



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St. Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Lower School

Brunts Lane,  
Biggleswade,  
Bedfordshire. SG18 0LY

**Previous SIAMS grade:** Outstanding

**Current inspection grade:** Good

**Diocese:** St. Albans

Local authority: Central Bedfordshire

Dates of inspection: 30 June 2016

Date of last inspection: 12 July 2011

School's unique reference number: 109595

Headteacher: Sue Rolfe

Inspector's name and number: Shirley Whales 830

#### School context

St Andrew's CE Lower School has very recently expanded and now has a new, second, site on the other side of Biggleswade. There are now over 500 pupils on roll, mainly from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils which special education needs is average. The proportion of pupils with statements or education, health and care plans is higher due to the school including a support base for pupils with speech and language difficulties. The leadership team, including governors is well established and has overseen the recent expansion.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Andrew's C of E VC Lower School as a Church of England school are good.

- Explicit Christian values make a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural (SMSC) development.
- School leaders and governors ensure that the school's Christian ethos continues to develop to suit the school's new context and is consistent across both sites.
- Collective worship makes an important contribution to the pupils' developing understanding of Bible stories and the relevance to their own lives.

#### Areas to improve

- Develop a consistent approach to the delivery of worship, which includes the elements of liturgy and involves pupils more in planning and leading so as to cultivate their spirituality.
- Develop the skills and abilities of leaders, including governors, to effectively monitor and evaluate the overall school's Christian distinctiveness so that future planning is well informed.
- Ensure, through making it part of school improvement planning, that the good practice in religious education (RE) which exists in some classes is shared so there is consistency and rigour throughout the school.

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

The school's motto of 'Aspire, Believe, Celebrate,' is embodied in the work of the school. The school's values are firmly rooted in Christian principles and are understood by all members of the school community. There is strong evidence of effective moral and social development which is underpinned by the Christian values. Pupils understand how the values relate to everyday life and apply these to their behaviour. One child explained that the value of love was difficult to follow because 'it was really hard to love your enemies'. The school now plans to evaluate the value of reflection areas in classrooms in relation to the Christian values so as to add greater spiritual depth to pupils' contributions. The Christian values are given a high profile within the school. They are reflected in the way that families are cared for and in pupils' academic learning and their well-being. The emphasis on the Christian value of love is exemplified by the attention given to parents with children who have special educational needs. This has a positive impact on the constructive relationships between families, pupils and the school. This has resulted in improved attendance. The majority of pupils make good progress to achieve results broadly in line with schools nationally. Curriculum weeks such as Art in Heaven make an important contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Pupils gain a growing understanding of their role in local and global communities through their involvement in a range of activities. These include sport and music performances, and initiatives to help others, such as Red Nose Day. The school has recently investigated Oxfam's Global Learning Programme as a way of improving pupils' appreciation of Christianity as a multi-cultural worldwide faith. Some pupils are able to articulate their understanding of different faiths with an impressive degree of accuracy and interest. One year four pupil described one aspect of Sikhism: 'the Sikh flag is lowered, the pole washed in milk and the new flag is raised. When they touch the flag, it brings them closer to God.' The school has recently introduced Philosophy for Children, which has improved the discussion around ultimate questions but the practice is not yet fully embedded and RE is not challenging enough. The school plans to review the pitch and expectations in RE so that consistent and highly effective provision is evident across the school.

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

Collective worship has been enriched as plans now include a strong focus on explicit values linked to Bible stories. Pupils see worship as 'a good time when God can hear what we need help for'. Pupils respond respectfully throughout worship; some participating with confidence and a good degree of understanding. Pupils are able to apply worship themes to their daily lives, for example, by using the values in context of thinking about their behaviour at playtimes. Pupils celebrate major festivals in the church year but they are not yet able to explain the distinct elements of Anglican liturgy. However, these distinctively Christian elements of worship are used to create an appropriate atmosphere in Key Stage 1 acts of worship. Here pupils have a sound knowledge of Bible stories. They listen courteously and respond spontaneously by confidently praying their own prayers within the 'circle of prayer'. The school has started to involve pupils more in class worship and intends to extend these opportunities further to include whole school worship. Recently appointed collective worship ambassadors enthuse about their 'special responsibility' in their new role and 'can't wait to get involved'. The school has developed prayer spaces within the school but these have not yet provided a wide range of opportunities for pupils to explore ways that can support them in how they want to reflect. Some pupils have a significant and impressive understanding of the Trinity, one child articulately explained, 'God the Father to guide us, God the Son who came down to earth and was crucified to save us and God the Spirit who is always with us'. However, this degree of understanding is not always shared by other pupils and so reflects the inconsistencies across the school. Foundation governors have paid regular visits to the school and they actively contribute in supporting pupils with visits to the church. These valuable experiences help pupils to deepen their spiritual understanding and to build a familiarity with Christian faith and tradition. Evaluation of the quality of worship by senior leaders and governors has become more formalised but this is at an early stage of development.

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

The leadership team has responded well to the challenges inherent in the school's expansion to a two site school. They have established a shared Christian ethos across both sites by promoting their agreed Christian values. These are shared on the school's website and widely recognised throughout the school community. Focus for development points from the last inspection have been fully addressed strengthening the school's Christian distinctiveness. However, elements of this have been insufficiently well reflected in school improvement planning and professional development opportunities whilst attention has been given to other priorities during the expansion of the school. Nevertheless, the Christian ethos and values which underpin the nurture of every child as a valued individual are recognised by parents. This is made explicitly clear and is seen in the inclusive environment and the high expectations of behaviour and trust that are characteristic of the school. School leaders mirror this Christian commitment to value each pupil, which is made possible through effective systems for pastoral care and academic monitoring. The appointment of the new RE and collective worship leader has added a specifically Christian dimension to the leadership team and she is well-placed to focus on and lead in these important areas. Good use is made of her expertise and in the short time that she has been in post, she has gathered evidence from observations, evaluations and questionnaires and as a result has clearly identified key areas for improvement. Arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. Links with the local church are an integral part of being a church school and both parents and pupils enjoy the festivals and celebrations that bring the families together. The local vicar provides strong support for the school but his increasing role means that his visits are less frequent. However, backing from foundation governors cements the links by keeping both church and school informed and engaged. Pupils' visits to the church strengthen the affiliation and help to give them visible, 'quality experiences' in order to develop their 'personal relationship with God'. The RE leader has been well-supported in her professional development and benefitted from valuable training with the diocese, which, as aforementioned, has enabled her to gain a better understanding of where further improvements are required. She has a secure understanding of the actions that are essential to promote the importance and the distinctiveness of the school's Christian character.

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