

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

| Mitcheldean Endowed Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School | |
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| Hawker Hill, Mitcheldean, Gloucestershire. GL17 0BS | |
| Current SIAMS inspection grade | Outstanding |
| Diocese | Gloucester |
| Previous SIAMS inspection grade | Outstanding |
| Local authority | Gloucestershire |
| Date of inspection | 20 March 2017 |
| Date of last inspection | 24 April 2012 |
| Type of school and unique reference number | Primary 115693 |
| Headteacher | Julia Dowding |
| Inspector's name and number | David Shears 423 |

School context

Mitcheldean Endowed Primary is a broadly average sized school with 205 pupils on roll. The large majority of pupils are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or a disability (SEND) is above the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. The RE leader was new to her post from September 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Mitcheldean Endowed Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school is exceptionally well led by the headteacher whose vision for the distinctively Christian nature of the school is shared by all staff, providing a unity of purpose and direction.
- The care of pupils is a strength of the school. Consequently the vast majority of pupils behave exceptionally well and look after each other. They are considerate of others in need, both in school, in the local community and beyond.
- Collective worship is consistently effective in developing pupils' understanding of the school's values and pupils can make links between these and key Bible stories.
- Pupils are making good progress in RE because teaching overall is effective. In particular, RE is making a substantial contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.
- There are close links with the local churches, the parents and community which demonstrates the positive impact that the school has beyond its gates.

Areas to improve

- Further develop pupils' higher level thinking skills in RE so that they have a deeper understanding of Christianity.
- Strengthen pupils' cultural development to include having a clearer knowledge and understanding of other faiths so that they are able to discuss the similarities between these religions and Christianity.
- Extend the effective practice of enabling pupils to lead worship to give more pupils regular opportunities to deepen their understanding of the purpose of worship.

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

Christian values are at the centre of the school's effectiveness and are embedded in all aspects of school life. As pupils move through the school their understanding of these values grows and deepens. Pupils are able to express this well and demonstrate how they apply this understanding to their behaviour and attitudes towards others. As a result the vast majority of pupils behave well and have positive attitudes towards their work. The school consistently challenges pupils to achieve well academically, including pupils who have special educational needs, resulting in overall standards that are above the national average by the end of Year 6.

Staff model the school's Christian values well, both in relationships with each other and with pupils in the way that they show care and support. Consequently, pupils care well for each other in school. For example, Year 6 pupils mentor children in the Reception class through the whole year, acting as a positive role model for them. Their care extends to others outside of the school gates including supporting a range of charities that care for the vulnerable further afield such as Operation Christmas Child and Children in Need. This demonstrates strong social and moral development.

The spiritual development of pupils is also a strength. This is because there are many opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning in a wide range of subjects. Each class has a list of 'awesome facts' that are focused on the current topic being studied, so that pupils are able to reflect on some of the amazing facts in life. The school has developed the use of 'big questions' for pupils to reflect on, linking these to particular Christian values and supporting further pupils' spiritual development. Opportunities for reflection are highlighted in the school's planning so that it can be monitored carefully. RE makes an important contribution to the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils through the inclusion of opportunities for reflection. However, the cultural development of pupils is not as strong. There are some activities to engage pupils in learning about other cultures such as through visitors, including one sharing aspects of their Hindu religion and Indian culture and another group of visitors sharing their Japanese culture. However, the opportunities for cultural development are not always explored in enough depth and so pupils' understanding is not always secure.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Pupils recognise that collective worship is an important part of the school day, because they are 'in a Christian school'. Staff also demonstrate its importance by attending collective worship and actively joining in with pupils. Worship is planned around the values of the school and it is this provision that is the main catalyst for learning about these values and how they can be demonstrated in day to day school life. One of the main displays in the school hall depicts the twelve values and a Bible story that relates to each of these, together with a painting of the story. This, coupled with the school's golden rule to 'love God and to love your neighbour as yourself', reminds pupils that these values are based on the Christian faith.

Acts of worship involve the use of liturgy as part of the welcome to worship to which pupils respond. There is a clear focus on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and pupils have a growing understanding of what this means. Pupils talk about having daily opportunities to pray and are able to recite specific ones such as the Lord's Prayer. They also have opportunities to write their own prayers and some of these are used within collective worship. Pupils are very clear about the purpose of prayer and know that they can pray at any time for many reasons, including giving thanks, saying sorry and presenting their requests to God. In some classes pupils are being encouraged to pray spontaneously, taking another step towards praying independently. This, alongside opportunities to reflect in worship, supports pupils' personal spirituality. Pupils know a range of hymns and songs and sing well together. However pupils say that they prefer the modern songs, particularly those that have actions. The school has identified the need to further develop the range of songs.

