



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### Ravensden Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School

Vicarage Close, Ravensden, Bedford MK44 2RW

**Previous SIAMS grade:** Good

**Current inspection grade:** Good

**Diocese:** St Albans

Local authority: Bedford Borough

Dates of inspection: 10 February 2016

Date of last inspection: 19 January 2011

School's unique reference number: 109623

Headteacher: Barbara North

Inspector's name and number: Juliet Lyal NS 829

#### School context

Ravensden Church of England (VA) Lower School is a small village school with 92 pupils on roll, of which 22 are pre-school. Most pupils are of White British origin and few live in the village. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above the national average and those eligible for additional funding by the pupil premium is just below average. The governors have agreed that the school should become a full primary school from September 2017. The small, 12<sup>th</sup> Century church is close by but there has not been a rector for 20 months. Ofsted inspected the school the day before this SIAMS.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ravensden C of E (VA) Lower School as a Church of England school are good.

- The school's distinctively Christian character has a positive impact on the attitude, behaviour and achievement of the pupils
- The strong relationships between all members of the school community are based on their commitment to maintain and develop the strong Christian ethos of the school
- The reflective and creative atmosphere, fostered by Christian values across the whole school, enhances the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils
- The investment in a high staff to pupils ratio enables all learners to be exceptionally well supported and flourish in their potential as children of God

#### Areas to improve

- Enable governors to fulfil their statutory responsibilities in relation to the distinctive Christian character of the school by ensuring this is regularly included as an agenda item in their programme of meetings
- Ensure that monitoring and evaluation of collective worship is fully recorded, strategies are developed for pupil-led worship and Anglican traditions become fully embedded.
- Develop strategies to ensure that written work in RE is in line with the higher level thinking and reflective skills that are now in place.

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

Following the SIAS 2011, the school's practice and policy has been to ensure that Christian values and character of the school are explicit and deeply embedded in the daily lives of the school community. This is now the case. Learners have no doubt that 'we are a Christian school' and describe how learning about, and living out, the Christian values are 'what we do'. The standard of pupil behaviour is very high and some pupils can explain how this is encouraged by the permanent Christian values display, with Biblical quotes, in their central hall. Pupils are excited about how, with staff and parents, the values bricks are awarded to build the tower on their local church collage. In discussion, some parents describe the positive impact of the Christian values on their children at home and believe that this is due to the staff being 'more than just teachers'. A grandparent commented 'they are very supportive and very Christian'. Others agreed that 'they care about our whole family'. The school believes that the rise in self-esteem of pupils promoted by the Christian values of the school contributes to the rise in attainment. With a high staff to pupil ratio, and established intervention programmes, pupils do well. At the end of Key Stage 1 (2015) attainment was significantly above national average. Pupils in Year 4 (2015), of which 29% needed specialist support, made significant progress in reading and in maths. Good progress was made in writing. Attendance is high because pupils want to be in school. Some parents choose this school over their local school because they like the high profile given to Christian values and its inclusivity. Since 2013, spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development has been a key theme for priority on the school development plan and is integral to all areas of the school's creative curriculum, thus becoming a natural part of teaching and learning. Pupils are confident and articulate in exploring theirs and others' spirituality and express their thoughts clearly. Religious education (RE) is treated as a core subject and makes a significant contribution to SMSC. When the Christian value of the month (Love) came up in an RE lesson discussion a pupil with special educational needs commented 'Love is more than like' and explained why. Pupils are well aware of the global nature of Christianity and show respect and understanding for those in their school and the wider community with faith and belief practices different to their own.

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

The school community values and expresses the importance of collective worship. Reception pupils upwards begin each day with members of staff by worshipping together. The leading of worship is shared by the head and teachers on a weekly rota, as well as adults from the local church community. Teachers ask to lead collective worship as they feel it is part of their own Christian commitment to the school. The senior teacher's planning enables pupils to develop a good understanding of the school's Christian values. Pupils can express this in discussion and the recently started 'prayer and reflection book' contains prayers written by the children based on the value of the month. Pupils know that worship focuses on the person of Jesus. A Year 3 pupil explained confidently how 'Jesus is God's son'. The church lectionary is usually followed, including a Bible reading, prayer and hymn. A visual stimulus often gives focus, for example a candle, which pupils say helps them to pray. Half termly class assemblies are delivered by the children. Year 1 & 2's assembly, on the school's current Christian value 'Love', was reflective, Biblical and challenging. All pupils were engaged and focused. Other pupils, teachers and parents joined in the singing and prayers. Since SIAS 2011, formal evaluations of the impact of collective worship on the school community have been undertaken and recorded by staff and governors although evaluation of each day's worship is not apparent. Pupil involvement has increased: Year 4 pupils have technical and practical duties and evaluate the worship in the newly made 'worship' book. Opportunities for pupil-led whole school worship are yet to come. Worship also takes place immediately before lunch when each class prays together with, in some classes, a pupil volunteering spontaneous prayer, as seen in Year 1 & 2. Pupils pray reverently and some say it's their 'way of talking with God' and reflecting. The lack of an incumbent has impacted collective worship and pupils are yet to be fully confident in Anglican practice. However, the school has benefitted from continuing church links through monthly worship led by a lay preacher and by termly services at the church. Some school families respond to invitations from the church to attend special Sunday services. A local church group, 'Open the Book', frequently leads Bible based assemblies. This, combined with visits of other Christian representatives, develops in pupils a good understanding of Christian belief and the Church year, including the main Christian festivals. Pupils are aware of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit although their understanding of this is undeveloped.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good.**

