



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

LAYSTON CHURCH OF ENGLAND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED FIRST SCHOOL

The Causeway, Buntingford, Hertfordshire

SG9 9EU

Diocese of St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Date of inspection: 19th June 2014

Date of last inspection: 8th June 2009

School's unique reference number: 117390

Head teacher: Mrs Myra Bloomfield

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Mel Adams NS 58

School context

The school in the small rural town of Buntingford is an over-subscribed one form of entry first school. There are 147 children on role and the majority of pupils live near to the school. Around ten percent are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the remainder are white British. The percentage entitled to free school meals and those with special educational needs is low. Since the previous inspection there has been a change of vicar, along with two Head teacher changes, the most recent being in September 2013.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Layston First School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The passion and drive of the recently appointed head teacher, supported by the vicar and the governing body, have ensured that the school, building on developments since the previous inspection, has rapidly further strengthened distinctiveness as a church school.
- The Christian values which are understood by children of all ages and shared by all members of the school community, support excellent behaviour and relationships, and lead to very effective learning and high attainment.
- Daily worship, in which all members of the school community participate, supports and inspires the strong Christian ethos of the school.

Areas to improve

- To strengthen children's understanding of global issues and respect for diversity by developing understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith.
- To further develop the involvement of children's understanding of worship through planning and leading collective worship

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

Christian values are described by staff, parents and governors as embedded in the life of the school, and shape the ethos of the school as a church school. Parents describe how children learn and develop well through staff and parents working together. Parents also recognise the significant impact of the values on the motivation of children to learn, believing that all children really do have 'a chance to shine'. As a result, spirituality develops well further supported by a creative and inspiring curriculum. Children have a deep understanding of the Christian faith and values and their understanding of other faiths enables them to respect differences and similarities in expression of faith, including shared values. Children have an understanding of a range of expressions of Christian worship through visitors from different denominations. Empathy, forgiveness and deep levels of care are evident throughout the school as a result of which behaviour and relationships are excellent. During the inspection, children from different year groups were seen to affirm and encourage each other. They gain insight into global issues through learning about the leadership of such as figures as Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, saying that they inspire them to fight injustice. They do not relate this to an understanding that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith. The school provides a setting in which questioning, self-worth, meaning and purpose can and do develop as children move through the school. This was evident in a Year 4 RE lesson where children were discussing issues of commitment, justifying their reasons and sensitively responding to each other. This led to a discussion about the nature of commitment including commitment to Christianity and different faiths. Attendance for the majority of children is good and the governing body have strategies in place to improve attendance for the small number for whom this is not the case. Visits to a range of places of worship including Christian and other faiths support the children's understanding of the faith and cultural experiences of others. One child described how this inspires them to respect the practices of others. Links with schools in Ghana and China are also enriching children's global understanding. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported by the school's distinctive Christian character.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

The daily act of worship, attended by all staff and children, is highly valued in the school and is seen to be at the heart of the school's mission statement : 'Loving to Learn, Learning to Love, for every child a chance to shine'. This is brought to life through a range of Christian values, agreed at the beginning of the academic year by staff and governors, which have a significant impact on day to day relationships. Children are confident to articulate how what they hear and do in worship is in their thinking during the day, and helps them in relationships, for example through being able to forgive when things go wrong. They also speak of how, 'it makes us want to explore more about God'. One parent described how this also makes children feel safe and cared for, and 'feel good about themselves so that they can get on with learning'. Children are motivated to take action through a range of fund raising for charities which is generated by children themselves. One child explained how, having seen a programme on television about poverty, they organised a cake sale to raise funds. Respect for the act of worship is clearly evident through the willingness of children to participate, entering with reverence, listening to Bible stories, answering questions, participating in prayer, and reflective silence. Children contribute through writing and reading prayers and also through spontaneously offering to contribute. This was observed during the inspection where children were showing a real understanding of the Holy Trinity, further enhanced by the contribution of a child who was able to illustrate three in one with a balloon and another with a piece of music using three notes. Children were able to articulate how God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and expressed how the Holy Spirit 'is in us and helps us spread Jesus to others' and how 'He helps us to make the right choices'. Prayer is important both within the act of worship and during the day, where children can write prayers for the prayer tree which are then dedicated to God during collective worship. The head teacher describes how some children will want to

write a 'sorry' prayer when things go wrong. Challenging questions, such as 'If God is three in one, how big is God?' linked to the use of silence and reflection support spiritual development, as children describe how they really think about such questions and talk about them later with their friends. Children have come to understand and make use of reflection and silence and this was observed in the Reception class where children were invited to be still and think of their special place. The head teacher and vicar plan the schedule for worship covering the agreed Christian values following their evaluation of daily worship. Through visits to the church for worship and visits from the vicar to the school, children have an understanding of the Church year through celebration of festivals and aspects of liturgy including Anglican prayers. There are increasing opportunities for spiritual development during the day including in the forest school where by learning an appreciation of the natural world, children experience the wonder of God's creation through first-hand experience. They have created spaces for reflection, including making crosses as a focal point.

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

The school has not only sustained, but further developed as an outstanding Church school since the previous inspection, with areas for development addressed and the development of values education. Staff, governors and parents describe how the development of the Christian character of the school has significantly accelerated since the appointment of the head teacher in September 2013. Her passion, vision and drive are dynamic, resulting in a sharpening of focus on distinctive Christian values. Governors describe how the values are part of the 'DNA' of the school, 'the golden thread' and help each child to achieve their God given potential. They are evident throughout the school in displays and classroom reflective areas, and inform relationships throughout the school. They are expressed in the newly implemented behaviour policy which staff, parents and children speak of with enthusiasm, describing how the values of forgiveness and reconciliation on which it is built are motivating and improving behaviour, particularly for those whose behaviour can be challenging. These values also inform leadership and management decisions by staff and governors. In the short time since her appointment the head teacher has further developed the partnership with the vicar and Layston church, extending opportunities for children and all those in the school community to learn about Anglican faith and practice. Senior staff lead evaluations taking into account feedback from staff, governors, parents and children. This has accurately identified strategic areas for church school development. High attainment is attributed by school leaders to the mission statement which encapsulates the agreed values, driving improvements to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn well. Daily learning is further enriched by parent volunteers working alongside staff and children. Contributions to the community beyond the school include visiting local residential homes and the head teacher's regular contribution to the monthly Buntingford Journal. Governors are fully supportive of the professional development of school leaders. This has directly led to the development of collective worship and Religious Education, both of which are intrinsic to the school's church school distinctiveness. Leadership of Collective worship is highly effective in developing Christian worship.

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