



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

### Thorndon Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

The Street

Thorndon

IP23 7JR

**Previous SIAMS grade:** Good

**Current inspection grade:** Good

**Diocese:**

Local authority: Suffolk

Dates of inspection: 20 May 2015

Date of last inspection: 18 January 2010

School's unique reference number: 124745

Headteacher: Tamsin Little

Inspector's name and number: Graham Lancaster 713

#### School context

Thorndon is a small but growing school which serves the village and surrounding area. There are currently three mixed-age classes with some provision being made within the timetable for year group specific teaching. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. There have been significant changes in school staff since the previous inspection, including the headteacher. The school had a Section 5 OFSTED inspection three weeks ago and was graded "Good" in all respects, which indicates a marked improvement from the previous judgement.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Thorndon Primary as a Church of England school are good

- Outstanding leadership has led to significant improvements in the overall effectiveness of the school and ongoing strengthening of the Christian distinctiveness of the school.
- Collective Worship is central to the Christian life of the school and provides the platform for the ongoing development of the values of the school.
- Creative and effective religious education produces enthusiastic responses from pupils and enables them to explore their Christian values in a broader context.

#### Areas to improve

- Further strengthen strategies to make the Christian characteristics of the school's values more explicit, thereby empowering pupils to draw on prior learning as they discuss and explore their own values and beliefs.
- Capitalise on the confidence and critical thinking of the Collective Worship Ambassadors by providing opportunities for them to contribute to the process of evaluation and further development.

**The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is good at meeting the needs**

### **of all learners**

The significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and, as a result, in pupil progress and outcomes, are evidenced in the recent OFSTED report. This has been achieved in the context of an overt commitment to an inclusive ethos which necessitates the staff being highly effective and innovative in meeting a wide range of pupil needs with relatively limited resources. There is an explicit commitment to the development and progress of every pupil, including those that are vulnerable, which stems from the Christian values of the school.

Christian values are not currently overtly expressed but are drawn from a thematic approach based on "Values for Life". Governors feel that "values are bought into by the whole community". The current theme of "resilience" is readily identified by pupils and parents and is evident in shared areas, in classrooms and in Collective Worship, with direct reference to examples from The Bible.

Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is a priority and opportunities are provided for them to explore spirituality in a range of contexts, for example in the setting of "Forest Schools". There is a focal point for prayer in each class and pupils identified the school's sensory room "Apollo" as a place they can use for quiet reflection. Refreshing and developing the school's sanctuary garden has been identified within the school's plans.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. There is enthusiastic engagement in learning in each class which was observed in the context of the religious education focus week which takes place each half term. This was typified in the creative approach to exploring Pentecost in the youngest class, with pupils not only enjoying making tongues of fire headdresses but celebrating the birthday of the church and sending out messages of "Good News" to other classes.

Pupils are aware of the needs of others and are actively involved in identifying and planning the school's charitable giving.

Recorded RE shows clear progress in pupils' understanding of Christianity and of other world faiths through a wide range of teaching approaches. Opportunities are not as yet provided for pupils to learn from religion by considering possible applications to their own lives, circumstances and personal characteristics.

Pupils see the adults in school as role models, living out the school's values through their close working partnership and high level of commitment to each other and to the school.

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

Excellent use of the Church is made for collective worship. There is a sense of peace and worship in the middle of the busy school day which is regarded as natural and special by the pupils. Flexible approaches and an appreciation of differing needs by the pupils ensure everyone can be included. The signing of the Lord's prayer has a deep sense of reverence, engages all pupils and serves to reinforce the meaning of the words. Biblical material is regularly included and reference made to the person of Jesus Christ and to the Trinity. One pupil recently commented "I don't always think I am a very important person but I feel special in Church".

All staff are involved in the planning and leading of collective worship which is enhanced by the active involvement and advice of the incumbent. The worship she leads is much appreciated by the pupils and leaves a lasting impression. Collective worship themes are embedded in formal and informal teaching across the school.

Parents appreciate the invitation to attend Friday collective worship. These sessions and the celebration of Christian Festivals are well supported. A strong partnership has been forged between the activities of the Church and the school and opportunities are actively sought to further enhance this eg the marmalade and flower festivals.

The introduction of Collective Worship Ambassadors has enabled these pupils to have a more significant role in collective worship and they talk enthusiastically about the half-termly sessions they devise and lead. Their role does not currently give them opportunities to contribute to the

evaluation and further development of collective worship.

Governors' expertise in and contribution to the evaluation of the impact of collective worship has grown through training and increased opportunities such as the recent pupil survey. Further joint working with the current and future Ambassadors is at the planning stage and governors are confident that this will serve to strengthen this aspect of their role still further.

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

Following a challenging period for the school the current headteacher has built a highly effective team of staff who share her clear vision and aspirations for the school and her commitment to providing a rich, engaging learning experience for every pupil within a distinctively Christian context. This is recognised by governors, parents and pupils. Leaders have taken every opportunity to draw on advice and training provided by the diocese both for subject leaders and for the staff as a whole. Leadership is distributed well, and the RE subject leader demonstrates excellent subject knowledge and evaluative skills from which she has produced a clear action plan in partnership with the foundation governors and incumbent. There is also recognition that in a small school everyone works closely together to plan, prepare and innovate. This is an exceptional feature of Thorndon Primary school.

Improvements in overall effectiveness have been achieved in conjunction with steps to enhance the Christian character of the school. The areas for development identified in the last SIAMS inspection have been successfully addressed and there is a clear plan for further improvements based on rigorous self-evaluation.

Although the overall Christian vision for the school is not visibly spelt out within the learning environment there is no question but that it is understood and lived out by members of the school community.

Since the previous inspection Foundation Governors have engaged in training in respect of their distinct role. They are frequent visitors to the school and their effectiveness in monitoring is evident in their knowledge of the school and their support and challenge of the school's leadership. They are aware of the need for succession planning and are confident that the depth to which Christian values are now embedded in the life of the school and the shared leadership of RE and collective worship will ensure continuity should change occur.

The incumbent makes a significant contribution to the spiritual life of the school, leading collective worship and working closely with headteacher and governors to build a significant partnership between the Church and the school.