



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Forest and Sandridge Church of England Primary School

Sandridge Common
Melksham
SN12 7QS

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: Wiltshire

Dates of inspection: 16 October 2014

Date of last inspection: February 2010

School's unique reference number: 126402

Headteacher: Anna Willcox

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field 151

School context

The number of pupils on roll is rapidly rising as the school prepares to move from its rural setting to a new site on a new housing estate in September 2015. It is currently housed in a Victorian building and six mobile classrooms. There have been changes to senior leadership in the last eighteen months as the headteacher took maternity leave and the deputy headteacher left for promotion. The governors have retained the acting members of the senior leadership team to maintain stability in the transition to the new school. Nearly all pupils are White British and the proportions of disadvantaged pupils and those with special education needs are broadly average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Forest and Sandridge as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The headteacher is an inspirational Christian leader and this is providing strong strategic direction for the school at a key moment in its development.
- Christian values inform all aspects of the school's work from the personal conduct of pupils to how governors see the school's mission to its expanding community.
- Teaching about Christianity in collective worship and religious education (RE) makes a significant impact on the Christian character of the school.
- Pupils' engagement with Christian values and Bible stories results in mature spiritual, moral and social understanding of issues in their daily lives.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that the tasks pupils are set in RE enable them to demonstrate their true level of knowledge and understanding
- Provide consistency for pupils across the school in how they can access opportunities to use personal prayer and reflection in their everyday lives

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

Christian values have long been established as the basis of the school's ethos but there is still a constant drive to improve. Leaders regularly reflect on the impact of Christian values through annual reviews and staff training days. Changes made at the start of this term to the planning for worship mean that scripture defines the school's core values even more closely. The vocabulary everyone uses to talk about behaviour has expanded and this helps the new policy work even better. Rewards for good conduct are directly linked to Christian values, particularly through the highly prized 'Kindness cup'. Given the excellent teaching about Christian values, it is not surprising that these are lived out by children and adults in how they treat each other. Pupils see themselves as guides for younger children. They take the buddy system very seriously and this, in turn, raises the expectations they have of themselves. The Christian ethos in which pupils learn raises their self-esteem and, consequently, achievement across the school is improving. This represents good progress from starting points in Reception that are just below age expectations. Children's social and emotional skills develop rapidly because Christian values are taught from the beginning and they quickly learn to use times of quiet reflection. Disadvantaged pupils are closing the gap with how most pupils achieve although their attendance is not rising as quickly.

Pupils have been inspired and challenged by religious education lessons especially the theological accuracy with which some teachers explain the meaning of Bible stories. As a result, pupils explain with impressive understanding how Christian values shape their attitudes to those of different cultures and with different needs. A striking example is how older pupils link the story of the Good Samaritan to how bullying can arise from prejudice (but 'not in this school') and suggest connections with living in contemporary war zones. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Reflection areas are well established and, more importantly, in some classrooms are challenging pupils with questions to prompt their own thinking about Christian values, for example, *Can you make a link between these words – God and Friends?* However, leaders are never complacent. They acknowledge that there are still too few opportunities across the school for pupils to explore personal prayer separately from how they contribute to formal prayer in worship.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The systems for checking the impact of worship, especially the 'tracker-chats' with pupils, are exceptionally effective in bringing about improvement. In the previous academic year, the new collective worship leader accurately identified an issue in planning that was hampering pupils in moving to a deeper understanding of Christian values. Careful research led to the adoption of a new structure whereby the biblical teaching for each of the school's values is explored over a number of weeks. Although this has placed extra demands on teachers in following this through in class worship, the impact has been immediate and substantial in all areas of school life. Pupils constantly make connections between Christian values and daily life and this means the prayers they write are relevant to everyone present. Worship provides pupils with a strong spiritual framework. The messages from Bible stories go well beyond the school gates and prompt meaningful discussions in families where there are mixed attitudes to religious faith.

