Fraser 107

School context

In September 2014, Hormead Voluntary Aided School changed from a primary school (4–11 years) to a first school (3–9 years). It is a small school with two year groups in each of the three classes. Most pupils are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for looked-after children and those eligible for free school meals, is below the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is slightly above average. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2015 following a period of interim leadership. There has been high staff turnover since 2014 when the previous substantive headteacher left.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Hormead Church of England Voluntary Aided First School as a Church of England school are good

- The headteacher, supported by the governing body, has established a strong Christian ethos, upon which all decisions, policies and actions are clearly based. The impact on pupils' behaviour and attitudes is already apparent.
- The school's Christian values determine the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC), enabling pupils to develop confidence in reflecting upon and expressing their views and feelings.
- The strong partnership of the headteacher and parish rector, based on their compassion for the community, seeks to address the wide ranging needs of all pupils

Areas to improve

- Raise standards of achievement in religious education (RE) through embedding the new curriculum and developing an effective system of assessment.
- Establish a more formal system of monitoring and evaluation to ensure that standards in RE are improving.
- Ensure that pupils have a good knowledge of the links between the school values and Biblical material, using opportunities in RE and collective worship.

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

It is evident that Christian values have become deeply embedded throughout the life of the school community since the appointment of the current headteacher. The headteacher has ensured that a strong, shared vision, based on seven key agreed Christian values, underpins every aspect of the school's provision. Christian values, each based on a Biblical text, are made explicit in display throughout the school, through the school website and in communications to parents. Pupils, staff, governors and parents are able to articulate how these values have improved relationships, behaviour and learning. Relationships are clearly founded on six of these values, mutual respect, peace, co-operation, kindness, honesty and love for each other. Pupils now support each other and younger pupils in sorting out disagreements and conflicts through reflecting on the school values. Where intervention is necessary, staff also take the same approach, avoiding punitive action whenever possible. Consequently, relationships at all levels are very good. Based on the school's seventh value of aspiration, standards of achievement for all pupils are rising because the headteacher ensures that the curriculum is varied, engaging and rich. Despite this being a small school the opportunities and enrichment activities provided are extensive. Underpinned by the headteacher's Christian vision that each pupil should enjoy life to its full, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is apparent in all aspects of the curriculum. For example, every pupil in the school plays a musical instrument, enjoys a variety of sports experiences and participates in the weekly Forest Schools activities. Forest school education is an area of great strength in which pupils' understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of nature is developed, together with a responsibility for personal safety and for protecting the environment. Rigorous monitoring of pupils' achievement by the headteacher ensures that appropriate and extensive intervention is put in place to address the needs of those at risk of underachieving. In their desire to raise aspirations, the headteacher and rector have taken wide ranging actions to ensure pupils, whose absence impacts upon their progress, are in school, ready and able to learn. Pupil voice is beginning to have an impact within the school. This is because pupils are divided into four 'house huddles', each led by one of the oldest pupils. Huddles meet together to discuss a range of issues, from charity giving such as Tearfund and Dwarf Sports Association, to the evaluation of collective worship and future practice within the school. In this small school where there is little diversity the headteacher ensures that pupils are gaining a knowledge and understanding of other faiths and cultures. Pupils are now able to articulate why it is important to know about other faiths and they speak enthusiastically about visiting a mosque and gurdwara where learning was set in context. Pupils are beginning to understand the way in which faith guides people's lives and are increasingly confident in stating their own beliefs whilst respecting the views of others. The school has identified that pupils are still at an early stage of understanding that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith. Pupils enjoy religious education (RE) and are keen to talk about what they have learned. Their knowledge is now extending as a result of the improving quality of teaching in RE. Their understanding of how each value is underpinned by Biblical material is at an early stage, although those stories which the pupils do know they can talk about confidently. During the inspection pupils confidently explained which values were exemplified in the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is an important feature in the daily lives of pupils and staff. Governors, parents and staff all recognise the impact the current headteacher has made in transforming collective worship. Collective worship is well planned as a result of the fortnightly meetings between the headteacher and parish rector. Pupils also recognise how collective worship now impacts upon their behaviour and attitudes towards themselves and towards others. In a recent survey all pupils stated that they enjoy worship. This is because worship is consistent in its format, engaging and relevant. Biblical material is included in all aspects of worship and pupils are beginning to develop knowledge of some Bible stories and theological concepts. Pupils participate enthusiastically to collective worship through writing prayers, taking part in role play and singing with gusto. Pupils are aware of God as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in worship. At the gathering for worship volunteers are welcomed to 'Open the Box', from which one pupil removes the Bible, the cross and the candle. Another pupil reminds the school that these represent God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, thus supporting pupils' understanding of their importance in worship. On the day of the inspection every pupil volunteered for this role. Likewise, all pupils wanted to participate in an activity where the image of the human body from the Bible was used as an example of how different parts work together for the good of the whole. Pupils quickly understood both the analogy and the relevance to their current value of co-operation. Prayer and reflection are strong features in the daily lives of the pupils who state that they enjoy these many opportunities. Even the youngest pupils are able to explain that prayer can happen anywhere and how some places, actions and objects can help them feel closer to God. Prayer spaces, both inside and outside, are being introduced to further extend pupils' spiritual development. Through their 'house huddles' pupils are involved in identifying the best places to site these and which resources to purchase with money donated by the parochial church council. Leaders use a range of creative engagement activities enabling pupils to have a broad range of spiritual experiences. One example of this was during Lent when each pupil was offered an ice cube to feel the pain of sin and to feel forgiveness as the ice melted into a bowl. This sense of awe and wonder contributes to pupils' spiritual development, but the deeper theological and philosophical enquiry is at an early stage and as a result pupils have a developing understanding of the Trinity, Christian

