



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Milton Ernest Voluntary Controlled Lower School

Thurleigh Road
Milton Ernest
Bedford
MK44 1RF

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Bedford Borough

Dates of inspection: 23 March 2016

Date of last inspection: 2 March 2011

School's unique reference number: 109613

Headteacher: Lisa Virnuls

Inspector's name and number: Shirley Whales 830

School context

Milton Ernest VC Lower School is located in the heart of the village in close proximity to the local church. It is a smaller than average school with 53 pupils on role, most of whom are of white British heritage. The school accommodates a lower than average proportion of free school meals and pupils with special educational needs. Milton Ernest is federated with another small village school, Eileen Wade Lower School in Upper Dean, and the headteacher shares her time between the two schools. The headteacher has been in post since September 2015.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Milton Ernest VC Lower School as a Church of England school are good

- The school's Christian values contribute particularly well to pupils' personal development and well-being; the pastoral support given inclusively to all pupils enables them to achieve well.
- Christian principles are at the heart of the development and motivation of staff, allowing them to develop their passions and helping them to enrich the curriculum so that there are clear benefits to the pupils.
- Worship is important in the life of the school and the community.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that systematic monitoring and evaluation of the school's distinctive Christian character involves the whole school community so that school improvement procedures are more effective.
- Make more of the opportunities to enrich pupils' spiritual development through prayer and reflection in worship and across the school.
- Provide more occasions for pupils to experience people from other religions and cultures, to give them greater knowledge of diverse communities.

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

Christian values and aspects of the school's Christian character are taught well using Bible stories, artefacts and role-play. The pupils are 'immersed in rich experiences' which enables them to care for one another and achieve well. The holistic approach to providing the pupils with the best possible education is linked to a rich, broad and balanced curriculum. At a banner dedication ceremony involving the Bishop of Bedford, parents, local church members and the school, all present paid tribute to the pupils who contributed to the design, 'New Life, Fresh Hope'. Whilst the values impact on pupils' daily lives, pupils are not always able to link them to a Christian focus. They can talk knowledgeably and sensitively about them in terms of developing positive relationships, enabling them to make choices and respect one another. Pupils know they are valued and trusted by their teachers and in return pupils recognise their respect for adults in school, so they are polite, listen to them and do their best. They enjoy coming to school and want to learn. Parents, who have opportunities to express how the values are exemplified outside school, speak highly of the impact that they have made on their children but they are not fully aware of the Christian distinctiveness attributed to the values. Attendance is good and the school addresses any low level disruption issues using the golden rules and consistent class and playground management strategies. The Christian character and values contribute particularly well to pupils' moral and social development and pupils are beginning to develop spiritually through a range of experiences. They speak excitedly about a project to design a reflective area within the school garden. They clearly enjoy the involvement and speak knowledgeably about the signs and symbols they may include in this 'special area'. This has provided valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their spirituality through discussions and debate. One child spoke enthusiastically about the topic, 'How Jesus inspires people' and how this has helped her to think about what she wants to create in their garden. The provision of religious education (RE) is well-established and it makes an important contribution to extending pupils' appreciation of religious and cultural diversity. Their understanding of Christianity as a world-wide faith is at an age-appropriate level, encompassing many beliefs and festivals. In their RE lessons pupils learn about other major religions, but opportunities to gain first-hand experience of those who practise other faiths are limited.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The school community recognises the importance of worship and they particularly like the links with the local church. Pupils attend church on a monthly basis and members of the clergy are regular visitors to the school. Pupils engage in worship respectfully by singing and responding appropriately. They share their achievements and help to prepare for worship on a daily basis. Bible stories are linked to the school's value of the month and pupils discuss the feelings of the characters in the stories. Whilst worship is planned by linking the values and Christian festivals; further Christian themes and liturgical links are less well developed. Other Christian traditions are mentioned in collective worship, for example the work of the Salvation Army, but visits from those of other traditions are rare. Pupils are however exposed to modern day examples of faith in action through Christian perspectives such as their contributions to the Food Bank and they react 'compassionately' by responding sensitively. One child expresses how 'it important to help those who have not'. Opportunities are provided for pupils to write and join in with prayers and responses. Prayerful moments provide them with a sense of unity and cohesion and reflection areas in school are being developed to improve these opportunities further. Pupils take part saying prayers at different times of the day but opportunities for focussed prayer and reflection during worship are not yet realised. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of theological concepts. They explain their thoughts about the Trinity using information gleaned from the recent St Patrick's Day assembly in which they refer to the shamrock representing God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pupils' level of participation in worship is increasing and school leaders are mindful of extending pupil involvement further. Staff and clergy engage in delivering and observing worship but a systematic process for planning and evaluation, that involves all stakeholders, is not yet in place to enable the impact that collective worship has on

the pupils' spiritual development can be monitored.

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

Whilst there has been a period of change in leadership over the last year, the school has succeeded in sustaining and developing its vision based on distinctively Christian values. However, whilst school leaders are all committed to the distinctively Christian vision and values, not all are yet clear about the part that they play in improving Milton Ernest as a church school. Governors, in particular, are not yet fully involved in the monitoring and evaluation of plans or the school's strategic direction in order to identify how the Christian values are having an impact on achievement and well-being. Leaders have a good understanding of recruitment processes and are mindful of retaining the school's distinctiveness through effective succession planning. Staff are deployed effectively and their talents valued so they are all encouraged to develop their individual passions, which enrich the curriculum for all pupils. The areas from the last inspection have been partially met and governors and those new to the school are aware of the urgency required to address them fully. Standards of achievement are excellent and good progress for all groups of learners can be attributed to the emphasis placed the school's understanding and monitoring of each individual's personal development. With cross curricular opportunities and links to worship themes, the older pupils are able to empathise with biblical characters and illustrate their reliance on God in times of need. This curriculum is becoming more rich and varied; it contributes to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their positive attitudes to learning. The school enjoys a close relationship with All Saints' Church, the diocese and the wider community in and beyond the federation; these embody a spirit of friendship and support and realise benefits for all staff and pupils. Through the curriculum, pupils are introduced to national and global topics. Both RE and collective worship hold a high profile within the school but monitoring has not been sufficiently rigorous to ensure continued improvement. Opportunities for professional development are taken with an intent to improve not only these areas but also the Christian distinctiveness of the school.

SIAMS report March 2016 Milton Ernest VC Lower School, Thurleigh Road, Milton Ernest, Bedford, MK44 1RF