



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

### Loders Church of England Primary School

Loders  
Bridport  
DT6 3SA

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Satisfactory**

**Diocese: Salisbury**

Local authority: Dorset

Date of inspection: 17 June 2015

Date of last inspection: September 2009

School's unique reference number: 113773

Acting headteachers: Rowan Beecham & Beth McGrath

Supporting executive headteacher from Acorn Multi Academy Trust: Andrea Rice

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field 151

### School context

This is a smaller than average-sized rural primary school with 62 pupils on roll, a drop from 84 at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils are taught in three mixed age classes. Most are from White British backgrounds. A slightly higher proportion than usual have special educational needs or disabilities although the proportion supported through pupil premium funding is low. In November 2014, the school was placed in special measures by Ofsted because of inadequate leadership and management. The substantive headteacher has been absent from the school since January 2015. The school is in the process of becoming a sponsored academy with the Acorn Multi Academy Trust (MAT). The executive headteacher and other senior leaders from the MAT are providing extensive support for the school. Two experienced classteachers are sharing the roles of acting and assistant headteachers. There has been a significant turnover of governors and a number of positions remain vacant.

### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Loders as a Church of England school are satisfactory

- The executive headteacher and other leaders from the Acorn Multi Academy Trust have brought much needed clarity and purpose to the school's work. They have accurately identified the priorities for improvement as a church school and are rapidly putting these into action. As a result, morale has risen with staff keen to embrace changes. The curriculum has expanded to the delight of pupils and standards of teaching and learning have improved.
- The vicar has played an important role in promoting and supporting improvements to aspects of the school's Christian character and in providing pastoral support.
- The leadership of religious education (RE) and collective worship is being shared more widely across the staff so raising the profile of the school's Christian character.
- Pupils express spiritual and emotional ideas with confidence and maturity because of the atmosphere for learning where views about faith are discussed openly and honestly.
- Collective worship is a valued part of the school's daily life and improvements are opening up opportunities for pupils of all faith backgrounds to develop their spiritual understanding.

### **Areas to improve**

- Complete the work begun to revise the Christian vision and values of the school so that all areas of leadership, and teaching and learning, are underpinned by a clear theological understanding as the school moves towards academy conversion.
- In liaison with the church and the diocese, appoint two new foundation governors as a matter of urgency, in order to strengthen the capacity of governors to play a full role in school improvement
- Implement the new systems for staff and governors to monitor the impact of the school's Christian character so action plans contain clear priorities and milestones for improvement.
- Provide appropriate support and training for the new leaders of RE and collective worship to ensure that the move to more distributed leadership is effective.

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

Most members of the school identify care and friendship as the values that characterise its work. In the last few months, work has begun on introducing the values of Respect, Empathy, Aspiration, Confidence, and Honesty (*REACH for the sky*) as a motivational guide. However, how or why these values might have a distinctively Christian source, beyond being shared human values, has not been explored. Although pupils have a wide knowledge of Bible stories, they are only just beginning to make connections with the school's values. School policies do not highlight this link so there are missed opportunities for Christian values to be used in managing behaviour and attendance. In spite of this, relationships among staff and pupils are highly supportive, behaviour and attendance are good and all three are said to stem from the school's Christian foundation.

Changes to the deployment of staff are making a positive impact on pupils' learning. With the help of external colleagues, teachers are now working together to analyse the progress made by individual pupils and the different groups in their classes. The outcomes are being used to target extra support and to challenge more able pupils. This means the school is moving closer to its aim of 'nurturing and developing everyone's God-given talents'. Assessment records show that, at the end of each key stage, pupils are on track to do better, especially at the higher levels, although there is much to be done in the middle years of Key Stage 2.

