



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church**

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Walsham-le-Willows Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Wattisfield Road
Walsham le Willows
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk IP31 3BD

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

Local authority: Suffolk

Dates of inspection: 17 July 2015

Date of last inspection: 16 November 2009

School's unique reference number: 124717

Headteacher: Angela Hunter

Inspector's name and number: Stephen Green 809

School context

This rural primary school is situated 12 miles from Bury St Edmunds, with 139 pupils currently taught in five mixed-age classes. The substantial local Traveller community currently account for 14 % of the school's pupils. Two years ago the school expanded to add pupils in Years 5 and 6. St. Mary's Church is a ten minute walk away. There is no incumbent but the rural dean is caring for the school during the interregnum. There are currently three vacancies on the governing body. The headteacher has been in post for 9 years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Walsham-le-Willows CEVC Primary School as a Church of England school are good

- Relationships between pupils, parents and school staff are of the highest standard.
- The school's Christian values are having a very positive impact upon learning across the curriculum.
- The vision, dedication and professionalism of school leaders are respected and appreciated by parents and pupils.

Areas to improve

- To provide dedicated time for the RE coordinator to monitor and evaluate the impact of RE teaching on pupils' spiritual development and its positive contribution to pupils' enthusiasm for learning about other faiths and cultures.
- To increase pupils' spirituality by improving opportunities for personal prayer and reflection.
- To provide the opportunity for pupils to write, lead and evaluate some acts of worship during the school year, in order to increase their ownership of and commitment to collective worship.

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

This school has a strong Christian character which is immediately obvious to pupils, parents and visitors. The school has adopted the Values for Life scheme and uses the values within it as a focus for collective worship (CW) themes and for further class study. Pupils have a good awareness of these values and understand what they mean. Parents are made aware of the values currently being focussed upon through regular newsletters and on the school website. The leader of a church youth group in another village commented that the impact of these Christian values can be clearly seen in the way the children from this school interact with each other. Foundation governors have a history of taking a leading role in the school's strategic development. They had a prominent part in the recent work to develop a new mission statement for the school. 'With God's blessing, we learn together by encouraging each other to do the best we can' is the statement the school adopted, and it accurately summarizes their overriding aims. Christian values have led to excellent standards of pupil behaviour. There is good attendance and there have been no exclusions. Parents are keen to ascribe much of the school's success to the relationships between pupils and those who care for them, at school, and praised the headteacher for her approachability. Mutual support amongst the school staff has ensured that, as one teacher said, "there is always someone there when you are worried," and she was able to provide several meaningful examples. Parents spoken to could explain the significance of this being a Church school, and all maintained that the parent body supported the school's Christian values. As one parent said, "many parents would support the school because they are moral values (they ascribe to) as well as Church ones. There is a good balance between them." Academic progress and achievement are good and there are no underachieving vulnerable groups. The school's Christian values can be seen making a strong positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's commitment to Christianity and Christian values is evident in most shared spaces and classrooms, and includes many inspirational posters (e.g. "No-one can do everything but everyone can do something"), which pupils were keen to point out on a tour of the school. Whilst learners have a reasonable understanding of other faiths and Christianity as a multi-cultural religion, this is an area that the school recognises could be further developed. Religious education (RE) is well-led and currently going through a period of transition as a new scheme of work is implemented. Staff have had considerable training on this from the diocese and are very enthusiastic about its potential. RE makes a significant contribution to the development of pupils' Christian values. However, although RE is considered by school leaders and parents to be an important part of the process of developing pupils' values and understanding of Christianity, there is insufficient evidence available to demonstrate that pupils are regularly excited and challenged by their RE.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