Extra numbers this year mean that the hall cannot hold the whole school so arrangements for worship have had to be flexible. Excellent leadership has not only kept worship at the centre of school life but has brought about improvement. Worship continues to bring adults and pupils together every day and there is a tangible sense of excitement in sharing this time together. Pupils are confident to take a leading role in worship. They understand the distinctive nature of worship and explain 'it is not just about what you learn but what it helps you to do'. Imaginative displays, a rolling PowerPoint and the altar, specially designed for the school, keep key Christian beliefs at the forefront of everyone's mind. Teaching is explicitly Christian. It honours Anglican tradition but is made relevant to pupils of all religious backgrounds, or of none. Leaders from a range of church traditions make worship memorable and consistently capture pupils' interest. Consequently, pupils talk confidently about the person of Jesus and of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE is a popular subject. Older pupils have a good recall of what they have learned over time and enjoy drawing out the common themes between different world religions. This is important to them as they know the importance of RE for growing up in today's society. This, combined with strong teaching about Christianity in collective worship, means they gain a good and sometimes excellent understanding of the concept of faith and how it plays out in people's lives. By the time they reach Year 6, excellent teaching draws on the skills of enquiry and analysis that pupils have developed across all subjects. They respond to challenging questions with considerable confidence and maturity because lessons build step by step on their previous learning. A typical response in a lesson on how Christians make use of the Psalms was 'they contain every emotion we know as humans'. Consequently, the quality of writing that followed showed a high level of spiritual understanding for their age. The school's assessment data shows that pupils reach standards in line with national expectations. Overall, teaching is good and progress speeds up as pupils move through the school. However, discussions with pupils suggest that their grasp of key concepts in RE, by the end of Key Stage 2, may be better than the data indicates. This is because tasks that are set to evaluate pupils' progress do not always offer them sufficient scope to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Lessons cover a breadth of world religions with an appropriate focus on Christianity. However, it is not clear how progression in pupils' learning about Christianity is planned. This is particularly relevant for enabling the more able pupils to meet high expectations at the end of each key stage. The deputy headteacher has taken the role of RE subject leader this term and has already made a start on analysing how well the curriculum matches pupils' needs and why standards may not be better. She has accurately highlighted priorities for action and understands these in the context of national issues in RE. She is passionate about the subject and has a clear vision for RE in helping pupils to grapple with the fundamental questions of meaning in life and to make their own choices about faith.

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

The leadership of the school is highly effective because its Christian character directly informs strategic planning. The vision and core values have recently been revisited to ensure there is a strong focus on meeting the needs of the whole community as the school expands and moves to a new site. Senior leaders know exactly what is working well, where improvement is needed and why. The School Development Plan always pays attention to aspects of the school's Christian character and to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, although the insightful quality of leaders' analysis is not always reflected in written documents. The Christian character of the school is always covered in the induction of new staff, pupils and their families. It has proved to be secure through recent changes in leadership because all staff understand Christian values as the basis of relationships and the spiritual life of the school. Nevertheless, the inspiring presence of the headteacher made a welcome impact on her return from maternity leave. Her vision gives clear and unswerving direction to the school at a vital time in its development. It is rooted in her Christian belief that each person is created in the image of God and should, therefore, be seen as if through God's eyes. Governors and leaders live out Christian values in the decisions they take and the manner in which they are implemented, in particular, admissions and support for disadvantaged pupils. They are fully aware that their strategic role is as much about delivering the Christian mission of the school to the community as providing a new building that is fit for purpose. Staffing structures are rightly seen as vital to the school's success as a church school. Wise decisions have been made to retain a senior team that has gained experience in Christian leadership and has proven ability to raise standards. RE and collective worship have a high profile within the responsibilities held by this team and this has led to significant improvement in the impact of Christian values, especially on behaviour. The church is part of the strong 'Family of Churches' in the town. The benefit of this is felt in school, particularly in the broad range of leaders that pupils encounter in worship. The headteacher and the vicar share a vision for the school in its new location and are already taking steps to support the transition. The development of a chaplaincy role for the vicar is yet another example of the strong strategic leadership in the school.