

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Western Downland CofE Primary School

Rockbourne, Fordingbridge, Hants, SP6 3NA

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Salisbury
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local Authority	Hampshire
Date of inspection	8 June 2017
Date of last inspection	24 May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided - 116387
Headteacher	Kim Wilcox
Inspector's name and number	Richard Wharton (835)

School context

Western Downland is a smaller than average school, serving four rural parishes. The school operates across two sites, which are approximately 2.5 miles apart. The proportion of children with disabilities or additional educational needs is lower than that seen nationally, as is the number from ethnic minority groups or who speak English as an additional language. Children come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Four out of the seven class teachers have been appointed in the last two years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Western Downland Primary as a Church of England school are good.

- Opportunities for prayer and reflection are integral to the life of the school and this forms the basis for an inclusive environment where the uniqueness of each individual is celebrated and respected.
- Relationships between the school and church are highly regarded by all members of the school community and contribute significantly to the school's distinctive character.
- Children are rightly proud of the distinctive character of their school and talk in impressive depth about the way in which it influences their decisions.

Areas to improve

- To embed a more systematic process for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's distinctive Christian ethos in order to generate further strategies for continued improvement.
- To develop the children's understanding of the Christian basis of the school's core values and its shared interpretation of spirituality in order that these provide a clear basis for developing further exemplary practice.
- To develop the knowledge and understanding of staff in order to fully embed the Understanding Christianity resource.

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

Western Downland is a happy, caring Christian community where all members are valued and welcomed. Parents feel that the accepting and respectful attitudes of the children are fostered through the staff leading by example. The school is highly inclusive, committed to meeting the needs of the whole child and providing extra support where needed in order to meet its vision of ensuring that all are enabled to develop 'the roots to grow and the wings to fly'. As a result of this attention to individual needs, overall pupil progress and achievement is well above average.

The school revisited its core Christian values in autumn 2016 in order to secure collective ownership of the Christian basis of its ethos by the current school community. The three values of love, fellowship and righteousness were introduced in January 2017. A rich theological underpinning to these values has been developed with the support of the local vicar and the school is currently working with the children on finding biblical reference points for them. Through this activity, the children are being enabled to better understand the Christian basis of the values. The new values are already making a significant impact on the moral development of the children, who speak with impressive insight about the ways in which they influence their relationships. Parents also speak in glowing terms about the extent to which the Christian character of the school shapes relationships among the whole community. They say that the Christian ethos of the school is lived out explicitly in its day-to-day life and that children come home and discuss stories of faith that they have talked about and raise further deep questions.

Children clearly have a growing sense of personal spirituality and are able to reflect deeply on different beliefs and worldviews. Reflection areas in classrooms are used consistently; the candle is lit at times of reflection and the children's thoughts are captured in class Big Books. The school has developed a shared interpretation of spirituality through window, mirror and door symbols and children are beginning to be able to use this to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Children have a high degree of respect for cultural diversity and opportunities are created to widen the children's experience of diversity through visits, books, resource boxes and inviting visitors into school. The religious education (RE) curriculum also plays an important role in enable children to understand and respect different faith traditions. Children are very keen to respond to issues of national and global concern and parents report that they are always coming up with fundraising ideas because they are motivated by their Christian values.

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

Collective worship is of central importance in the life of the school. The contribution which the local vicar makes to leading and planning worship clearly has a significant impact in terms of providing an underpinning narrative for the school's values. This is supported very effectively by the timeline of Jesus' life in the hall of the key stage 1 site. Collective worship enables children to make links between their own understanding of the value of truth and the Christian understanding of Jesus as 'the light of the world who brings truth into our lives'. Acts of worship effectively demonstrate the naturalness with which the children engage in prayer and reflection, as well as their enjoyment of singing. Parents say that it is clear that staff put a lot of thought and preparation into collective worship as it is the first thing that children will often come home and talk about. Children take an active role in the worship observed and are given some opportunities to lead. Parents say how much children look forward to services in the parish churches and these services give children a sense of Anglican traditions and the cycle of the Church's year. Aspects of these are also incorporated into the imagery and traditions of whole-school worship as well as through use of colours in classroom reflection areas. The Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is incorporated into worship through candle prayers and children are able to talk about this with understanding.

