



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Pulford Voluntary Aided Church of England Lower School

Pulford Road, Leighton Buzzard LU7 1AB

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Central Bedfordshire

Dates of inspection: 02 February 2016

Date of last inspection: 11 January 2011

School's unique reference number: 109619

Headteacher: David Heather

Inspector's name and number: Judith Ruff 528

School context

Pulford VA Lower School is an expanding, popular and oversubscribed school situated in parkland, within the town centre, adjoining a feeder middle school. The headteacher has been in post for seven years. The school's last Ofsted report was in 2010, when the school was judged to be outstanding. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils receiving support for special educational needs is above the national average. All Saints Parish Church is a short walking distance from the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Pulford Voluntary Aided Lower School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- School leaders' strong and clearly articulated vision for 'a church school for the whole community', has resulted in high quality outreach opportunities, enabling local community schools to benefit through the 'Excellence in RE' project
- Excellent levels of pastoral care and concern result in each child knowing that they are loved and valued as unique individuals made in God's image
- Pupils' appreciation and use of personal prayer and reflection in their daily lives has enabled them to grow as mature, spiritually aware community members
- The school's commitment to providing high quality first-hand learning opportunities in RE inspires and enthuses pupils to understand and appreciate the importance of faith and belief within Christianity in the local context and for other world religions

Areas to improve

- Deepen pupils' understanding of worship by enabling them to plan and lead more often
- Increase opportunities for pupils to write extended responses in RE enabling them to demonstrate their depth of thought, reflection and understanding of their studies

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

In this school the distinctive Christian character shines through everything it communicates to families and those out in the wider community. It really does live out on a daily basis the mission statement 'God's family through faith, hope and love, dedicated to realising the potential of each person'. Christian values, such as love and compassion, are demonstrated through generous levels of charitable giving. Importantly they are also evident through the small acts of kindness shown through 'going the extra mile' to support and help others who are experiencing difficult and challenging times. Parents interviewed spoke glowingly of the school's inclusive approach to welcoming all the family and ensuring that they receive the benefits of, as one described, 'a strong, Christ-centred community'. Pupils leave the school with attainment levels significantly above national averages. Those with special educational needs and those for whom the school receives additional funding, also attain well and make good progress. This is due to extremely high levels of care and attention, relating back to the whole community's mission to 'realise the potential of each person'. Values such as 'co-operation' are linked by the children to St. Paul's teachings on being part of Christ's body, each part being important as part of the whole. Pupils' ability to persevere and to find the courage to keep going when things are difficult is inspired by biblical figures. Pupils are mature and responsible, taking on School Council membership with pride and commitment. The 'family feel, where everyone smiles' ensures, through schemes such as 'playground friends', that all relationships are harmonious and respectful. Behaviour policies emphasise the approach being 'firmly grounded in the school's Christian ethos'. The fact that attendance rates are high and there have been no exclusions can be directly linked to the exceedingly strong pastoral care levels. These ensure that each child is secure in their importance as being special and unique, both to God and the whole school community. Pupils' awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural faith is strengthened through a link with a sponsored child in Kenya. Pupils' have excellent awareness of the impact of the Christian faith and belief and understand the key concepts around the sacraments through RE work. The use of the church for RE focused activities, together with opportunities to engage with members of the local church community, gives Christianity relevance in the local context. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, reinforced through innovative approaches to learning outside through the Forest Schools' initiative. This enables pupils to appreciate the wonders of the natural world, whilst working together as teams to complete specific projects, such as the building of dens.

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

Collective worship is clearly engaging and inspirational for the whole school community and it is owned by all as a very special part of the school day. Through regular, high quality worship opportunities pupils know first-hand the joy of praising God through music, prayers and reflecting on Bible stories and texts. Pupils' spiritual development is enhanced greatly by the confident way in which they use prayer as a tool for personal support. Parents interviewed spoke of their children offering to pray for sick relatives and in one case teaching the Lord's Prayer to a grandparent. During the inspection, a small school choir sang the 'Nunc Dimittis' very beautifully as part of the Candlemas preparations. Pupils' faces and body postures reflect how moved they are by the songs they sing, such as 'Purify my heart'. Regular use of Anglican liturgy to provide a clear structure has given pupils a confident, self-assured approach and ownership of the worship. They listen carefully to Bible passages and can understand how they relate to the current focused value. Christian festivals and seasons are well publicised and pupils can experience first-hand the ways in which the local church is decorated and furnished as part of each celebration. Pupils participate well through readings, prayers and musical contributions. They love opportunities for role play of Bible stories, for example, when the 'Open the Book' visitors lead worship. However, opportunities for them to plan and lead acts of worship are not sufficiently regular. The school benefits from a weekly clergy led act of worship, usually from a member of the local Anglican Team Ministry. However, an open invitation for other Christian denominations within the town to lead worship has resulted in both Methodist and Baptist ministers taking up this offer. Pupils have a rich experience of worship styles and benefit greatly from opportunities to worship in 'our church'. Pupils have developed a good understanding of the Trinity, both through work in RE and through Trinitarian prayers in worship. Monitoring and evaluation of worship has led to significant improvements, such as enabling pupils to worship on a regular basis in two separate age and phase appropriate ways.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