All groups within the school community recognise the value of CW and the impact it has upon the lives of pupils and the ethos of the school. The Values for Life scheme is used as the core scheme by those who lead worship, and those who lead worship maintain that it provides a valuable framework for them to plan around. CW has an appropriate focus upon the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and biblical material. A wide variety of people lead worship, including regular representatives of both the local Anglican church and the Congregational church. The local High Street chapel also has a role in the school by running the regular and very popular Splat Club. Recent work by this club on Pentecost is displayed prominently in the hall and became the focus for subsequent worship and RE. Since the last inspection pupils have been given a wider role in supporting those who lead CW, but do not yet have the opportunity to lead or evaluate it themselves. Good use is made of the local church, and pupils have a sound understanding of the symbols and traditions associated with the Christian faith. During the present interregnum, the Rural Dean has taken on the role of the school's rector, and has been heavily and effectively involved in the school's strategic planning for improvement. The Diocesan Schools Advisor has become a valuable link between the school and the diocese, a

link that has led to much good work by pupils through the Diocesan Art Project, visits to the cathedral and the Discovery Centre, and by arranging a regular series of Open the Book assemblies which the children and parents both spoke very highly about. Most recently the diocese has provided valuable training for staff to introduce a new scheme of work and assessment system. The school recognises the need to develop pupils' individual spirituality by improving their understanding of the role and importance of personal prayer and reflection. Most learners have some understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, although it is limited. Parents support the school's CW, and they have regular opportunities to worship at St Mary's church alongside their children. These shared services are very well supported. However, there was insufficient evidence available to demonstrate whether worship is regularly inspirational. Increasing the formal monitoring of CW was a development point in the last inspection. However, there has been little progress in this area and therefore there is no evidence base to provide those who plan CW with an accurate understanding of which aspects of worship are the most inspirational and effective from participants' perspectives.

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

There are several areas of outstanding leadership, including the commitment of school staff, the relationships they have developed, and the support being provided by the diocese in the interregnum. However, at the time of the inspection there was only one foundation governor, there were three vacancies on the full governing body, and there was no permanent rector in the benefice. Despite the best efforts of the school, the Dean and the church to minimise the effects of these, they are nevertheless limiting what can be achieved. One example of this is governor monitoring. The Rural Dean is a very involved governor, helping in the preparation of key documents in the strategic development of the school and leading worship half termly. School leaders are determined to further develop the links that the school already has with the local and wider church, and have an action plan to help them to achieve this. A lay reader in the church is a regular visitor, and co-ordinates both school visits to the church and the Open the Book scheme. Leaders of the Congregational Church and the High Street Chapel have a regular involvement with pupils in the school. The diocese has offered support in staff and governor training, and has regularly worked with pupils. Parents do not have a regular opportunity to feed back their opinions, but maintained that this was not necessary as the headteacher is very approachable. Nevertheless, the school feels that this would be a valuable development in improving communication. Leaders have an explicit and clear Christian vision that has a strong impact upon relationships and wellbeing in the school. School leaders have been effective in engaging and communicating with all groups of parents (including the traveller community), and this has ensured that attendance is still high and there are no exclusions. Pupils in vulnerable groups perform above the national norm, and generally in line with all pupils at the school. Strategic leadership of the school is very effective, with training, mentoring and resources being targeted where they will have the greatest effect. Governors and relevant subject co-ordinators have a major role in strategic planning (e.g. developing the school ethos, writing the Self Evaluation Form and the Whole School Improvement Plan). Staff and governor training are valued highly, and the school has made use of diocesan expertise to introduce a revised scheme of work for RE, to change the way RE is assessed, and to prepare the school for inspection. As a result of the high value which has been placed by school leaders upon staff training, teachers are very capable of offering valuable support to the school's leaders, as well as being well trained for their own professional advancement and the provision of church school leaders in the future. The RE co-ordinator has a good understanding of her subject and is enthusiastically bringing in changes to what is being taught, how it is being taught and how progress is monitored. She scrutinises work, monitors planning and supports colleagues in RE. The school recognises the need for her to have a formal role in monitoring teaching. Arrangements for RE and CW meet statutory requirements.