



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Stonham Aspal Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

The Street
Stonham Aspal
Stowmarket
Suffolk
IP14 6AF

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: St Edmundsbury & Ipswich

Local authority: Suffolk

Date of inspection: 10 March 2016

Date of last inspection: 31 March 2011

School's unique reference number: 124772

Headteacher: Sharon Waldron

Inspector's name and number: David Bunkell 815

School context

Since the previous inspection, the former headteacher has retired after 26 years' service to the school. The current headteacher was appointed from Easter 2015, and leads a school of 181 pupils, most coming from a number of small villages. Following a lengthy interregnum, a new incumbent moved to the village in 2014, and is responsible for several churches in a large rural area.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Stonham Aspal Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Pupils are confident but not arrogant, and show a highly-developed interpretation of spirituality as they live out the Christian message.
- High quality relationships between all in the school are beneficial, based on true mutual respect and compassion.
- Leadership by governors, senior staff and the coordinator for religious education is exemplary, enabling the undoubted success of the school as a Christian community.

Areas to improve

- Consider creating an outdoor space for prayer and reflection, to enrich pupils' spiritual journeys.
- Give pupils further opportunities to lead collective worship and to monitor its effectiveness, in order to deepen its value to them.

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

Pupils are highly aware that they attend a church school, and are able to express their gratitude for the positive impact that this has on their academic achievements, wellbeing and personal development, regardless of ability or background. They have a particularly well-developed sense of spirituality, evident in the compassion with which they treat each other, and in their care for their environment. Mindful of the need to look after God's creation, some senior pupils have taken the initiative to care for a garden area, including renovating the greenhouse gutters to collect rain water more efficiently. By upholding Christian values such as service and trust, the school is able most effectively to support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils whether they are Christian, of other faiths or of none. The school aims to have a family ambience, and is highly successful in this. While eating lunch with a small group of pupils, several of them introduced their siblings, seated elsewhere in the hall. On the playground pupils of all ages and both sexes play together harmoniously. In lessons, pupils will wait extremely patiently to allow others to express their views, but are then unafraid to disagree politely and to state another viewpoint. When discussing how they are often able themselves to resolve any minor incidents, they used the word 'reconciliation' as being their aim. Throughout the day, pupils frequently draw parallels between their own behaviour or attitudes and Bible stories, for example, members of the school council stating that they try to 'follow in the steps of Jesus'. Pupils enjoy learning about major world religions in their religious education lessons, frequently making connections between the practices of different faiths. They realise that there are Christians throughout the world, in conversation mentioning the Anglican church in Australia, large Pentecostal churches in America, and the Vatican City.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship (CW) takes place daily for the whole school during the afternoon, and is described by many pupils as a highpoint of the day. Following a recommendation from the previous inspection, all teaching staff now participate in leading CW, increasing their ownership of this fundamental part of the day. Starting with Anglican greetings and responses and the lighting of a candle on the worship table, the distinct Christian nature of CW is at once apparent. Pupils enter and leave singing enthusiastically a relevant hymn or worship song. The school has adopted six core Biblical values, each used for half a term as the theme for CW. The current value is faithfulness, and during the inspection CW was based on the story of Job's honesty and faithfulness. Pupils attentively watched a video clip with children acting out the story, and were then given time to reflect before answering a question regarding how Job had shown faithfulness. Many were keen to answer, and responses showed profound understanding of theological concepts, recognising the consequences when the Ten Commandments are not obeyed. In response to a further question about integrity, one pupil cogently argued that in a sense Satan had shown integrity in this story. The session had done much to promote personal spirituality. It ended with a time of prayer, and a Christian dismissal and response. In addition to CW having this focus on prayer, pupils often write their own prayers, and prayers are said at appropriate points throughout the day. Pupils said that they appreciate opportunities to pray and reflect, but there is no specific outside area for them to do so in their free time. In conversation pupils showed a mature understanding of the Trinitarian nature of Christianity, able to explain the principle of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, acknowledging the central position of Jesus Christ, and saying that 'the Holy Spirit is always with us'. In addition to CW led by staff, a local 'Open the Book' team leads CW weekly, and pupils said they enjoy the chance to dress up and participate in these sessions. Pupils also sometimes participate in CW by explaining to others what they have learnt in religious education lessons, but they do not currently have the opportunity themselves to plan and lead CW, or formally to monitor its effectiveness. The incumbent also regularly leads CW. The school uses the church for CW on special occasions, where the seasons of the Church's year and Christian festivals are observed. Governors frequently attend CW and monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Religious education (RE) is considered to be a core subject, with equal status to literacy and numeracy. In conversation many pupils of all ages said that RE is one of their favourite lessons. They are inspired by RE and apply their skills extremely well, always keen to discuss and debate. In conversation they said that they particularly enjoy cross-curricular work in RE, such as the use of drama, art and craft. As a result, pupils' achievements in RE are excellent, and they are particularly adept at identifying similarities between religions, such as when a pupil suggested that when the Sikh Guru Nanak disappeared in a river for three days, perhaps he had been washed up on the same hill as Moses, and derived his wisdom from that experience. Assessment of work in RE is well developed, with objectives always made clear to enable peer review and informed assessment and effective tracking of progress. This entirely meets a recommendation from the previous inspection. Any pupils with learning difficulties are given very effective support to enable them to achieve their best. The coordinator for RE and the headteacher frequently monitor the quality of teaching in RE, and it is always judged to be at least good and is frequently outstanding. The teaching of Christianity is given due prominence in the RE curriculum, which contains a good balance of learning from religion and learning about religion. Weekly lessons are supplemented by termly 'enhancement days' when all pupils focus on a subject such as the Lord's Prayer, Easter or Pentecost. Pupils said how helpful these days are. When appropriate the church is used as a resource for RE, such as a recent occasion when a doll was taken into the church and the pupils led through a Baptism service by the incumbent. The teaching of RE is extremely well led and managed, with RE a priority in training for any new teachers.

