

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Burwash Church of England Primary School	
School Hill, Burwash, Etchingham, East Sussex, TN19 7DZ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chichester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	East Sussex
Date of inspection	14 June 2017
Date of last inspection	November 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary – Voluntary Controlled - 114492
Headteacher	Debbie Gilbert
Inspector's name and number	Pamela Draycott - 161

School context

This smaller than average primary school serves the village of Burwash and the surrounding area. It has six classes of varying size based on the ages and needs of the pupils. The school site and the parish church of St Bartholomew are adjacent to one another. The vast majority of pupils are White British. The percentage for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage is below the national average. Likewise, the percentage with some sort of special educational need or disability is below average. There is a long serving staff team led by an experienced headteacher.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Burwash voluntary controlled primary school as a Church of England school are outstanding

- A strong, inclusive and aspirational ethos is based on clear Christian values which underpin the school's work. This impacts positively on the exemplary behaviour of pupils and the caring and respectful relationships which characterise the school.
- Under the experienced leadership of the headteacher the collegiate way in which staff and governors work closely together to support the academic and personal development of pupils expresses excellently the school's Christian and inclusive ethos.
- The worship programme is central to school life and contributes deeply to the pupils' spiritual and moral development clearly influencing attitudes and behaviour.
- Positive relationships between the school and the parish church strongly reflect them working together in Christian service of their wider community.

Areas to improve

- Embed the recently reviewed Christian vision so that it consistently and explicitly sustains and drives forward its distinctiveness and effectiveness as a Church school during its next period of development.
- Improve the regularity and rigour of governor monitoring of the impact of worship on the school community in order to develop and embed best practice.

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

The school successfully creates a friendly, supportive and welcoming atmosphere based on its high profile Christian foundation of mutual respect, honesty and trust. As a result, pupils are very well supported and challenged and consequently make at least good and often very good progress from their various starting points. There is no significant overall gap in attainment between different groups of pupils. Standards are consistently above the national and local averages which clearly expresses the motto of 'Caring Children Loving Learning'. This motto is underpinned by the school's vision which has recently been reviewed as part of an ongoing cycle of school improvement planning. The 12 Christian values have been developed and refined since the time of the previous denominational inspection, with detailed input from staff, governors, pupils and parents, especially through the Christian values group. These values are very well known by pupils and staff and are used effectively to help pupils reach their potential both academically and personally. Pupils are treated as individuals and their wellbeing is given a high priority as exemplified by strong pastoral care of the individual. This results in pupils feeling happy and safe in school and to them having constructive attitudes to learning. Attendance is above the national average and pupils' behaviour in class and around the site is exemplary. Pupils are helpful and polite and can relate their actions to the school's Christian values. As a Year 4 pupil reflected, 'Forgiveness is one of our school values because God forgives us. That means when I've done something I need to say sorry and try not to do it again'. High quality displays celebrate the school's Christian values and support learning and teaching very well.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and appropriate opportunities are taken to provide quality times of thinking and reflection about a range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) issues. This is particularly the case through topic work and in religious education (RE). Pupils respond excellently and are developing their ability to express their thoughts, ideas and beliefs confidently whilst listening respectfully to others. For example, in Year 1 pupils are able to make links between the parable of the Lost Son and their own experiences of being loved and forgiven. In Year 4 and 5 they can use English and RE skills to interrogate a biblical parable and draw out its meaning for Christians whilst relating its significance for their own lives. The provision of SMSC opportunities is enhanced further through helping pupils appreciate the beauty and diversity of the natural world as part of God's creation. This is done, for example, through the work of the eco group and by helping pupils develop their confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences with nature. This is based on a 'Forest Schools' approach which the school uses excellently. It impacts positively on pupils' engagement with and enjoyment of the natural world. Pupils take responsibility for themselves and others in a caring and assured manner. For example, they act as monitors and children of all ages can be seen playing together at break times. The school council, the eco council, the school newspaper group and the Christian values group are also ways in which pupils have a positive impact on school life and development. Charitable giving is clearly seen as an expression of the school's Christian foundation. As a Year 6 pupil said, 'We are very privileged and a way of showing thankfulness to God for that is by helping others and by giving to charity'. RE is effective in supporting pupils' appreciation of a variety of religious beliefs and practices. This includes a growing awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural, world faith. For example, some RE work focusing on Saint Teresa of Calcutta and the Little Sisters of Charity and links with a Christian school in Malawi support pupils in appreciating the world-wide nature of Christianity. A visit to the local Roman Catholic church in the village supports pupils in understanding something of denominational similarities and differences. Recent visits to a Sikh gurdwara and to a Jewish synagogue have enhanced pupils' consideration of the role and significance of religion, faith and culture in the world today. The RE and the worship programmes express and support the school's Christian and inclusive foundation and values very well.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship plays a key part in school life with pupils and staff able to articulate its importance across the school community. It is held at the beginning of each day and contributes effectively to the strong sense of community which is in evidence across the school. Worship is carefully planned by the headteacher to include a focus on Christian values, festivals, beliefs and practices as well as issues specific to the school or events in the news in Britain and beyond. It fosters an inclusive and respectful atmosphere which supports a deep sense of belonging and 'family'. Pupils and adults engage well in worship and recognise its impact on them as individuals. 'I enjoy the singing. It makes me feel closer to God' as a Year 5 pupil reflected. Whilst a Year 6 pupil said, 'being together and thinking about God is important to our school'. Pupils enter and leave the hall quietly and respectfully. They join in very well when asked to do so through enthusiastic singing and responding to questions raised by the worship leaders. Worship appropriately includes a wide range of biblical stories. These help pupils develop a very good understanding of the importance of the Bible and of Jesus for Christians. It also helps them appreciate, in age-appropriate ways, key Christian beliefs such as forgiveness and the concept of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship is regularly led by the headteacher,

