



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



 The **Methodist Church**

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Winterbourne Valley Church of England First School

Winterbourne Abbas
Dorchester
DT2 9LW

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: Dorset

Date of inspection: 29.2.16

Date of last inspection: March 2011

School's unique reference number: 113820

Executive headteacher: Rachel Horne

Head of school: Annie Burson

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field NS 151

School context

This small rural school has three classes with a pre-school onsite. The school is part of the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership (DASP) and, since September 2014, the Abbas Federation. The latter is a soft federation with Cerne Abbas and Prince of Wales (VC and community schools). An executive headteacher leads all three schools with a head of school managing Winterbourne Valley on a daily basis. Small year groups mean that the proportion of pupils with special educational needs fluctuates. The proportion for whom the school receives extra pupil premium funding is below average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Winterbourne Valley as a Church of England school are good

- The strong strategic leadership of the executive headteacher and the chair of governors is forging important partnerships for the future of the school whilst retaining its distinctive Christian character
- The vicar's work to strengthen the relationship between church and school has enhanced its role at the centre of the community
- Religious education (RE) and collective worship play a major part in shaping pupils' spiritual development

Areas to improve

- Ensure that the systems for evaluating the impact of Christian distinctiveness are fully embedded in the federation's governance, policy and procedures to sustain it through ongoing changes
- Fine tune development planning to make the focus for improvement clear and manageable within realistic timeframes
- Enable pupils to make independent use of indoor and outdoor areas for prayer and reflection

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

The school's mission statement draws a direct link between nurturing all pupils and the teachings of the Christian faith in order that all pupils learn well. Support is tailored to the specific emotional needs of individual children because of the breadth of specialist staff available. This is only made possible in this small school by operating within a federation. As a result, pupils make good and sometimes better than expected progress as well as attending more regularly than in most schools. This includes those with special educational needs. The school's Christian values, known as the '7 Cs' (for example, co-operation and consideration) define aspects of character that are promoted across the DASP partnership. They clearly help shape the exemplary behaviour in the school. In order to retain a distinctively Christian basis to these values, nine biblical Fruits of the Spirit have been identified to run in parallel with the '7Cs'. However, the combination of both sets presents some pupils with too large a body of ideas to use as easy reference points in their daily lives. Leaders are aware of this and reviewing how these might be managed better.

Spiritual development is a strength of school life because of the way staff interact with children and consistently pose them questions of deeper meaning that are appropriate, yet challenging, for their age. Religious education (RE) plays a particular role in this through its focus on skills of enquiry. As a result, pupils develop the vocabulary to express their ideas with confidence. For example, they can take the meaning of a Bible story and test it out in a modern day scenario with considerable maturity for their age. RE, therefore, makes a positive contribution to the Christian character of the school and to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In spite of this, leaders are never complacent and have set about developing indoor and outdoor areas to increase the range of opportunities pupils have for their own personal prayer and reflection. Pupils value their lessons about other religious faiths because 'God created everyone so it is important we understand them'. They are aware of how the profile of their community is less diverse than many others in the UK and have very positive attitudes to any kind of difference between groups or individuals. Consequently, they form relationships that show a compassionate acceptance of others through the Christian teaching they receive.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The pattern of daily Christian worship and the celebration of Christian festivals that mark out the year define the school as a church school. This is something equally valued by pupils, staff and the wider community. The popularity of services in church for Christmas and Easter means 'standing room only' and the deeper messages that adults and children take away from these occasions leave a lasting and spiritual impression on everyone. Worship within school has a special atmosphere that distinguishes it from lessons. The high quality of music plays a key role in pupils' spiritual development because it enables pupils to experience both joyful praise and quiet reflection through the medium of singing. This is a significant development since the last inspection that emerged from improved systems for gathering feedback. Although groups of pupils are confident to perform, all pupils know the words of songs and can sing them spontaneously. This is particularly true of the termly Taize worship. This completely captures pupils' imagination and helps them understand that worship can take different forms. Although pupils wholeheartedly enjoy and join in worship, they are less confident in identifying the key components and in linking them to what Christians believe about Jesus, and God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The responsibility for planning, leading and evaluating worship lies chiefly with the staff and the involvement of clergy and pupils has been slower to develop. However, pupils' knowledge of responses and symbols, and their confidence and eagerness to participate, suggests they are already beginning to play a bigger part.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils all think RE is important, particularly the lessons they have about religions that they do not encounter in their own locality. They have a secure knowledge of key Christian beliefs for their age because teachers build their understanding in small steps. Diocesan RE advisers have guided schools

