



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Barley Voluntary Controlled Church of England First School

Church End, Barley, Royston, SG8 8JW

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 1 July 2016

Date of last inspection: 28 March 2011

School's unique reference number: 117386

Headteacher: Margaret Davies-McKeon

Inspector's name and number: Lindsay Fraser 107

School context

Barley First School is a small school of 37 pupils aged 3 – 9 years, serving the village of Barley and the surrounding area. All pupils are of White British heritage at the time of the inspection. Few pupils are eligible for additional government funding known as pupil premium. The number of those with special educational needs and disabilities is below average. The school has a formal collaboration with Barkway Church of England Voluntary Aided School with a head of collaboration who is also the headteacher of Barkway School. Pupils in Key Stage 2 from the two schools are taught together in a single class spending a proportion of the week in each school. A new rector was appointed within the last year.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Barley VC Church of England School as a Church of England school are good

- Underpinned by the school ethos of 'Christian Love in Action', the governors' decision to enter into a formal collaboration with Barkway First School is having significant impact on progress and well-being.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is excellent because the school is committed to teaching its Christian values through first hand experiences.
- The recently appointed rector has had a significant impact upon the development of spirituality in collective worship which has benefited the whole school community.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that pupils can link their school values to Bible stories through more cohesive planning and evaluation in collective worship.
- Include within collective worship a stronger focus on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit so that pupils gain a clearer understanding of the Trinity.
- Ensure that regular monitoring and evaluation of the school's distinctive Christian character involves the whole school community to inform strategic planning.

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

The school's ethos of 'Christian love in action' permeates the whole school, demonstrating that Christian values and the Christian character are understood by all pupils and staff. Relationships at all levels are excellent, enabling pupils to develop high self-esteem. All pupils make good progress, including those who have special needs because they are very well supported. Attendance has improved significantly due to the measures taken by the school. The developing collaboration with Barkway First school is benefiting pupils both academically and in their social development. This is because the headteacher, who also has the position of head of the collaboration, has skillfully united the staff and pupils through their shared Christian character. This underpins the sharing of good practice between staff and the support which pupils give to each other, especially in the mixed Year 3 and 4 class. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is excellent because of the wide range of experiences planned within the curriculum. Pupils are developing a very good understanding of and respect for diverse communities. The leadership of the collaboration has established strong links with a large and contrasting primary school in London. Pupils have hosted a visit from their counterparts in London with reciprocal visits to the London school. This is enabling pupils to experience at first-hand a culturally diverse setting. Visits have been complemented by a visit to a Sri Lankan Hindu Temple, enabling even young pupils to relate some similarities and differences between two faiths. Pupils are clearly benefiting from these exchanges because they are keen to talk about their feelings and knowledge gained. Written exchanges are taking place enabling pupils from different faiths to share what their different festivals mean to them. Pupils in Key Stage 1 learn about refugees and can talk with knowledge and empathy about those who have to leave their homes. As a result, pupils raise money for Save the Children Fund to support refugees. This has built on the 'camp-out' from the previous year where pupils paid money to camp on the school field. This raised money for the charity, but also enabled pupils, led by a foundation governor, to reflect on the plight of refugees realizing that, unlike the refugees, they would be returning home. Pupil voice is a strong feature of the school and the pupil council involves all pupils, meeting twice termly. Led by the oldest pupils in the school pupils wanted to consider the extent to which they were demonstrating 'Living God's Love'. As a result they have created a display showing all the examples of where this happens, such as through collective worship, kindness, prayer, friendship and leading by example. Their support for the Bishop's Harvest, Water Aid and the Royston Foodbank are further examples of their thoughtfulness and sensitivity which has also been remarked upon by visitors to the school. Pupils have a deep understanding and spiritual awareness. They requested more opportunities for reflection through the development of a sensory and reflective area within the school grounds. This had been an area for development in the previous inspection and is now in place. Religious education (RE) has become a much stronger area of the curriculum as a result of the sharing of expertise with Barkway and the input of the recently appointed rector and Barkway subject leader. Pupils value the importance of RE in their lives and use their knowledge and understanding to express themselves with a depth of thinking. This has inspired the rector and teachers to explore opportunities for those pupils who wish to take their discussions and reflection to an even deeper level.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The effective partnership with the local church, especially since the appointment of the current rector, is a substantial strength in the quality of collective worship. All pupils have become fully engaged in acts of worship and really enjoy the creative and imaginative approaches recently introduced by the new rector. This is enabling pupils to explore faith through Biblical stories and the relevance to their own lives. During an act of worship on the day of inspection even the youngest pupils were able to learn from the story of Jonah. This was because objects and artefacts were used together with time for discussion and reflection. Reflection is becoming an established part of collective worship and pupils are applying reflective practices at other points during the day, such as the use of indoor and outdoor reflective areas. Staff are now beginning to adopt these same practices in their delivery of collective worship. From the moment of gathering together for collective worship pupils are engaged in a spiritual atmosphere. They join hands together in a circle whilst singing from memory one of the school's songs, engendering a feeling of tranquillity. Pupils value this because it creates a sense of community and togetherness. Parents state that their children often talk about their times of worship and even the youngest children are able to relate some of the stories. Planning for collective worship is based on the diocesan schedule and the school values. Pupils are beginning to link

