

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Combe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Church Walk, Combe, Oxfordshire OX298NQ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Oxford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Date of inspection	4 July 2017
Date of last inspection	10 June 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled Primary 123116
Headteacher	Charlotte Marshall
Inspector's name and number	Joanne Daly 843

School context

Combe Church of England (VC) Primary School is a small rural primary school with 110 pupils on roll. Most pupils live within the village. The headteacher was appointed in September 2015. The school has strong links with the village church of St Laurence. The pupils are mainly White British and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs or who are supported through pupil premium funding is below national averages. Pupils make excellent progress and achieve well above national standards.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Combe as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The Christian vision and dedication of the headteacher, embraced by all, ensures that the school's Christian values permeate the daily life of the school resulting in very high standards of behaviour and achievement.
- The school's relationship with parents, the local church and the wider community are outstanding and are mutually beneficial and supportive.
- Pupils enjoy and are challenged by religious education (RE) and this along with the strong leadership of RE has had a major role in developing and strengthening the Christian character of the school.
- Very high value is placed on collective worship and there are opportunities for personal reflection and prayer throughout the day as well as in worship. This supports the spiritual development of the whole school community.

Areas to improve

- Strengthen the work already begun to develop 'Understanding Christianity' so that it impacts on pupils' depth of learning of Christianity.
- Ensure that the monitoring and evaluation of RE by governors is as robust as other areas so that standards in the school continue to remain high.

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

Excellent relationships across the school community are fundamental to how this school operates. Combe school has successfully embedded its core Christian values of compassion, community and wisdom. They are well known by the whole community and they have significant impact on the daily life of the school which shows great progress since the last inspection. The values are owned and known by everyone and the reason they make such a difference is because they stem from, and are reinforced through Biblical teachings. They result in an inclusive school where relationships are outstanding because all members of the community feel valued and loved. Pupils behaviour, linked to the school's 'Behaviours for Life', is very positive and pupils are courteous and polite and are very proud of their school. They are very caring of one another and of others and are particularly keen to care for and support the younger pupils. One parent said 'I was blown away by how the older children care for the younger children'. Pupils talk about how the values help them to 'be kind and help others' and how they make them see that 'you must treat people how you want to be treated and look after everyone'. Pupils talk about how values help them to know how to behave. They appreciate how their efforts to live out the values are recognised through the end of week values certificates. Parents say pupils talk about the values outside of school and that it is engrained and part of their everyday vocabulary. They comment that the pastoral support in school is 'outstanding' and that the headteacher is 'inspirational, approachable, visible and welcoming' to all. Because pupils are so well supported and keen to come to school, attendance is high at 98% which is well above national levels. Thus, pupils make excellent progress, achieve very high standards and are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

The school has a spirituality policy that has been developed with other stakeholders to include a clear interpretation of spirituality which is shared across the school community and beyond. This results in countless high quality opportunities both during the school day and outside of the school day that develop pupils' personal spirituality. There is a broad and creative curriculum with a strong emphasis on curiosity, creativity and challenge which is heavily influenced by the values of the school. The curriculum promotes and supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development and encourages them to ask big questions, be globally aware and to be proactive in change and social justice. Pupils recently focused on what it was like to be a Syrian refugee, putting up tents and questioning a member of staff who dressed up as a Syrian refugee. Pupils have a great understanding of the importance and value of service to others and their role in the school and village echoes the school values of compassion and community. For example, pupils sponsor a pupil in a school in Uganda and they support the local foodbank at harvest. Through learning experiences across the curriculum and through links with other parts of the world as part of the 'Global Learning Project', pupils show a high degree of understanding and respect for diversity. They speak enthusiastically about their learning of other faiths and can articulate well their understanding of Christianity as a world faith. Religious education is a strength in the school and is well led by the RE Leader and promoted by the headteacher. It reinforces the core Christian values of the school and SMSC development. Pupils are excited and challenged by RE and explore 'big questions' during lessons. They are able to talk knowledgeable about what they learn. They recognise the importance of knowing about the beliefs of others and being able to talk openly about their own. They also feel RE is important because they are 'a Christian school'. The RE leader supports other schools in teaching RE and sharing good practice with them. The school is in the process of introducing 'Understanding Christianity'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship has a very high profile in the school and is engaging and inspiring. It is valued by everyone. Worship makes clear links between the school's Christian values and the Bible and helps the pupils to understand how this links to their own lives. This has a significant and positive effect on pupils lives and on their behaviour and relationships. Worship is moving and inclusive. The pupils sing beautifully and enjoy worship and the opportunities they have to reflect and pray. Sign language used by staff and pupils ensures access to worship for all adults and pupils. Pupils are given frequent opportunities for deep discussion and questioning which excites and engages them meaning that all pupils are keen to contribute. In worship pupils discussed whether Jesus would leave the temple because he was angry at what he saw. Even the youngest pupils were confidently offering their responses to this and making links to the school value of compassion and wisdom. Collective worship is well planned and led by the headteacher, clergy and staff offering a rich experience. Pupils confidently plan and lead acts of worship every week and they evaluate their worship afterwards in a special book given to them to record this. Pupil leadership of worship was a focus for development at the previous inspection. This has since been embedded in the daily life of the school and the impact of this has been significant. High quality Christian worship has meant that pupils can talk with great understanding about the Trinity in an age appropriate way. They speak of God as the Father, Jesus as the Son and the Holy Spirit. They explain how this is represented in worship as 3 candles which are linked together as one. Their understanding of the distinctive features of different Christian traditions in worship including liturgy and the seasons of the Church and Christian festivals is also impressive.

