



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Birchanger Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Birchwood, Birchanger
CM23 5QL

Previous SIAMS grade: Satisfactory

Current inspection grade: Satisfactory

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex

Date of inspection: 25 June 2015

Date of last inspection: November 2010

School's unique reference number: 115127

Headteacher: Helen Coop

Inspector's name and number: Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

Birchanger Primary School is a small school serving the villages of Birchanger and nearby Stansted. It's 112 pupils are almost all from a White British background. The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs is below average. After a time of significant staff changes, a new headteacher came into post from September 2014. She is building up a strengthened team around her. The parish church of St Mary the Virgin is within walking distance of the school and so is easily accessible with regular visits made.

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

- This nurturing Christian school values the uniqueness of each individual and enables positive attitudes amongst its pupils who grow in their self-esteem and confidence.
- The partnership between church and school is valued by the whole community as it supports its journey to maintain its Christian distinctiveness.
- Strong leadership is underpinned by core Christian values.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that governors engage in rigorous self-evaluation of the school's Christian character and distinctiveness by having a focus on this at all governing body meetings.
- Embed the evaluation and leadership of collective worship, involving pupils, staff, parents and governors to ensure worship is always evolving in quality.
- Deepen pupils' understanding of worldwide Anglican tradition and practice and ensure opportunities for pupils to meet people of other faith traditions in order to enhance learning and support spiritual development.

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

Birchanger Primary School provides a Christian family environment embodying its motto, 'learn to love, love to learn'. It values the uniqueness of each person, encouraging positive attitudes amongst its pupils, who grow in their self-esteem and confidence. This takes place within an environment which successfully seeks to nurture constructive relationships across the whole school community. This is because the school's chosen core Christian values, such as love, care courage and truth draw on the teachings of Jesus. They are at the centre of school life and practice. Consequently, pupils recognise that these values make a difference to the decisions they make in daily life. Good examples include pupils saying that 'courage means they are not afraid to be determined and try hard'. They also 'try and be a good friend and help others'. Attendance is good and in line with the national average. It is celebrated weekly and positive behaviour is encouraged as an expression of the school's Christian underpinning. Staff work closely with parents to support and help them and their children. The love of learning is constantly talked about and demonstrated through the care and nurture staff show in helping pupils learn. Pupils take on their own learning challenges. As a result, attainment shows a positive and improving picture, with some pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage exceeding age related expectations. A variety of extra-curricular clubs are offered to pupils to enrich their lives. Pupils experience the Christian values of service and generosity through fundraising activities. Such events help to enhance their understanding of their place in the world and their Christian responsibility to others. Birchanger pupils show respect for different cultures and communities through their religious education [RE] and in worship. Pupils enjoy their RE and 'learning about different religions and what is different to ours'. This makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural [SMSC] development, which is good overall. They speak with enthusiasm about 'learning in a fun way' about Hinduism and Islam as well as Christianity. This includes creative ways of studying creation and pilgrimages. Pupils can relate the Christmas and Easter story well, but are less secure in their knowledge of Ascension and Pentecost. Understanding of the person and role of Mary, after whom their church is named, is not developed appropriately. Pupils know that 'Christians should live in peace and not fight each other but have faith in God'. Pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith is underdeveloped. Thus their understanding of and respect for diversity within the church is limited. The school has rightly identified the need to deepen pupils' understanding of worldwide Anglican tradition and practice. In addition, it also recognises the need for pupils to meet people of other faiths to improve learning and deepen opportunities for spiritual and cultural development. Plans for these aspects to develop further have not been put into practice.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

The school has worked hard to establish a regular pattern of worship. As a result, the school week begins and ends with worship at the start and end of each week. Other acts of worship during the week take place at different times. Each class contributes to church services which take place throughout the year, at Harvest, Christmas and Easter. These are valued and seen as important by pupils and their parents. Pupils enjoy choosing the songs and singing in worship, with parents commenting that their children sing about the school's values. This includes 'He'll be there' which has a focus on values and the Birchanger School Song which celebrates 'learn to love, love to learn'. Thus, worship which has a focus on the church year and Christian values is making a limited, but growing impact on the lives of the children and their families. Pupils say they enjoy listening to Bible stories, such as the healing of the paralysed man. This encourages them to 'help your friends'. Pupils have opportunity through worship to focus on the life and teaching of Jesus. Pupils say that 'the church is a quiet place where you can pray'. They can also use the willow dome, the meditation area in the wooded part of the forest school or quiet cabin in the school grounds for prayer and quiet reflection. The school uses The Lord's Prayer regularly, with an emphasis on praying to God the Father. The Holy Spirit is referred to as being all around them. Pupils speak of 'the spirit of faith that you should believe in'. However, pupils' understanding of The Holy Trinity (God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as part of their regular worshipping life is not understood. Pupils experience prayer but have limited understanding of its value and relevance in their everyday lives. Pupils' perceptions of worship and suggestions for improvement are now gathered more regularly. Each week a different class writes down

their reflections. This began around five months ago. Thus its impact on shaping worship is still in the early stages of development. Pupils enjoy and engage well with worship led by a range of people, including their rector, Stort Valley Trust and Puppets Galore. Just as the school council meets to 'talk about how to make the school better', pupils say they would like to meet with their rector to share their viewpoints on worship. The school recognises this suggestion from pupils as a positive way forward but firm plans for this to happen have yet to be put in place.

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

This school has experienced a period of great change, notably in its leadership. However, since the appointment of its headteacher, at the beginning of the academic year, the school is now in a more settled phase of its life and learning journey. There is a renewed impetus from the whole community to move forward together under the direction of the headteacher. The pursuit of excellence is rightly high on the agenda. However this has not, as yet, impacted significantly on the standards pupils attain and the progress they make. A focus on ensuring a Christian based community where all children are happy, can thrive and succeed, whatever their starting point in life is key to the school's renewed Christian vision led by the headteacher and supported by governors. Links between the school's Christian character and the school's strategic planning are beginning but they are not consistently made. Pupils have a voice through the school council. Parents praise the spirit of the school where 'everybody knows everyone here'. Governors are committed to the school's development plan. Whilst the school has experienced significant changes, areas from the previous inspection have been addressed. Above all, governors are committed to the wellbeing of the children and supporting staff professional development as part of the future leadership of church schools. However, church school distinctiveness is not a standing item on the governing body agenda, although SMSC development has been previously. Governors acknowledge this helps raise the profile of their important monitoring role, including of RE and worship. Both RE and worship meet statutory requirements. Governors are well focused on the importance of all children receiving a rounded education and growing in their self-esteem. The support offered to this by the school's Christian underpinning is beginning to be articulated. Governor curriculum meetings always focus on pupil achievement. Diocesan support and training is much appreciated. It has been especially valued during the time of change and the recent Ofsted inspection and its follow up. Community links are strong, especially with the parish church. The school Christmas fair and summer fete are held at the school and run by the PTA. In addition, the school recently celebrated the local link to the Magna Carta anniversary celebrations. The school has rightly identified that displaying pupils' work in church will enhance further the good links which exist between church and school. However, this development has not been implemented as yet.

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