



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Lawrence Voluntary Aided Church of England Lower School

Manor Lane, Wymington, Rushden NN10 9LL

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Bedford

Date of inspection: 24 June 2016

Date of last inspection: July 2011

School's unique reference number: 109628

Headteacher: Gilly Donald

Inspector's name and number: Alan Thornsby 137

School context

St Lawrence is a smaller than average lower school in the village of Wymington that serves wide catchment area. The majority of pupils come from Rushden. The majority of pupils are from a diverse range of White British socio economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The number of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is below the national average. From September 2017 the school is to become a primary school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Lawrence Lower as a Church of England school are good.

- The commitment and drive of the headteacher, governors and staff have created a caring and inclusive Christian learning environment where children develop academically and personally.
- The impact of the Christian values and ethos has created a sense of belonging to a community that serves the wider community.
- The links with the St Lawrence and other local churches have enhanced the worshipping and spiritual life of the school.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that values are communicated throughout the school as distinctively Christian values to build on a secure foundation for development and extension as the school becomes a primary school.
- Give pupils greater involvement in the planning, delivery and evaluation of worship to further their spiritual development.
- Ensure that revised assessment arrangements for religious education (RE) are robust, useful and well understood in preparation for the school extending its age range.

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

The school has a caring and inclusive Christian character that reflects Christian values in action. These permeate the practice and policy of the school. The ethos group of pupils, who describe Christian values as 'an opportunity to talk about God and Jesus' suggests the monthly values that include respect, love, friendship and justice. They are secure in the knowledge that 'Christian values can be followed by anyone because Jesus told his disciples to "love one another as I have loved you"'. The ethos of the school is summed up in 'Let your light shine' that is displayed around the school. Although children recognise values in action, many are at an early stage of making links between the values and the stories and teachings of Jesus. Children mirror the Christian examples of adults. Christian values in action result in relationships between all members of the school and wider community being very strong and secure. Children behave well and understand the values of restorative justice, forgiveness and fresh start. They are confident, articulate and understand right and wrong. They recognise how Christian values impact on attitudes to work and enjoy being in school. The Christian ethos enables effective strategies to maintain high levels of attendance. It also ensures that staff know the needs of each individual and provide challenge and support to enable progress. Rigorous tracking systems and the inclusion team identify rates of progress and the need for intervention strategies to ensure every child has the best opportunities to learn. As a result, achievement and progress are above average, especially at Key Stage one. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is good, underpinned by Christian values, RE and cross-curricular links. The family atmosphere of the school further enhances it. The religious education syllabus and a range of visits to other places of worship support pupils' awareness of the diversity of faith and cultures. The input of parents and staff members provides children with first hand experience of other faiths. In this way RE supports how everyone is respected as an individual. Pupils show Christian values in action through a range of charity support. They also show respect for and care of the environment through building bug hotels and hedgehog houses.

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

Collective worship is central to the ethos of the school by the way it reinforces Christian values. Themes are based on social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) and the church year. Biblical links ensure that everyone is developing an understanding of values from a Christian perspective. This is reinforced by values displayed in the form of a cross through the school. Pupils are developing a good understanding of the Bible, recognising 'the Old Testament is about creation and the time before Jesus and the New Testament is about Jesus and Christianity'. Pupils input into worship through the ethos committee who describe worship as 'a time to come together and share thoughts'. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to plan, lead and contribute to the evaluation of worship. Although St Lawrence Church has been without a vicar for some time, the school has maintained links through the chair of governors and churchwardens. It is used for end of term services, planned and led by pupils who recognise this as a special place for worship. The school has also made strong links with other local churches that give pupils a sense of belonging to a wider worshipping community and awareness of Christian denominations. The input of these churches has made a significant impact on the spiritual life of the school. Family Praise engages the whole school family, including parents and siblings. Parents comment that 'it allows children to think about worship and not be embarrassed to talk about faith at school or at home'. Worship reflects the Anglican pattern of greeting, engagement, response and reflection. Pupils have a developing awareness of the Trinity and have created a number of symbolic interpretations, including woven cords, the shamrock and the Triquetra. They recognise Pentecost as 'the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the church'. The centrality of prayer in school is seen in the prayer tree in the entrance. Pupils explain that prayer 'helps us think about God'. They are aware of different types of prayer including praise, saying thank you and sorry. The leaders of Family Praise who use different types of prayer support this. Pupils recite the school and Lord's Prayer with confidence. The collective worship leader and foundation governors monitor worship and regularly report to governors. This allows everyone to be aware of the impact of worship, and informs developments.