Older pupils have opportunities to plan and lead acts of worship which is enabling them to have a better understanding of what worship entails. The school has rightly identified that this effective practice needs to be widened to enable more pupils to engage in leading worship regularly.

The school makes good use of the local Anglican church to celebrate the major Christian festivals and parents talk about the popularity of these events. The local incumbent regularly leads collective worship in school and pupils talk enthusiastically about the 'Open the Book' team from the parish church and the local free church who act out, with pupils' help, different stories from the Bible. They particularly enjoy these acts of worship because of the high levels of participation. Collective worship is evaluated using contributions from governors, staff and pupils and areas for further development are identified and developed. These have included increased opportunities to participate in drama and more opportunities for pupils to choose songs for worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards in RE are at least in line with the national average with some pupils attaining the higher level by the end of Year 6. Overall this demonstrates that pupils have made good progress over time. The school has developed the use of assessment in RE since the last inspection to analyse how well different groups of pupils such as boys and girls and disadvantaged pupils are achieving. The school keeps effective records of the progress that each pupil makes and it recognises the usefulness of bringing this information together to provide the bigger picture.

Work in RE books and folders demonstrates the breadth of learning in RE and there is an appropriate balance of learning about religion and learning from religion. Pupils' learning in Christianity is good and they are able to talk about key stories from the Bible and link these with the school's Christian values. Pupils are engaged well in learning about Christianity and reflect on how this may help them to formulate their own views. However, pupils do not always have enough opportunities to develop their higher order thinking skills and so deepen their understanding of Christianity. For example, pupils do not regularly use Bibles to research and explore Christian truths.

The school has fully embraced the new approach to RE through 'Understanding Christianity' and a robust action plan has been written to ensure that this progresses in a timely way. Both the headteacher and RE leader have received initial training to establish this scheme of work and have already started to fully implement this through the school over the past month. The local incumbent has provided valuable support to ensure that teachers have the subject knowledge to be able to deliver the scheme effectively. As a result the work that pupils are now beginning to produce is already of a better quality, demonstrating their ability to tackle Christian concepts at a greater depth.

There is a clear plan for the teaching of other religions in the school and pupils are aware of some of the practices and beliefs of these religions. However, pupils are not always sure about which religions these practices belong to and so their understanding of a particular religion is not as strong.

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

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school's development as a church school that is embedded through the Christian values. This is shared by staff who work well as a team in realising this vision both in lessons, through collective worship and throughout the school day. Consequently, there is a strong Christian ethos that pervades the school, demonstrated through the way both pupils and adults support and care for each other.

Leaders and managers have ensured that the school meets its statutory requirements in its arrangements for RE and collective worship. The school has a clear and accurate evaluation of itself as a church school and, through its monitoring, has identified what needs to improve further. Staff have focused well on the whole school areas for development from the previous SIAS inspection and as a result the provision in these areas has improved. Teachers also receive feedback individually, identifying their strengths in their teaching of RE. However, there is not enough guidance to support them in developing their skills further. The foundation governors play an important part in supporting the school, including joining the school family for acts of worship and completing a brief evaluation. The chair of governors, who is also a foundation governor is involved with the school's self-evaluation as a church school but this is not always shared effectively enough with all foundation governors.

Since the previous inspection the school has developed stronger links with the Anglican church and this is now a substantial strength. This is because both the headteacher and the local incumbent consider this relationship to be a vital part of their role. There are also positive links with Forest Gate church which parents recognise as being 'another Christian church that worships God in different ways'. This church runs a pre-school group and parents talk about the good links between this group and children moving on to the school. Links with parents are equally strong. They talk enthusiastically about the effective level of care that their children receive and know that they are safe. They feel involved through being invited to class assemblies and acts of worship in the local church. There are excellent links with the local community such as a close link with the local residential home for the elderly who receive regular visits from the pupils to talk and play games with them and sing for them.

Overall, the school has continued to thrive and flourish since the last inspection. It continues to find ways to enhance the provision further so that pupils have a positive start to their education within a distinctively Christian environment.