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

The school's mission statement includes the words 'keeping central to the ethos of the school the values of the Christian Gospel', and it is clear that this vision does permeate all that happens in the school. This has a direct positive impact on standards of pupils' achievements, where they feel valued and safe, and are enabled to succeed. The Christian character of the school is apparent everywhere, with a wide variety of displays and resources, including a Christian cross above the whiteboard in some rooms and frequently incorporating 'prayer dice' with six prayers. The Christian distinctiveness of the school is central to the improvement plan. In an atmosphere of compassion, endurance and trust the wellbeing of all is of paramount importance, where relationships are seen to be very positive, and all are valued regardless of their faith or background. Leaders are preparing carefully for the future success of the school, prudently considering various options for the inevitable changes that lie ahead. Monitoring and evaluating by governors is particularly effective, and often relevant to the Christian ethos. In a recent visit a governor had looked at the use by pupils of tablet computers, and then suggested additional Christian software that might be worthwhile. Partnership with the local church is very strong, with the incumbent a familiar figure at the school. Links with other local churches are also strong, with some foundation governors worshipping at an evangelical church in a neighbouring village, this church also providing the weekly 'Open the Book' CW sessions. A pre-school shares the school site, and although separately run has strong mutually beneficial links. When school CW takes place in the church members of the regular congregation attend. The community magazine for six local villages always contains detailed news about the school and its ethos. Links with the diocese are good, with much use made of training opportunities and regular meetings. Pupils have visited the cathedral, while there finding and photographing a Stonham Aspal kneeler. Referring to a wall plaque, they recalled the visit to the school by the bishop to dedicate an extension to the building. Parents are highly supportive of all that the school does for their children, in conversation invariably saying that being a church school makes a real difference, and that in some cases they had visited a number of schools before choosing this one because of its atmosphere and Christian values. Parents attend such events as CW in the church in large numbers. The arrangements for RE and CW far exceed the basic statutory requirements.

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