



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Much Birch CE (VC) Primary School

Much Birch
Hereford
HR2 8HL

Previous SIAS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Hereford

Local authority: Herefordshire

Dates of inspection: 2 October 2015

Date of last inspection: 20 September 2010

School's unique reference number: 116833

Headteacher: Bernadette Davies

Inspector's name and number: Karen Surrall 842

School context

Much Birch is a rural primary school with 195 pupils on roll. Its pupils come from a wide area covering Ross-on-Wye and Hereford; 63% of pupils come from outside the catchment area. The pupils are predominantly of white British origin; there is a small and growing percentage of children with English as an additional language in KS1. The school has less than the national average of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs. The newly appointed headteacher (September 2015) is the fifth to hold the post since the last inspection.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Much Birch (VC) Primary school as a Church of England school are good

- Strong spiritual leadership by the new headteacher, supported by a staff team that is determined to do their very best for the children in their care, is already improving academic expectations.
- The centrality of collective worship, prayer and reflection throughout the school has a significant impact on learner's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The pastoral care shown to all stakeholders by school staff is a strength of the school.

Areas to improve

- Provide effective learning to ensure children understand more about the diversity and difference of other faiths and cultures, including visits to a variety of places of worship.
- Deepen the school's understanding of spirituality so that learners have high quality learning experiences which raise their aspirations.
- Improve self-evaluation and monitoring of the school by governors so that the school's distinctive Christian character is fully understood by all stakeholders and incorporated into policy and practice.

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

The school's distinctive Christian values, currently 'Thankfulness', permeate every corner of Much Birch Primary. They are evident in classroom displays, the banners in the hall, the bunting on the playground and in the calm atmosphere of the school. As a result they underpin and shape the relationships between all stakeholders, support the learning and contribute well to pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC). The recently updated school website shares the school's vision of itself as a church school and incorporates the school prayer. Children and staff are clear about the Christian foundations of the value: 'we want to be more like Jesus' offered a KSI child. In a recent parent survey the vast majority of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the school encourages pupils to treat others with respect and dignity. They directly attribute this to the school's values, although parents were not included in the selection of the values; consequently, they do not see these as distinctly Christian values. Since the last inspection, the school has introduced reflection areas into all classrooms and outside. They have been imaginatively created, with a variety of resources to help aid the children's thinking, including candles, prayers and inspirational posters. As a result, these are used daily by learners and are highly regarded 'I like to be in the reflection area because it is what the children have done and not what the teachers have done' commented a child in KS2. Robust self-evaluation by the current leadership team has ensured that all staff understand how to improve achievement for all pupils and groups of pupils. The well-being of the pupils and their families is seen to be of the utmost importance. The appointment of a learning mentor four years ago has improved attendance to well above the national average and the calm atmosphere in school is directly attributed to her work with pupils, staff and families, particularly in relation to effective behaviour management strategies. Staff have recently developed their own definition of spirituality as a 'search for meaning and purpose and a relationship with God'. This is not yet embedded throughout the school so learners are not able to express their ideas fluently and plans for where SMSC can be developed in the broader curriculum are in their infancy. Teaching of religious education (RE) is imaginative and the children enjoy their RE lessons. Links with the Christian values of the school are explicit and consequently there are good, well-planned examples of where children's spiritual, moral and social understanding is being developed. However, the children's understanding of Britain as a multi-faith community is weak. They have little knowledge of the fundamental tenets of other faiths and only a basic understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a strength of the school, clearly helping learners and staff to make explicit the relevance of the school's Christian values to their own lives. The school has worked closely with the local incumbent, a valued member of the school community, to develop aspects of Anglican liturgy so that they are incorporated into acts of worship that are meaningful to all. As a result, worship has a strong biblical base and is centred on the person of Jesus. Children of all ages have a good understanding of the Trinity. Prayer holds a prominent place in the school day and children speak movingly of how important prayer is to them. They value deeply the times of prayer and reflection at home time, where their thoughts are guided to reflect on their day in the light of the current value and by focussing on a lit candle. One child spoke of the candle as 'a doorway to heaven', another 'that it gives you time to reflect on your day and how you might have done things differently'. The children are regularly challenged about their world view and encouraged to think how they can make a difference, for example the school has raised an impressive amount of money for a variety of causes. Parents acknowledge the impact that the school's worship has on family life and in some cases their own spiritual journey. Children ask searching questions, prompted by issues raised in worship times. These are sometimes linked to the current value, sometimes in response to world events, all initiated by the carefully planned

worship times. Staff and pupils regularly lead worship and prayer, particularly in class worship times and in the much valued whole school class led worship times. These are planned and led by each class in turn to which parents are invited. Whilst the planning and leading of worship is guided by the collective worship lead, all staff are able to develop their own ideas and encourage children to do the same. There are many examples of prayers, written and collected by the children, in each classroom. These show a high level of understanding of how Christian teaching relates to the school's values and to their own lives. The excellent practice evident in collective worship and the impact that it has on the pupil's SMSC development can now be further strengthened by a deeper and more explicit discussion and understanding of spirituality and the evaluation of its impact on the whole school community.

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

The new headteacher has a strong vision for the school and how the school's Christian values can support all members of the adult community to achieve the very best for the pupils in their care. She is clear about the need to raise expectations so that all children achieve their potential. This vision is shared by other leaders within the school and robust self-evaluation has seen improvements in the attainment of groups of pupils over recent months. The learning mentor is a valued and valuable asset to the school. She is able to spend time working with individual pupils and with families, responding daily to those in need of intensive support. A detailed, daily report to the headteacher ensures that there is a close working partnership between the school and improved outcomes for hard pressed families. Her work is a practical outworking of the school's Christian character. The lead for RE and collective worship has a high profile within the school's management structure and it is her vision for the school that has driven the development of the school's reflection areas, partly funded by the parent, teacher and friends association. Together with the incumbent she has developed a comprehensive programme of collective worship that enables all pupils to understand the school's distinctive Christian values and the impact on their lives. Links with the local church are good, although visits at present are impossible due to building work. The incumbent, who is also the chair of governors, is seen by all members of the community as part of the team, 'someone who gives lots of support'. He knows the school well and shares with the headteacher the vision to 'make the children the focus of everything we do, giving them opportunities to flourish'. The school has good links with the Diocese of Hereford, children attend the leavers' service at the cathedral each year and staff have been on diocesan led training. As a result, staff are clear on how to improve this church school. Governors are not yet proactive enough in ensuring that the Christian character of the school is at the heart of the school's work and understood by all stakeholders. For example, current policies do not reflect or underpin the school's vision of itself as a church school. All the development points from the last inspection have been addressed showing the determination of governors and staff to improve provision for the children in their care at this good church school.

SIAMS report October 2015 Much Birch C of E (VC) Primary School Hereford HR2 8HL