A rich and varied life of prayer and reflection contributes significantly to the spiritual journey of the whole school community. In every classroom, in the hall and outside in the quiet areas there are places where pupils and staff can be quiet, reflect and pray if they wish to. Pupils are very proud of their outside reflection areas where they made their own bench and planted their own tree. Classroom reflection areas are well developed too and pupils speak of them as a place of peace and reflection where they can pray or just sit quietly. Prayer is a focus in worship and pupils speak confidently about the importance and nature of prayer and the value of personal prayer in their own lives. In the hall, there is a prayer space and a reflection table where pupils can spontaneously go and pray. During worship there were a group of pupils of varying ages kneeling at the prayer table or sitting quietly saying prayers. Parents speak very highly of worship and are welcomed and encouraged to attend. They describe it as a 'quiet, special time to reflect'. They feel welcome to use the prayer area in the hall themselves if they want to pray. The pupils regularly say the Lord's Prayer and at the end of every worship the 'Combe Liturgy' is said by all which relates directly to the school values. Pupils initiate and regularly take part in charitable social actions which comes from their response to the school values of community and compassion and worship. They raise money to support a wide variety of charitable organisations including cystic fibrosis and fundraising for the Grenfell Tower disaster. Pupils also take part in a Partnership Enterprise Week in which they raise money for various charities including the Nasio Trust. Following a fund-raising activity, the pupils were asked what they wanted to buy with the money and they said they wanted it to go to a charity rather than use it to buy resources for their own class. This is reflective of the Christian ethos of the school and the workings of the school Christian values. Monitoring and evaluations of worship by leaders, staff, the vicar and pupils enables the school to re-evaluate provision and move forward in a way that is clear to everyone.

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

The headteacher has rigorously driven forward improvement as a church school since her appointment in September 2015. This is echoed by the staff and governors and parents. Parents and staff are full of praise for the ways in which the headteacher has improved the distinctive Christian character of the school and created a caring, compassionate school where the whole community feel involved and valued. Parents say 'the spirit of caring is entrenched on day one when the pupils arrive'. There is a clear Christian vision and mission statement rooted in Christian values, which all members of the community articulate fully. This is made explicit in all school documentation, the website and throughout the school environment. Governors, parents, staff and pupils are clear that the values have impacted on pupil behaviour and relationships across the community. Achievement and attendance are also high and well above national levels as a result. Governors are regular visitors to school and know it well. They are ambitious for the school and decisions that they make are made with reference to the school values. Church school effectiveness is a priority and is evidenced in the school improvement plan and in governing body agendas and minutes of meetings. All issues from the previous inspection report have been addressed and this along with monitoring, evaluating and strategic planning has had a significant impact on the school. Monitoring and evaluation by governors has enabled the school to move forward quickly. They need to develop this further by ensuring that the monitoring of RE is as effective as in other subjects. The RE leader regularly monitors and evaluates RE and RE is a school development priority. Professional development of governors and staff is another priority especially in relation to being a church school. This is planned strategically and substantially benefits both staff and governors. Diocesan training supports the governors understanding of what it means to be a church school and the RE leader attends RE Leadership network meetings with the Diocese and works with the RE Adviser. The RE leader also leads staff meetings for staff. Other schools in the community have benefited from support by the RE leader. Middle leaders are encouraged to aspire to be leaders in church schools and are on leadership development programmes to support this. Links with the local church of St Laurence and the vicar are strong as are links with the Diocese. The school, the community and the church support one another very effectively and the school is regarded as a key focal point for the community. Examples of this include the school choir who sing for the church and wider community and 'Friday Friends' tea parties which includes invitations to members of the wider community.

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