Religious education (RE) has a high profile in the school. It is valued by all members of the community, treated as a core subject and is part of the school development plan for raising attainment and accelerating progress. In line with the school's creative curriculum, RE lessons are lively and inspirational enabling pupils to be creative and reflective. Action from SIAS, 2011 has led to the development of higher order thinking skills which is particularly apparent during class discussions. Pupils are attentive, enjoy 'big questions' and exploring ideas. They are able to link their RE learning to their Christian values and reflect upon both. After a group discussion about Christian values portrayed in a photograph and then listening to Colossians chapter 3 from the Bible, a Year 4 pupil commented 'we should wear our values every day'. The lesson was about how Christianity provides a framework for Christian living. Pupils across the whole school can demonstrate age appropriate high order thinking in discussion and activities are differentiated to challenge and meet the needs of all learners. However this high level is not always reflected in lower key stage 2 pupils' written work because the written tasks do not always develop or draw out their higher thinking skills. RE benefits from the leadership of a dedicated and creative co-ordinator who, whilst not an RE specialist, demonstrates good subject knowledge. She attends courses within the local authority and diocese and ensures that teachers receive appropriate training too. The consequence of her mentoring is that the teaching of RE across the school is good, well planned and thoroughly assessed. Detailed tracking shows that attainment is in line with, and occasionally higher than, national expectations; some pupils with special educational needs do better in RE than in other core subjects. The teaching and learning in RE, especially Christianity, offers even the youngest pupils opportunities for SMSC development and contributes to the embedding of the school's Christian values. Reception pupils' RE learning was enhanced when pupils made up their own verses when singing what God 'holds in His hands.' Faith visitors support RE and pupils enjoy visiting places of worship, including their own church. Some pupils can make links between Christianity and other faiths as shown by a KSI pupil who, having learnt that Allah (God) used a spider to protect Muhammad in the cave went on to ponder about Biblical stories he knew where God was protecting people.

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

The school has made good progress since SIAS 2011, making it a school where there is a strong sense of belonging, Christian identity and involvement. The strong, committed headteacher, described by some parents as 'amazing' and the challenging, yet supportive, governing body now work closely together and have a clear, shared Christian vision and understanding of Ravensden as a church school. They led the school through a successful public consultation to become a full primary school in September 2017 and are developing the strategic vision into planning to enable a successful transition. The governing body is committed to both school and church and say that 'everything is values driven'. Their meetings start with a prayer. During the interregnum the chair of governors, who is also chair of the parochial church council, has worked tirelessly to develop social and worship links. All stakeholders are regularly surveyed about the school as a church school, and the findings are acted upon to increase the pace of change. Most are proud of the school's progress as a good church school. The Bishop of Bedford's visit in July 2015 to open the new pre-school included an assembly in which pupils articulated what the Christian values meant to them, publically affirming the impact of the school's values programme. Leaders and managers articulate what working in a school that is distinctively Christian means to them and can readily describe the positive impact Christian values make on their pupils. Whilst this is recorded in the school development plan, it has not yet permeated the agenda of governors' meetings. Governors' visits are in place and monitored accordingly. They say that they are kept well informed of the school's performance and attainment by senior leaders. Pupils gain a good understanding of local, national and global communities through, for example, mixing with other schools, visitors, trips, charity links and parents. Community days are well attended. Collective worship and RE are led by senior leaders who feel supported by each other and the governing body. As with the whole curriculum, planning for collective worship and RE is informed by the school's Christian values and contributes to pupils' SMSC development. Leaders and managers are looking forward to the imminent arrival of the new incumbent and working together to fully embed Anglican traditions. The chair of governors has the role of RE link, works closely with the subject leader and is thus well aware of pupil achievement and good practice. Staff attend diocesan and local authority meetings and say that they value networking and training. Both the senior teacher and the school are benefitting from her recent diocesan church school's training as well as that for her senior leadership qualification.

SIAMS report February 2016, Ravensden Church of England VW Lower School, MK44 2RW