The effectiveness of religious education is good.

Religious education is well led by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic subject leader. She maintains her awareness of current developments in RE by attending training and shares these with colleagues. She ensures that the syllabus and planning meet the needs of the school and impact on SMSC. The suggestions following the award of the RE Quality Mark and diocesan support have begun to be addressed. Staff share planning to have ownership and support each other. The subject leader checks planning and carries out observations with the headteacher to monitor and evaluate. There is an annual review to assess effectiveness and identify next steps. This informs a report and action plan with success criteria that are shared with governors. As a result, standards and progress are good. Teaching is good because of staff knowledge, enthusiasm and questioning skills. Teaching assistants are effectively used to record individual contributions of pupils and support learning. Pupils' books reflect a range of activities and progression that indicates a good balance of learning about religion and reflecting on what it might mean to them. 'Tickled pink' and 'go for green' marking comments create a response and dialogue between teacher and pupil, indicating children's understanding of their learning and next steps. Although the school has assessment procedures in place, these are currently being reviewed in order to provide a more useful and accurate picture of progress and development. RE is made meaningful and relevant because practical activities are used to promote the thinking skills of pupils and understanding of Christian values. For example, in exploring the Ten commandments, children undertook a problem-solving journey across the playground to 'The Promised Land'. This allowed them to consider their roles and responsibilities before devising and prioritising their own set of rules. Children in a Year 2 class were absorbed in a range of practical and thought provoking activities. This gave them first hand experience of Islam as their Muslim teacher shared her faith and practice. As a result they extended their knowledge of religious vocabulary. It also gave the opportunity for them to explore similarities and differences with Christianity.

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

The headteacher has a determined vision for the school that values each child as an individual and gives the best learning opportunities within a distinctively Christian school to become a caring citizen. Committed foundation governors ensure everyone is aware of the impact of Christian values, RE and worship. Regular meetings between foundation governors, the headteacher and RE subject leader inform reports that ensure that governors are aware of the developments in school. Regular communication with the ethos committee and focussed governor visit reports enhance governor knowledge. Church school distinctiveness is an agenda item at every governors meeting. As a result all governors and staff have a good understanding of the impact of working in a church school on their roles. They ensure that Christian values inform their decision making and planning. However, foundation governors are aware of the need to make the Christian foundation and values even more explicitly Christian, to further the school as it becomes a primary school. Self-assessment is accurate and the development points from the previous inspection have been addressed. The identified next steps reflect a cycle of on-going review and reflection within a climate of improvement. This indicates that the school has a good capacity for continuing development. The school development plan includes an RE action plan, in addition to having elements of church school distinctiveness threading through. Staff are proud to be working in the school and of the sense of community that results from Christian values in action. They recognise the support of the headteacher and governors in meeting the needs of all pupils. The headteacher is currently supporting another local church school as a consultant. As a result, other staff are experiencing leadership roles as part of a church school. Parents are unanimous in their praise for the school and recognise the deep impact of the ethos on pupils. Typical of their many positive comments is 'there is a cohesive feel to the school at the heart of our community with the church. Staff treat our children as we do at home'. The school has strong links with St Lawrence church and the Wesleyan Chapel of Wymington. As a result, there is a clear sense of Christian distinctiveness and a church school for all in a wider worshipping community. The school also recognises the benefits of the input of the diocese for support and training.