



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### **Balcombe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School**

London Road  
Balcombe  
West Sussex  
RH17 6HS

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Good**

**Diocese: Chichester**

Local authority: West Sussex

Dates of inspection: 20 October 2015

Date of last inspection: 23 June 2010

School's unique reference number: 126006

Headteacher: Wendy Millbanks

Inspector's name and number: Rosemary Appleby 749

#### **School context**

Balcombe CE Primary School is smaller than the average size primary school in a rural setting with 145 pupils on roll. There are five classes with two year groups taught in each class. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average, as is the number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Attendance is above national average. Most pupils come from a white British heritage.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Balcombe CE Primary School as a Church of England school are good**

- Christian values have a positive impact on pupils' good behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Effective links with the local church and the community are mutually beneficial and ensure that the school is seen as central to Balcombe village life.
- The clear Christian vision and commitment of the headteacher, staff and governors in their resolve to build on current strengths.

#### **Areas to improve**

- Increase pupil awareness of cultural diversity to enable learners to have a greater knowledge of other faith communities.
- Improve the effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation of Balcombe as a church school by creating more rigorous systems that ensure actions lead to improvements across the school.
- Improve the impact of collective worship themes by ensuring that they more regularly and explicitly refer to Biblical material and consistently include time for quiet reflection.

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

The impact of the Christian character of the school is outstanding because the school's Christian values are consistently understood and clearly articulated by all members of the school community. This is evident in the excellent inclusive and positive caring relationships across the school community and the exemplary behaviour seen around the school. Parents, pupils and governors were unanimous that the most important Christian value to the school was 'respect'. This underpins all areas of school life where learners say that they feel valued and safe. The ethos is underpinned by twelve Christian values chosen by the school community in 2012. This has promoted an excellent shared ownership and enabled the school to explore and strengthen its Christian distinctiveness. This ethos contributes significantly to pupils' achievement which current data indicates is above national average. Pupils speak proudly about their achievements and the many ways, such as the Celebration Assembly, the school affirms them. As you enter the school an 'Aim High' tree has leaves of achievement illustrating the very high aspirations that the school has for its pupils. Christian values are clearly prominent in each classroom and the hall, ensuring that the Christian values consistently maintain a high profile and promote the school's mission statement that 'In all that we do we are guided by God'. Parents state that the school's Christian values provide clear guidelines and structure for excellent behaviour and respect for others and that they can constantly see these values in action at home, in school and in church. There are excellent mutually supportive links with the local church community of St Mary's. Pupils and parents were proud that they had collected money and contributed towards a stained glass window in St Mary's Church. A member of the church community provides a very popular weekly club at school called Pathfinders where Bible stories are discussed and pupils respond in creative ways enhancing the Christian distinctiveness of the school. One pupil who attends this club said that they had learnt that 'God provides for our needs and we should be happy and not greedy'. Pupils experience a calm, happy and purposeful learning environment where they are motivated to learn. While the environment in the hall is very explicit about Christian values this is not always so evident in displays of learner's work. For example, a stunning display about Friendship missed the opportunity to include work about the friendship of God. Religious education (RE) contributes well to the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils. Pupils learn about other religions in RE and explain that they learn about Hinduism and Sikhism and how churches look different in other countries. Through this work pupils have empathy for other cultures. Promoting the spiritual element of Forest Schools, which has recently been added to the curriculum, is an aspect of the pupils' learning that is being developed.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

Collective worship is a distinct time in the school day when Christian values are reinforced. Pupils value this time because they learn about stories that have relevance in their own lives. Pupils are engaged and respectful through participation in worship such as singing, giving their own opinions about how they might act in times of adversity and praying. The school has recently provided the children with opportunities to raise their understanding of prayer through such initiatives as Prayer Spaces. The quality of the pupils' personal prayer writing is developing as is the prominence of prayer throughout the whole school community. Aspects of Anglican worship such as reciting the Lord's Prayer and school prayer are well established. Pupils enjoy stimulating visual images that enhance their appreciation of how stories of adversity can lead to people choosing to follow God. Although the importance of reflection is emphasised in the collective worship policy it is not consistently used in practice. The services at St Mary's parish church celebrating Harvest, Easter and Christmas reinforce Anglican tradition and increase pupils' understanding of the Christian year. Pupils lead worship at the parish church, for these services, which appropriately extends worship opportunities. Staff and clergy regularly lead collective worship. Pupils have good opportunities to develop their growing understanding of the trinity and pupils talk about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit with a growing

understanding. Planning and evaluation of worship does not involve a range of stakeholders and therefore programmes of worship are not using the skills of all stakeholders. The commitment of the collective worship leader is evidenced by her intention to attend Diocesan training in 2016 as she has correctly identified the need to review the collective worship policy.

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

The headteacher, staff team and the governing body verbalise a strong sense of Christian vision and direction for the whole school community. They have been proactive in addressing and continuing to address the key issues from the previous inspection. The leadership and school management is not outstanding because systems for monitoring and evaluation are not yet sufficiently rigorous in identifying areas for future improvement which form an integral part of the overall school development plan. The school development plan has not included explicit action points linked to Christian distinctiveness for the past two years which means that areas for improvement in the school's self evaluation document are not put into action and this hinders progress to bring about improvement. Governors are committed to the Christian ethos of the school and support the school well. They make visits to worship and school events throughout the year enabling them to know their school although evaluation of these visits is mostly informal. The school environment now makes an increased contribution to spiritual development through the welcoming mosaic incorporating the school's motto and the Christian values cross in the hall. The wildlife area is being developed into a place for quiet reflection and many policies now include statements that reflect the Christian context of the school. The involvement of the whole school community in selecting a set of core values gives them a shared ownership and consistency in their understanding of them. During interviews candidates are questioned about their commitment to the school's Christian distinctiveness to ensure that the school appoints staff committed to promoting a Christian ethos. Partnerships with the local community, parents and the church enrich learners' experiences. Links with the local church community are strong and mutually enriching, and are effective in bringing a greater understanding of Anglican life and liturgy. Staff are well supported in their professional development through use of annual Diocesan training. The high standards of pastoral care and the development of a calm and focussed learning environment based on Christian values make an important contribution to pupils' progress. This helps them to achieve their best, including those with learning difficulties. Pupils are involved in decision making through pupil conferencing and although parents complete questionnaires, to involve them in effecting change, the questionnaires do not ask for feedback on the Christian dimension of the school. Parents speak warmly of the school and the caring inclusive environment in which 'everyone looks after each other'. They value the family ethos of the school where older pupils take on responsibility for the younger pupils in a 'buddy' system. The arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.

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