in the DASP partnership in dovetailing supplementary resources such as *Christian Concepts* and *Festivals Matter* into the main syllabus (Discovery RE). This has had an impact on both teaching and learning. It has increased teachers' confidence in setting tasks although the level of challenge sometimes means younger pupils require considerable support. The syllabus is taught on a two year cycle because of mixed age classes and is still in the process of being embedded. It is currently in the second year of the cycle and staff are wisely checking that key concepts are revisited at the appropriate points to avoid any gaps emerging in pupils' learning. In a Year 3 & 4 lesson to explore what the life, death and resurrection of Jesus teaches about forgiveness, this chosen focus formed a consistent thread through the lesson and built on what pupils had learned in previous years. Scrutiny of books indicates this is typical of what happens on a regular basis. Consequently, progress accelerates as they move through the school and, by the end of Year 4, the majority of pupils are making better than expected progress and reaching standards above national expectations. The new syllabus promotes higher order thinking skills relevant to RE. Although the majority of pupils are gaining confidence in raising questions of deeper meaning, they are less sure about explaining how people's beliefs affect the way they live their lives. Pupils' progress is regularly assessed and, in Key Stage 2, assessment tasks are skilfully adjusted to ensure they offer pupils opportunities to demonstrate the full extent of their knowledge.

In common with all small schools, the new subject leader is managing RE alongside other curriculum areas. The current context for RE nationally presents extra demands in keeping up to date but, being part of DASP, the new leader is able to benefit from the support of experienced colleagues.

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

Leaders are deeply committed to their Christian vision for the school at this pivotal point in its development. In particular, the executive headteacher and the chair of governors are relentless in their efforts to secure the maximum benefits from partnerships whilst protecting the Christian ethos so that it continues to shape the work of the school. Attendance, for example, is above average and rising because it implements the policy agreed across the DASP partnership whilst remaining flexible enough for Christian compassion to be uppermost in any decisions made. Maximum advantage is taken of opportunities to share specialist staff between schools in the Abbas Federation, especially in providing finely tuned support to individual pupils. This ensures everyone learns effectively and has transformed the ability of some individual children to engage fully in school life.

Working closely with the head of school, senior leaders know the school extremely well but are never complacent. As the federation expands they are managing change at many levels and this has led to a lack of cohesion in the systems for development planning. Several operational plans run in parallel. They tend to focus on tasks without sufficient clarity about exactly what has to improve. This makes it difficult for clear priorities to emerge and for middle leaders to know where best to focus their attention. Governors receive annual reports on collective worship and RE as well as making their own visits. The depth of their monitoring is increasing as they embark on their own audit of the Christian character. This task is not complete but has raised some useful points such as making a greater connection between the school's good ecology work and its Christian ethos. Governors take consultation very seriously, especially with pupils. Local advisory boards are in place and feedback from these forums helps them gauge public perception of their strategic planning. Links with the church are central to the school's identity and have helped to engage the village community in the life of the church. Regular and positive communication between the leaders, the vicar and the Parochial Church Council (PCC) lead to a high level of trust between church and school. Diocesan RE advisers have provided vital guidance in developing a consistent approach to RE within the local pyramid of schools. The executive headteacher plays a leading role in co-ordinating this work. These partnerships all provide vital support to sustain the quality of church school leadership locally. It is an example of the diocese delivering its vision for 'Transforming Lives' of children because it has a direct impact on how Christianity challenges their thinking. At Winterbourne Valley, it means that the quality of RE, collective worship and spirituality remain at the heart of the curriculum as the federation evolves.