Children have a particularly impressive appreciation of the place of prayer within their school, which can be found throughout the school from the Forest School prayer to the children's own prayers on the Prayer Angel. Parents also confirm that children talk about the importance of prayer at home. Children describe how prayers are said at key times throughout the day (e.g. lunchtime and at home time) and they learn prayers such as the Lord's Prayer and the school prayer by heart. The children were clear that, 'You can't just try to use God by praying for selfish things to please yourself, you have to try to think about what God would actually want you to pray for.' When asked how we can know what God would want us to pray for, the children said the school values help you. Worship is monitored by foundation governors and this informs development planning.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

The current RE leader has been in post for two years and has been well supported by the headteacher in developing provision for RE. This has included a focus on enabling children to have a clearer understanding of the Christian narrative, developing systems for tracking and assessment and monitoring of standards. Standards are strong in RE, particularly in terms of children's ability to make connections between different concepts. Tracking of progress shows that children leave the school achieving broadly above age related expectations. Teachers respond effectively to children's work in books and evidence show that children grow in understanding of core concepts throughout their time at school. New Big Books have been introduced, which very effectively capture whole class activities and reflections which extend beyond the work which would normally be captured in RE books. For instance the Year 6 Big Book contained some moving reflections on the ways in which the school value of righteousness might relate to the recent terrorist attack in Manchester.

The school follows the Wiltshire syllabus for RE and has been using Discovery RE to support this; however it has now begun to supplement this with the Understanding Christianity resource. Staff have embraced Understanding Christianity and the school plans to draw on diocesan support to enhance their subject knowledge to teach the more demanding content of the units more effectively. It was clear from the evidence provided that children engage in an interesting variety of activities in RE and respond well. At its best, teaching develops exceptionally insightful discussion, particularly among more able learners, on the purpose behind the biblical creation narrative. The school draws on visitors and visits in order to enable children to experience other faiths at first hand, for instance a visit to a synagogue and a workshop run by a Hindu parent.

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

The headteacher has formed and developed her Christian vision for the school over a period of eight years and has ensured that this is understood and embraced by all stakeholders. The school has worked together with the local church to create an ethos which ensures that children have a genuine experience of faith, which provides a foundation for their future. Children appreciate the ethos of their school and discuss it with enthusiasm; it is clear that it fosters a sense of wellbeing which underpins their academic achievements. Because of a recent significant turnover of teaching staff, the head felt that it was important for stakeholders to work together to review the school's core Christian values to ensure that these were fully understood by all. When new staff appointments are made, the school's status as a Voluntary Aided school is explained and the requirement of all staff to actively support the Christian ethos, values and traditions is made clear. The current school improvement plan contains a focus on developing a strategic 'blueprint' that articulates the school's core principles and behaviours, reflecting its church school distinctiveness.

Parents say that the school is always open to their contributions and encourages them to engage in school life. The school communicates its church ethos effectively to parents through weekly newsletters, celebration events and open invitations to worship. Parents are effusive in their praise for the ways in which Christian values pervade the life of the school and they discuss ways in which the children carry these with them after they have moved on to secondary school. Children have begun to take up leadership roles in relation to church ethos, for instance as Church School Ambassadors and Worship Leader. The links with the local churches are particularly valued and many shared activities are facilitated throughout the year. Governors have carried out some monitoring visits but evaluation of the impact of the school's ethos is not yet systematic to enable them to gain a thorough understanding of the school's performance as a church school and identify next steps for improvement. The school actively engages with diocesan support and works in active partnerships with neighbouring church schools.

The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.

SIAMS report, March 2017, Western Downland CofE Primary, Fordingbridge, Hants, SP6 3NA