

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Great Waltham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

South Street, Great Waltham , Essex CM3 1DF

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Chelmsford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Essex
Date of inspection	13 January 2017
Date of last inspection	February 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VC Primary 115114
Headteacher	Alex Burden
Inspector's name and number	Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

There are currently 158 pupils on roll in this rural school. The headteacher has held the substantive headship since February 2013. For 2016-17 there are 21 pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding. The proportion of pupils who have free school meals is below average. Whilst the proportion of SEND pupils is below average, those with a statement are higher than average. Great Waltham Primary School [GWPS] enjoys close links with St Mary and St Lawrence Church. The school is part of the River Chelmer Primary Partnership and part of the Chelmsford Teaching School Alliance.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Great Waltham as a Church of England school are good

- The nurturing Christian environment, based on the life affirming values of aspiration, strength, perseverance, integrity, responsibility and empathy [ASPIRE], helps pupils to grow in confidence and self-esteem and prepares them for life.
- The links with the church foster a great sense of identity for adults and pupils alike in belonging to a church school, which is valued by the whole community.
- The importance of prayer in the worshipping life of this church school nurtures pupils' spiritual development well.

Areas to improve

- Extend governors' strategic role in monitoring collective worship and religious education [RE] as important aspects of the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- Enable pupils and adults to deepen their knowledge and understanding of key Christian concepts and saints as part of their awareness of Christianity as a worldwide faith.
- Ensure pupils and adults, during their daily encounter and experience of worship grow in the knowledge and understanding of The Holy Spirit as an important part in the Christian understanding of God as The Holy Trinity.

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

Great Waltham's nurturing and inclusive Christian family community is rooted in its partnership with St Mary and St Lawrence Church. In addition, the life affirming values and Christian vision which this school embraces provide a firm foundation for its pupils, enabling them to grow in confidence. Children and their parents value being part of this community where the links with the church as well as the school's chosen values, such as integrity, help to shape their lives. Parents comment that their children live by these values at home as well as school. Consequently, pupils say, for example, 'Well done, Mummy, you've been persevering.' Pupils go on to explain the Christian character of their school by saying, 'It's important if you believe in Christianity, some of the words are like a life-long rule. Empathy is one of them. You put yourself in someone's shoes and see how they feel'. Indeed, pupils and parents can explain the ASPIRE values and vision in their own words and enjoy being part of this community. Consequently, relationships and behaviour are good. Attendance dipped a little last year, due to illness, but it has been consistently good.. There are few exclusions. Any poor behaviour is dealt with positively, with the focus on saying sorry and second chances, thus building character. Progress and achievement across all groups of children is good. The school correctly attributes this to the rewarding of effort and the encouragement of perseverance. Great Waltham ensures that any barriers to learning are removed so pupils can flourish within a supportive Christian framework. As a result, support for any vulnerable pupils is in place, and is successful, all the time working closely with parents as the relationship with parents is key to the ongoing work of the school. Whilst music and sport are strengths of GWPS, and support pupils' personal development, ASPIRE awards are not always given for academic achievement. As a result, pupils grow in their self-esteem. Spiritual development is recognised in many facets of school life, across the curriculum and in after school clubs, not just in worship. Pupils are aware of diverse communities and cultures through their RE and their charity fundraising work. They enjoy RE with one pupil commenting, 'I love RE because it's nice to know other religions do the same or differently to us.' Parents are supportive of RE and the contribution it makes to helping their children to understand that everyone is different and about 'different cultures and religions which are out there'. Pupils can relate the Christian story well and can clearly explain the significance of Christmas and Easter in their own words. RE makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development. However, pupils are less secure in their knowledge of Ascension-tide and Pentecost. Likewise, their knowledge of key saints, such as St Mary and St Lawrence to whom their parish church is dedicated, is under developed. Since the last inspection, there have been many more visitors of faith in school. Some pupils recall their learning from a Buddhist visitor as well as from their parish priest with great interest as it enhances their learning. They welcome learning more about Christianity as a worldwide faith. Meeting the Bishop of Bradwell in December 2015 helped pupils' awareness of belonging to the diocesan family. However, as a result, they say they would welcome meeting more people of faith through visits to places of worship as well as welcoming visitors from different faith communities into school 'so they can tell us how they live their life'. The school correctly identifies this and is committed to ensuring these visits continue to happen and have purpose.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils say the most important aspect of worship for them is praying when they 'speak to God and thank him for the things he's given us'. Following the visit of the Bishop of Bradwell giving a gift of holding crosses to each class, personal prayer and reflection has grown in prominence at Great Waltham. As a result, one pupil commented, 'we have a little prayer area at the back of our class. There is a little prayer tree and we write things we are worried about or thankful for to hang on the tree.' Both the school prayer, written by the children, and The Lord's Prayer are used in worship regularly, with pupils commenting, 'it helps me to forgive'. This results in pupils recognising the importance of prayer. In addition, pupils pray spontaneously and thoughtfully in worship, saying, 'we do get involved with the prayers and speak the prayer from your heart, not plan it.' Pupils enjoy hearing and acting out Bible stories in worship, applying what they learn to their own lives. As such, this nurtures their spiritual development. Consequently, they are encouraged to persevere by hearing appropriate stories. They link the Bible stories to the school's values, such as perseverance, citing the story of David and Goliath in their own words as 'be brave and never give up'. They speak of the importance of Daniel following his religion. Pupils say, 'Jesus was God's messenger. God is always there to help you. We know that Jesus was God's son. Jesus will help us do the right things and make the right decisions.' However, they do say, 'we do a lot on Jesus and God but not much on The Holy Spirit'. They say they would welcome their parish priest helping them understand this important aspect of The Holy Trinity. Whilst pupils' knowledge of God and Jesus is strong, the school acknowledges the need to spend time talking about The Holy Spirit. This enriches the Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit which pupils and adults experience and encounter in daily worship. Pupils enjoy worship in St Mary and St Lawrence Church, saying they like sitting on the pews 'all joined together. We can be together and spend time with each other'. They also appreciate 'loads of people praying together, most of the village' at key festivals through the church year. As a result, this enriches their experience of the importance of prayer within the Christian community.