Religious education contributes to the Christian character and to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development because it helps them to use religious and emotional language to express their opinions. Pupils consider RE to be very important. Lessons help them to decide what is right or wrong and learning about other faiths prompts them to rethink some of their assumptions about other cultures. Some year groups have visited a range of places of worship for different Christian denominations as well as other world religions but this is not a regular part of the curriculum. The school therefore, provides pupils with a strong moral compass whether they are of a particular faith or of no faith background. Teachers increasingly have confidence to follow up spiritual and moral issues as they arise. At the moment, this is neither planned nor monitored but has improved with the recent expansion of the curriculum for music, art and PE, areas that had been neglected for a while. Reception and Y1 pupils, for example, talked impressively about how painting in the style of Picasso had helped them think differently about their friends.

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

A pattern of daily assemblies and the celebration of Christian festivals throughout the year has long been established in the school. In recent months, however, a series of changes have engaged pupils' interest at a deeper level and have opened up opportunities for pupils of all faith backgrounds to benefit spiritually. Personal belief is treated sensitively so worship is fully inclusive. Pupils fully understand that they have choices in the way they engage and contribute to prayer and reflection so everyone makes use of this time. This is followed up in reflection spaces that

have been created in classrooms. These are well matched to pupil's changing needs because they capture the transient nature of spiritual reflection rather than requiring it to be a lasting written record. Older pupils drawing in a tray of sand is a clear example of this.

The school is beginning to make better use of the beautiful location (seen through the glass walls of the hall) and the ancient village church as stimulation for worship and spiritual reflection. As a result, pupils value these contrasting spaces for worship and appreciate the cycle of the seasons and the church year. Pupils know a broad range of Bible stories so draw on these to explain the key moments in the life of Jesus. Older pupils are able to go beyond this and begin to explore the meaning of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is because the weekly acts of worship led by the vicar challenge pupils to grasp the underlying meaning behind Bible stories. Explanations are pitched precisely to pupils' levels of understanding and are relevant to their experiences.

Consequently, they leave a lasting impression that pupils remember weeks afterwards.

The decision to increase the profile of music in the curriculum is having a significant impact on worship and, consequently, on pupils' spiritual development. This is because the music teacher understands how to interpret music and song specifically for worship so it is not only a tool in 'quietening minds' but can also surprise and challenge the thinking of adults and children alike. These developments in worship are still at an early stage, particularly in building pupils' knowledge of prayers. However, they are being introduced slowly but surely so that a secure understanding of the nature and purpose of worship is building across the school community. Planning is improving to include Christian values within the themes. Although monitoring of progress is still at an informal level, especially in gathering feedback from pupils, this has not held back improvement because there has been good communication between the vicar and staff.

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

The school's 'deep Christian roots' have historically been maintained through the link with the church and the celebration of Christian festivals. In recent years, however, these 'roots' have been less evident in the curriculum and have had limited impact in shaping the daily life and leadership of the school. Turbulence in both staffing and governance has interrupted work to address the issues from the previous inspection. Consequently, there has been a lack of clarity about the Christian basis of the school's core values and they have not provided clear benchmarks for staff or pupils in managing achievement, behaviour and relationships. All this is now changing with the sharply focused support for leaders from the Acorn MAT. This has built on the support provided by a Diocesan consultant headteacher and the vicar earlier in the year. The executive headteacher has recognised the potential of staff members to take on new responsibilities. The leadership of aspects of the Christian ethos, therefore, is being distributed more widely so that there is a growing and shared understanding of exactly how it underpins the care and support of each individual adult and child. The readiness of the current staff team to embrace the changes is enabling the school to regain its sense of purpose, its ambition and its own Christian identity. A review of the school's Christian vision and core values is underway with the whole school community. The systems now in place for regular monitoring and tracking of whole school progress include specific attention to the school's Christian distinctiveness. The implementation of this programme is supported by external leaders and by training for staff so ensuring the improvements to RE and collective worship are sustainable.

The partnership with parents, the church and the wider community has remained strong over the last year. Current developments have restored confidence in the school and admissions for September suggest that the decline in numbers has been halted. The vicar has remained a constant Christian presence in the life and governance of the school. It is an excellent example of clergy balancing the roles of pastoral care and active support for school improvement. Her early input into planning for worship and support for staff in the delivery of RE has raised the profile of both areas and the impact they have on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It is now urgent that the two vacancies for foundation governors are filled in order that the momentum is maintained.