



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Little Thetford Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Green Hill
Little Thetford
Ely
Cambridgeshire CB6 3HD

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Ely

Local authority: Cambridgeshire

Date of inspection: 5 July 2016

Date of last inspection: 14 July 2011

School's unique reference number: 110803

Headteacher: Jonathan Wallace

Inspector's name and number: David Bunkell 815

School context

A new headteacher started in September 2015. The parish is part of the Ely Team Ministry, and since February 2016 the team curate has been given responsibility to act as the incumbent of St George's Church Little Thetford, following a lengthy interregnum. The church is adjacent to the school in the centre of the village. A short Ofsted inspection in May 2016 confirmed previous judgements that the school is deemed to be good in all the areas of inspection. Currently 98 pupils attend the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Little Thetford Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and adults are highly positive, based on mutual respect.
- Many pupils show a highly developed sense of spirituality.
- Pupils derive much benefit from the quality and breadth of collective worship.

Areas to improve

- Review systems for teaching about other world faiths so that pupils become more aware of religious practices and therefore understand and respect diversity more fully.
- Constantly monitor and develop the indoor and outdoor prayer spaces to encourage pupils to make optimum use of these areas to increase their spiritual development.
- Increase the effectiveness of the many positive links between the school and the church by making the partnership more visible inside the church.

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

The Christian character of the school is understood by pupils, and enables them to thrive, with trust, endurance and hope ever present. Every pupil is valued as an individual child of God, so all achieve well, regardless of their ability or background. A very compassionate approach is used to support any families who have difficulties in ensuring the regular, punctual attendance at school of their children. The personal development and wellbeing of all pupils is of paramount importance. Pupils demonstrate very well developed spirituality, and their moral, social and cultural development is boosted in an environment where all human values stem from Christianity and the Bible. Charitable giving is important, and earlier this term the whole school participated cheerfully in the WaterAid's Pipeline Challenge, raising essential funds but also increasing awareness of the difficulties some countries have in accessing one of life's essentials. This all has a positive effect on all, whether they are Christian, of other faiths or of none. Pupils were seen to behave at all times in an exemplary manner, with older pupils playing happily with the younger children, and showing great tolerance. Relationships between pupils and adults are extremely harmonious, based on a real sense of mutual respect. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to learn about faiths other than Christianity and show genuine respect, but in conversation were sometimes confused about some basic facts regarding the words used for people who follow other religions, or the terminology for their places of worship. Some pupils had recently visited Westminster Abbey, and one spoke about the poignant effect on him on seeing the grave of the unknown warrior. Others spoke of a sense of awe and wonder at the vast space, appreciating that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith, celebrated there in a similar way to in their own small church. Pupils enjoy religious education (RE) lessons, and achieve well, making a real contribution to the Christian character of the school as pupils understand the relevance of RE to modern life and personal choices. This supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

All in the school community see the daily opportunity for collective worship (CW) as a highlight of the day. CW is always distinctively Christian, based on the school's core values of peace, love and service, with an individual monthly theme. In conversation pupils explained how specific Bible stories have affected the way in which they treat each other, living out the core value of service, and how they view themselves as part of God's world. At the time of the inspection the monthly theme was 'courage', and the local 'Open the Book' team enacted the story of Esther, with enthusiastic participation by volunteer pupils to act alongside the adults. The impact of the story was such that one pupil later in the day had located the Book of Esther in a Bible in the prayer space to read it again. This CW had begun with the enthusiastic singing of a relevant worship song, which pupils said helped to suggest that God shows courage. Parallels were later drawn with the courage that will be needed by the Year 6 pupils shortly to leave the school, and candles were lit for a time of reflection and for all to say together the school prayer. Collective and personal prayers are an important part of school life. Each classroom has a box in which prayers are placed, and these were seen to be used frequently. Pupils also make use of a newly-created indoor prayer space and a reflection garden for contemplation or prayer. The indoor space has proved to be immensely popular, but can accommodate only five pupils at a time. The resources there include a tray of sand, and a pupil demonstrated how to write 'sorry' in the sand, and then to wipe it clear for a fresh start. The outside area is under trees and also has bird feeders. As a result the furniture is messy and the ambiance not always suited to quiet reflection. The fact that pupils see prayer as such a natural pastime has enabled a highly-developed sense of personal spirituality, as pupils show compassion and patience. In discussion pupils could express a simple understanding of the theology of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, identifying Pentecost as one of the most important Christian festivals, while recognising the centrality of Jesus Christ. Individual pupils regularly complete proformas to evaluate CW, leading to such changes as greater pupil participation. On some occasions, CW is entirely planned and led by the pupils themselves.

The school council also considers aspects of CW, and governors regularly attend and evaluate the Christian content of CW, also suggesting practical matters such as the use of a microphone when CW takes place in church. Pupils particularly appreciate the extremely wide range of CW leaders, including all teachers, weekly 'Open the Book' sessions, and several other visitors, including the incumbent and a lay pioneer from the ministry team. Pupils spoke most enthusiastically about CW on Wednesdays, taking place in the church at the end of the afternoon, also attended by a number of parents. Many pupils then regularly remain in the church for a 'messy church' after-school session. Major church festivals are also celebrated with CW in church.

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

The Christian ethos is at the heart of every aspect of the leadership and management of the school. Leaders clearly live out and promote a vision of spiritual leadership that is firmly rooted in Christian values. As a direct result pupils are enabled to achieve to the best of their ability, and the school is a happy environment in which the wellbeing of all is an absolute priority. Governors know the school extremely well, and ensure that the Christian ethos remains central. This has been demonstrated recently by the process of appointing a new headteacher to build on previous successes, and in recruiting other senior staff to maintain the centrality of the Christian ethos. Self-evaluation of the Christian distinctiveness of the school is honest and thorough, involving all leaders. The foundation governors meet regularly as a committee to discuss the school's ethos, and the minutes of these meetings show discussion of such matters as development of the reflection garden, and ensuring that foundation governors attend relevant training. Governors and senior staff are planning carefully for the future success of the school, considering prudently any future inevitable changes. Partnership with the local church is particularly strong, with pupils identifying the impact that the recently-appointed incumbent has had, saying that they now benefit even more from the CW sessions in church. Two of the foundation governors are members of the PCC, and the school is discussed at every PCC meeting. The school sees the church premises as an extension to their own facilities, but there is nothing permanent in the church to indicate the importance of its partnership with the school. Links with the diocese and Ely Cathedral are also strong, with pupils attending events at the cathedral and diocesan resources used for effective staff and governor training. Staff meet regularly with colleagues at other church schools to consider such matters of moderating standards of written work in RE. A link with the cathedral's stained glass museum has resulted in an ongoing project for all pupils to make a small section of a stained glass window in the school, proudly pointed out by pupils who knew exactly which part they had contributed. Parents are very much part of the school community. In conversation they were unfailing in their praise for the school and all that is done for their children. They are also part of religious life at the school, regularly attending CW in school and the church. Wider families are not neglected, and at the time of the inspection pupils were enjoying the chance to prepare a concert performance for their grandparents. Religious education is deemed to be a core subject in the curriculum and as such is well resourced and an important part of staff development, enabling pupils to achieve well. The arrangements for religious education and collective worship far exceed basic statutory requirements.

SIAMS report July 2016 Little Thetford VC Primary School Ely CB6 3HD