Parents too value church worship when pupils are involved. Last year adults and children were involved in ashing as the school celebrated Ash Wednesday for the first time. Indeed, pupils are increasingly taking responsibility for planning and leading worship which the school sees as an ongoing part of its journey and part of its action plan. This takes the form of monthly worship in church as well as class led worship which takes place six times a year. This results in pupils contributing in many different ways, with space to reflect on the life-long values. The themes in the church services widen pupils' horizons. Pupils are growing in their confidence to plan creatively and lead worship. For example, one pupil said, 'we were in church for Harvest. We plan what classes do. My class developed a dance.' Whilst pupils' viewpoints inform future planning, the monitoring and evaluation of worship by adults and pupils is not rigorous or regular enough. The school has recognised this as part of its vision for ongoing improvement. Pupils have good ideas about how they might contribute and complement governors' evaluations of worship. Consequently, they say they would welcome more frequent worship outdoors, such as that which takes place on the outdoor stage at Remembrance-tide.

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

The contribution of the life affirming ASPIRE values to the school's vision and mission is proving to be very successful and continues to make a difference in the lives of the adults and children in this Christian community. The headteacher and governors very much see this as a journey in partnership with parents, staff and children and the church community. Parents and pupils are well listened to. Parents see the church as 'another room of the school' and value the work of the priest in charge so that their children think of the church as 'their church'. They also speak highly of the headteacher who 'knows all the children' and helps them and their children feel part of the school community. Consequently, this makes a valuable contribution to the school's Christian ethos. All areas from the previous denominational inspection have been satisfactorily addressed. Both worship and RE meet statutory requirements. Governors' monitoring celebrates pupils who value praying for the school, including their buddies in worship. For example, one Reception pupil said praying made her a better person. However, governors are mindful that their monitoring of collective worship and RE needs to be extended so that more governors are involved. They readily acknowledge that pupil and governor evaluation of worship is valuable, informing future planning and explicitly demonstrates the Christian character of the school, but is not regular enough. The school correctly identifies this for as a focus for development. Positive relationships and the wellbeing of children and staff are of great importance. Consequently, the life-long values are a focus of every governing body meeting, with the concern for the child and the best way to supply their needs at the centre of all discussions and strategic planning. This includes the contribution of aspiration, strength, perseverance, integrity, responsibility and empathy underpinning all achievement, including academic achievement. Links with the diocese and other schools in the area are good, and their support and mutual networking is much appreciated. Community links are strong, with children singing to the local elderly residents as well as taking part in the annual Christmas tree festival as an expression of this. Staff are well supported by governors for working in a church school. This includes a clear succession plan being in place to replace the RE subject leader when she retires at the end of the academic year. Leadership of RE is good but over this academic year so far the subject leader has not been able to conduct any lesson observations or looked formally at pupils' work in books. Neither has she had the opportunity to attend any RE specific training. Staff praise the friendly community spirit at Great Waltham, which they find inspiring and nurturing. This caring, hardworking school community works together for the success of all.

SIAMS report January 2017 Great Waltham Church of England VC Primary School, Essex CM3 IDF