

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Great Whelnetham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Stanningfield Road, Bury Saint Edmunds, Suffolk. IP30 OUA

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Diocese	Saint Edmundsbury and Ipswich
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Suffolk
Date of inspection	19 March 2018
Date of last inspection	25 January 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 124700
Headteacher	Kath Parkin
Inspector's name and number	Stephen Green 809

School context

Great Whelnetham is a small school with 145 pupils organised in single-age classes. It is situated in a rural location adjacent to the parish church and very close to the cathedral town of Bury St Edmunds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities broadly reflects national norms. The headteacher has been in place since January 2016 and the incumbent since 2017. Since the last inspection the school has reorganised to include pupils in years 5 and 6. There is an independent pre-school on the school site which offers a breakfast club in the mornings.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Great Whelnetham as a Church of England school are satisfactory

- Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas needing further improvement. They have worked hard to begin to address weaknesses.
- Relationships within the school are extremely positive and adults provide excellent role models for the children in their care. Parents greatly value the school's family atmosphere and appreciate the approachability of the senior and teaching staff.

Areas to improve

- To increase levels of individual pupil spirituality by developing a clear definition of this within the school and identifying specific opportunities within the curriculum for learners to explore and develop both their own spirituality and higher order thinking skills.
- To continue to develop the effectiveness of the governing body by ensuring there is a full complement of foundation governors, and that they have an effective role in the strategic leadership of the school by offering appropriate challenge and support for the headteacher and her staff.
- To provide more opportunities for pupils to visit and learn about places of worship used by a range of faiths and Christian denominations, in order to improve pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural faith, and their respect for the views of other faith communities.

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

The school has a clear set of Christian values drawn from the Values for Life scheme. It develops the key values from this on rotation over a two-year period, mainly but not exclusively through its programme of collective worship (CW). The current values are displayed widely around the school and are very familiar to pupils. Those parents spoken to were not aware of either the current value (trust) or the last one (friendship).

Relationships within the school are very strong, reflecting the school's Christian values and commitment, and are valued by parents. The school's Christian values inform and drive pupils' moral, social and cultural development. Pupils respect each other and other members of the school community and can explain that this links to their learning and the school's Christian values. However, the school has not yet got a clear definition of spirituality or identified opportunities within school life and the curriculum to develop this. As a result pupils' individual levels of spirituality are not developing as quickly as they could. The school council has plans to develop a reflective area outside, but these are still at an early stage. Pupils say prayers during the school day and occasionally write their own. Sometimes these have been collected together. There are many displays around the school which demonstrate the school's Christian distinctiveness, but not all of these include opportunities for pupils to respond and add their own thoughts. Pupils' behaviour is generally very good, and one parent praised it as 'exceptional'. She was particularly impressed by the way pupils interacted with those less fortunate than themselves.

The school makes its Christian distinctiveness obvious to visitors through many displays in shared areas and the school entrance, and on its website. There is some reference to its Christian foundation in newsletters, but these are understated and do not promote understanding.

Pupils have a good record of putting their faith into practice in support of others and have supported a number of local and national charities in recent years. They have a limited awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith. They study other world faiths as part of their religious education (RE) which now follows the Emmanuel Project. As a result of this, and participation in a diocesan RE activity day last year looking at Kagera, learners are developing some understanding of other faiths, but this is still at an early stage. The school has highlighted its wish to provide more opportunities for pupils to visit places of worship used by other denominations and faith groups in its development planning.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

The programme of CW is drawn up by the co-ordinator and based upon the Values for Life scheme. Major Christian festivals are built into planning, and pupils celebrate many in the parish church. Worship is led by senior staff, teachers and the incumbent, as well as on occasion by other church leaders. Parents are frequently invited to join CW, especially in the church, and many do so. Themes have an appropriate biblical basis and frequently look at the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The hall is usually used for worship, and the school has included displays and religious artefacts to make this a more meaningful setting.

Those pupils who are on the school council have begun to lead CW, reading from scripts, reading plays and acting out stories to make them more meaningful for the pupils. However, they have not yet had the opportunity to plan or evaluate worship, and consequently pupils do not yet have a sense of sharing ownership of CW. Classes sometimes worship together, but there appear to be few opportunities for most pupils to experience planning and leading worship.

Pupils have a lack of understanding of how Christians worship. They are not aware of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and, whilst they recognise the significance of major festivals, they have no comprehension of other significant acts of worship such as the eucharist. Visits to the nearby cathedral have not focused on developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of Anglican traditions and terminology. However, in the worship seen during the inspection, the children were attentive and interested.