the values to some Biblical stories. For example they were able to link their recent value of service to Jesus serving others. However, this is still at an early stage. Services based on Christian festivals and special events take place termly in the church. These are well attended by parents and members of the local community. Older pupils plan and lead the church services with the rector. Pupils are now developing knowledge of the Anglican pattern of worship through participation in these services and from learning some of the Anglican responses. Services are well attended by parents and, as a result of parent requests to have more opportunities to share times of worship, the school are considering ways in which this can be possible. A range of different worship leaders has enhanced pupils' wider experience of worship. The school now shares all services with Barkway First School. These have included a service at the beginning of school year and a joint harvest festival in the shared wildlife area; this was an innovative and spiritual experience for all participants. Pupils were also inspired by the Ash Wednesday service where they were invited to write down actions in their lives which they wanted to have forgiven. Their responses were then burned, the ash from this being used for the signing of the cross on pupils' foreheads for those wishing to receive it. This again was described as a very spiritual and moving experience. Teaching about Christian festivals and features of Christianity has improved since the arrival of the current rector and this is having an impact on pupils' understanding. For example their understanding of the meaning of Easter was such that parents commented that they had been learning from their children. Whilst pupils are developing a good understanding of some features of Christianity the school has recognised that this area needs further development. For example their knowledge of the Christian idea of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is still limited. Prayer is an important and integral part of the school day. Recently there has been a focus on praying as talking to God. This has been led by the rector and has resulted in many pupils writing sensitive and insightful prayers. Planning for collective worship is a collaborative experience across the two schools involving all staff and the rector. It has been agreed that the involvement of pupils will be the next step. Daily planning for collective worship takes account of pupils' responses from previous acts of worship. However more formal monitoring of the impact of collective worship upon pupils and a cohesive development of Biblical material has been identified by the school as an area to develop.

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

The governors' decisive actions, based on clear Christian values, to enter into a formal collaboration between Barkway and Barley First School has led to considerable improvements for the school. Reflecting the school's ethos of 'Christian Love in Action', senior leaders have overcome several challenges to provide the best teaching and learning environment for both pupils and staff. Creative groupings and placements across the two schools now enable pupils to gain maximum benefit from the collaboration. Governors have also introduced more flexible working patterns in the interests of staff well-being. As a result, staff feel valued and supported. Collaboration has created a greater capacity for leadership, staff development and future succession planning for the two church schools. Staff have enjoyed and valued this leadership development and their involvement in moving the school forward. Governors have given good support to the subject leader for RE, enabling her to share and demonstrate good practice across the two schools. Standards are therefore improving. Governors are keen to ensure that all information given to them regarding the school's own assessment of achievement and well-being is accurate through their termly monitoring days where challenging questions are asked. Foundation governors have a regular presence in the school and have a very good understanding of the developing Christian values and increasing impact of collective worship. Whilst the governing body is very aware of the strengths and areas for development within the school they are less clear in their understanding of the link between the school's Christian character and achievement. Leadership of the school has also identified the need to be more pro-active in sharing and celebrating the schools' Christian values and distinctiveness with parents and the wider community. The partnership between the church and school is strong and is developing further as the new rector becomes established. The church also benefits from the contribution of pupils who participate in church services during the year. Together with the joint parents' associations the two schools are forging stronger links between the two village communities, thus developing greater opportunities for pupils and families.

SIAMS report July 2016 Barley Voluntary Controlled Church of England First School,
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