Pupils' are inspired by RE, both by the creative, cross curricular way in which it is taught, but also through the excellent opportunities that the school provides through an impressive programme of visits and visitors. These reinforce the pupils' appreciation of the importance of belief and worship practices, not only in a variety of Christian denominations, but also within the Jewish and Islamic faiths. Pupils are highly energised and motivated through discussions and role plays, which enable them to think deeply about key questions and concepts important to believers. Excellent levels of RE subject expertise also ensure high quality planning of learning tasks. These are designed to enable pupils to learn about different religions and reflect on their own responses to what they have learned. Values work is underpinned through the celebration of common themes such as love, forgiveness and generosity of spirit. Pupils understand differences, but appreciate the need 'to know more, so that respect can grow'. Standards of attainment are at least in line with national expectations and a significant number of pupils attain above expectations. Progress is rapid through excellent opportunities to debate, experience first-hand the impact of religion on followers and to record their thoughts and ideas. A scrutiny of work showed creative approaches to recording and assessing outcomes, including the use of photographs and pupil reflections. Extended writing opportunities in RE are limited resulting in too few opportunities to demonstrate the depth of knowledge and understanding from the units of work that learners are capable of orally. Teachers are enthusiastic in RE lessons, which have a good pace, excellent support for those pupils with special educational needs and clearly defined learning intentions, against which both marking and feedback are given. Monitoring and evaluation of RE has been focused and is increasingly leading to opportunities for staff to discuss outcomes between classes and to learn from others' practice and successes. The school has in place a thorough RE action plan, produced after a detailed subject audit. The school has led the way locally in providing high quality outreach opportunities for community schools, using the local church as a base. This 'Excellence in RE' project is becoming increasingly popular with schools across the town.

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

All school leaders, including governors, clearly articulate a strong and unequivocal vision for 'a church school for the whole community'. The inclusive, caring and nurturing ethos permeates throughout the school, building consistently on the mission statement for 'all to realise their potential'. It welcomes those of all faiths or none with the same deep, sincere love and respect founded on Christian scripture and lived out daily through the personal witness of both leaders and staff. Pupils thrive in an environment where their potential as school leaders is recognised and developed in the service of others. Governors deeply value the school's church foundation and use their skills willingly and generously. For example, the current vice-chair of governors, a Muslim academic has undertaken staff training on Islam and its key beliefs in order to raise confidence and levels of understanding further. Governors are closely involved with the strategic planning of the school's Christian vision through contributing to the school's self-evaluation using their knowledge and understanding gained through regular monitoring visits. They are involved in RE book scrutinies and know that standards achieved in RE are of the same standard as those in literacy. They track the school development priorities carefully and thoroughly. Parents are actively encouraged to 'have their say' through regular 'Think Tanks' resulting in the provision of ideas of how values can be encouraged to permeate into home environments. Leadership of collective worship and RE is very high profile within the school, resulting in a sense of passion, conviction and direction for the contribution that both make to the ethos of a church school. The vicar also makes a valuable contribution through regular leadership of worship and the support for families through church initiatives such as 'Messy Mass' and 'All Age Worship' each Sunday. The headteacher is involved in the leadership of 'All-Age worship', building close and familiar links between church and school. Links with the diocese are strong and productive. For example, one teacher has been able to participate in diocesan aspirant church school leadership programmes, from which he has gained a broader awareness of church schools and their mission. Well thought out, clearly articulated policies, supportive of the school's Christian heritage guide and support both staff and parents in their understanding of the school's work. The impact of the school's Christian ethos in supporting spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the taught curriculum is considerable, where carefully thought through opportunities to weave through the values and Gospel teachings into the daily experiences of the pupils are prominent.

SIAMS report February 2016 Pulford VA Lower School Leighton Buzzard LU7 IAB