Parents spoke enthusiastically about the school's programme for worship, and of the impact which the school's Christian values, as developed in CW, have upon their children. Although they praised the opportunities they have had to join the school in worship, there is no system for regular formal monitoring and evaluation of worship. Worship is currently monitored mainly by the headteacher with some input from other school leaders, but there is no mechanism for gathering views from pupils or parents and governors rarely contribute. As a result, the reviewing and development of worship is not informed by the full school community.

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

Several people spoke during the inspection of the school having stagnated and become too comfortable following the last outstanding inspections. A governor described it as being 'like a comfortable pair of slippers. Now it is recognising the need for challenge.' One parent described the spark that the headteacher has brought following her

appointment, and a governor said she had 'reinvigorated the school.' Attendance is good and improving. The new chair of governors has also brought fresh enthusiasm to the process of school governance and is working closely with the headteacher to ensure this enthusiasm makes a real difference to teaching and learning within the school. He said that 'the school is starting to remind itself that it is a faith school. (This) had been lost in the past. They are now putting faith back on the agenda.' There is a very active parent support group which raises funds to enhance educational provision.

School leaders have a good understanding of the school's performance. They articulate and actively promote a vision based on their own and the school's distinctively Christian values. However, opportunities have not been created for these to be explored and understood more widely by the whole school community. Specifically, school leaders have not identified connections between the values being developed as part of their work from the Values for Life scheme, and the school's mission statement. School leaders and the teaching staff have excellent relationships with the children in their care and are seen as very approachable by parents. The parent of a child with severe special needs praised the way the school works tirelessly to ensure she gets the best education possible despite her specific challenges. There is a strong relationship with the local church and the school values the regular input of the new incumbent both in CW and as vice-chair of the governing body and the school's only foundation governor at the time of the inspection. The school makes a regular contribution to the parish magazine and in turn publicises church events. There is a link to the diocesan website on the school's website, encouraging the community to recognise the school's identity within a wider local Christian family. Local church leaders have run an Open the Book project which has proved particularly popular with pupils and developed another link between the church and the school. A church leader described the 'privilege of working with the children' due to their impeccable behaviour and positive attitudes.

Following a governance review, the role of governors in school improvement has developed, although there are still areas which require further development. By purchasing a greater level of clerking from the local authority, the governors have taken steps to address several concerns around procedures and effective minute taking.

There has been good support from the diocese which has enabled the school to develop its RE teaching, and provided training for staff and governors - notably to improve teaching and learning through the introduction of the Emmanuel Project and leading to more effective monitoring and strategic leadership by governors. The diocese contributed to the recent appointment process of the headteacher and is providing practical advice for school leaders following the review of governance and the local authority's statement of concern. This support is seen by the school as invaluable and an expression of the practical value of the school being part of the wider diocesan family.

RE and CW have high profiles within the school and are acknowledged as essential to its Christian distinctiveness. The headteacher currently leads both with the support of an enthusiastic and committed colleague who is being supported to assume the role of subject leader now that their year as a newly qualified teacher has been completed. This example demonstrates the school's awareness of the need for effective staff professional development as future leaders, and of succession planning within the school. Levels of continuous professional development and funding for RE and collective worship compare very favourably to other subjects, and resources are improving. However, at the time of the inspection the RE policy was not accessible on the school website, there is no specified link between the governing body and RE and collective worship, and there is only one foundation governor. The school has planning in place to address all of these issues in order to improve governors' strategic role in monitoring standards and offering appropriate challenge and support. There has been extensive staff training to accompany the introduction of the Emmanuel Project, and school leaders speak with great enthusiasm of its early impact and their plans for the future.

The school has detailed self-evaluation based upon the observations of the headteacher, which is prepared by the headteacher and discussed and reviewed with governors and staff. Greater involvement from other senior staff and governors is acknowledged as desirable but has not been implemented due to pressures elsewhere in the curriculum and life of the school. The roles identified for the new subject co-ordinator and governors are not yet active. However, although there is evidence to show the effect that the measures designed to bring about improvements in teaching and achievement are being effective at classroom level, they have not yet had time to impact upon the school's performance data, which is below that expected for similar schools. The headteacher's Christian principles are ensuring that the wellbeing of pupils and staff remain vital as the necessary process of rapid school improvement continues.