theological concepts and Anglican traditions and practice. Friday celebration assemblies, during which an act of worship also takes place, are well attended and enjoyed by parents because pupils' achievements are highly valued and praised. Services in the church for special events are also well attended by parents and members of the local community. When pupils leave at the end of Year 4 this occasion is marked with a special service of prayer, readings and singing in which pupils participate. Bibles, paid for by the parochial church council, are presented to all leavers. Pupils also enjoy and respect the opportunity to lead the village Act of Remembrance at the memorial on Armistice Day. Some informal evaluation of collective worship has taken place with pupils, through surveys and the use of 'house huddles'. Feedback from a 'house huddle' led to the introduction of a pictorial form Lord's Prayer to support pupils' understanding and memory.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

There is a strong commitment to re-establish RE as a core element of the school curriculum. The development of the curriculum itself, improvements in teaching and learning and the establishment of a system of assessment are still in their early stages, following substantial changes within the school in the last three years. However, there is clear evidence of good standards in some areas as a result of the introduction of an enquiry based approach to the teaching and learning of RE. However, this is not yet consistent across the school. Some headteacher and governor monitoring has taken place, although formal observations of teaching and learning are planned for the future. At its best, teaching challenges pupils and places an emphasis on developing critical thought. Pupils respond well to this and do so with enthusiasm when inspired to think deeply, creatively and form opinions. One example of this is the role play presented by Years 3 and 4 depicting each aspect of the Easter story and the thoughts of the different characters. A recording of this is highlighted on the school website as a demonstration of the growing importance of RE in the school. Older pupils can quickly refer to a range of topics which have particularly interested them. They regard the subject as especially relevant to themselves in today's world. As part of the school's creative curriculum opportunities are taken to inspire pupils' writing through topics in RE. Although there is evidence of good attainment in samples of pupils' work there is not at present a coherent record of pupils' progress in relation to their starting points. A tracking system has been introduced, but it is not yet sufficiently embedded to effectively identify and measure pupils' progress. Following recent training, teachers are feeling more confident and enthusiastic about teaching the new content and themes of the 'Understanding Christianity' project. Pupils also learn about a range of other faiths and there is evidence that they are developing a sound knowledge of beliefs and practices.

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

The governing body and headteacher have established and promote a clear vision in which the school's Christian character enables every pupil to fulfil their social, academic and intellectual potential. As a result, all decisions and policy making are based on the school's seven Christian values. Governors have a good knowledge of how well pupils are achieving academically because they are now provided with clear information on the attainment and progress of groups and individuals throughout the school. This enables governors to challenge and understand the background to any underperformance and the quality of intervention. The majority of governors have been appointed within the past two years. They acknowledge that monitoring and evaluation, identified in the previous inspection as a focus for development, are still too informal. A Christian character committee has been formed and has undertaken some visits. As a result of training, plans are now in place to formalise visits, especially in relation to the impact of the Christian character on pupils' knowledge and understanding. Monitoring so far has concentrated on pupil and parent voice. The results of this show that the revitalised Christian ethos and the improved quality of collective worship are already having an impact upon pupils' behaviour and attitudes. The contribution of the clergy and church members to school life is very effective as demonstrated by their involvement in collective worship and pastoral visits for staff and families. The school and the church give practical and prayerful support to each other, particularly over significant events such as celebrations and church services. The headteacher, as an organist, and pupils have participated in services organised by the church. Parish support for families in need includes the provision of food and clothing parcels, transport and spiritual support. To support the development of prayer spaces and RE resources in the school the parochial church council has donated £100 to school budget. The headteacher and staff are very involved in the local cluster of schools through peer coaching, moderation of standards, professional development and the hosting of a science competition. This has all proved very beneficial for the professional development of staff working in a small school. The headteacher has taken on the leadership of RE, ensuring that the subject has a high profile within the school. As a result of his subject knowledge and skills together with staff training on the Understanding Christianity project, the capacity for improving the quality of RE is good. Although the school is beginning to grow in numbers, the governors are mindful of ensuring the future sustainability of this church school and have embarked upon a process of strategic development and succession planning.