other staff, the Rector, class groups, and the Christian values group. This provides variety of approaches and contributes very well to pupils' enjoyment and engagement. Worship in school is enhanced through worship at least six times each academic year held in the parish church. These times are led by the Rector. This expresses the link between school and church and includes parents well. Several ways of introducing pupils to Anglican worship practice are used in school. The significance of the lighting of candles is securely embedded in pupils' understanding. The introduction of different colours to mark different times of the church year recently, including for the leaves on the prayer tree, is partially embedded. Pupils know why the colours change but not understand the symbolism of the colours themselves. Prayer plays an important and significant part in school worship. Pupils know the Lord's Prayer and can explain something of its significance for Christians. They listen very well and join in respectfully with prayers written and read by pupils as part of worship. They know that they can offer their own prayers on the prayer tree and in the reflection areas in classrooms and report that some pupils do so 'quite regularly'. They recognise that there are different types of prayer such as 'thanking and asking prayers to God', as a Year 3 pupil said. The worship programme's impact is monitored by senior leaders, and pupils' evaluations make a more positive contribution than at the time of the previous denominational inspection. Their comments are taken into consideration and there is evidence that this impacts on refining practice. An example of this is including more drama opportunities when the Christian values group leads worship. Whilst governors do monitor and evaluate worship this is less formal and not consistently robust or regular.

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

The school's longstanding and suitably qualified staff team is ably led by its experienced headteacher, clearly well supported by her senior leadership team and governors. Over the course of this academic year, as part of its cycle of ongoing development, the school has revisited its Christian vision to refocus it in the light of national and local developments. This vision draws effectively on the school's Christian and Anglican foundation of service to its community. Given that it is in the very early stages of implementation the refined vision has not had time to show impact. Governors are well informed and involved in school life, providing effective support and challenge. They have secured competent leadership for RE and worship both of which meet statutory requirements. The wellbeing of staff has a high priority and their professional development opportunities are taken seriously. They are appropriately supported for working within the church school sector. The school has recently invested in training for enhancing the teaching of Christianity through an approach that has been produced called 'Understanding Christianity'. Although in the early stages of implementation and not embedded, its positive impact on teaching and learning is already being felt. RE is taught in line with the East Sussex locally agreed syllabus (LAS) which has just been reviewed. The school is waiting for a copy of the LAS and has clear plans in place for linking this with its existing programme and with the Understanding Christianity materials over the course of the next academic year. Senior leaders and governors have a very clear understanding of the school's performance and distinctiveness. This is based on effective self-evaluation which involves a range of people across the school community. Consequently, there is a clear action plan for sustaining and further improving the school's effectiveness and distinctiveness as a Church of England school. The two areas identified for improvement in the previous denominational report were linked to elements of the worship programme. Both have been very well addressed and have led to positive improvements. The relationship with the parish church is very close. The school is involved in various church activities and vice-versa. Examples of this include, the Tuesday 'drop in' where pupils and villagers visit the church for a drink and a biscuit; the Christian values group has recently produced a booklet of favourite hymns to be used in both church and school; and the regular involvement of the Rector as governor and worship leader in the school. Parents are kept well informed of their children's attainment and progress and are appreciative of the approachability and commitment of staff. Many parents recognise this as an expression of the school's Christian foundation. The school has good links with the local authority buying into its governor training services, for example. It is kept up to date with developments in church school education through deanery briefing sessions, diocesan RE training and an annual visit from the diocesan school link adviser. The school is outward looking in other ways too. It is part of the Heathfield Area School Partnership (HASP) which is chaired by the headteacher. This partnership successfully provides opportunities for pupils and staff to work together.