



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Herstmonceux CE Primary School

Hailsham Road
Herstmonceux
East Sussex
BN27 4LG

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Chichester

Local authority: East Sussex

Dates of inspection: 18 November 2015

Date of last inspection: 14 September 2010

School's unique reference number: 114506

Headteacher: Catherine Cottingham

Inspector's name and number: Wendy Bray 512

School context

Herstmonceux is a smaller than average size primary school. The school serves its immediate village locality and pupils from farther afield also attend. The majority of pupils are white British heritage and there are very few pupils from minority ethnic groups or with English as an additional language. The number of children eligible for pupil premium is below national average.

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

- Pupils take the school's Christian based values of caring and loving seriously and look after each other very well
- A commitment to meeting the individual needs of pupils, driven by the Christian ethos, results in strong academic standards as well as pupils' social and emotional development
- The value placed on prayer has a strong influence and impact on the life of the school and contributes strongly to the spiritual development of the pupils
- The relationship with the Church and school community is good. The incumbent is a frequent, important and valuable member of the wider school team. This makes a positive Christian impact in the wider community

Areas to improve

- Increase the confidence of all leaders and managers to articulate the school's Christian vision, by making it explicit in policy and practice
- Broaden and develop governors' strategic planning and monitoring of the school's effectiveness as a Church school, so that formal evaluations are systematically gathered and used strategically to identify future improvements

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

Since the last inspection the school has focused on developing its Christian character through completion of its vision statement, 'Learning, Loving, Caring', which is lived out in the exceptional level of care given to pupils and its total commitment to meeting the individual needs of the pupils. As a result, pupils including the more vulnerable, achieve well.

Parents speak highly of the inclusive nature of the school and its strong focus on ensuring each child is given what they need to make progress. Pupils reflect this by sharing how much teachers care for them and make learning fun.

The development of children's spiritual awareness is strong because children are provided with regular opportunities to engage in a variety of multi-sensory activities to support this. Activities such as reflection books, prayer spaces and sand-tray reflection activities develop the pupils' confidence to express their thoughts and opinions as well as their understanding of feelings and emotions and the way they impact on people. The school's core Christian values of love and caring are modelled by all adults, and pupils reflect these in their own dealings with each other. Pupils behave very well, speak of everyone being caring and friendly and convey a strong sense of community. Their response to visitors and each other is characterised by courtesy and respect. One child said, 'It is a loving community. We care for each other and treat everyone the same.'

Religious education (RE) makes a good contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development and the school's Christian character. Questioning is used effectively within lessons to prompt pupils to think below the surface of religion and belief. As a result, pupils are able to forge links between their study of religion and belief and the relevance to their own lives. For instance one child described how studying the story of Moses had taught him about how to be a good leader, whilst another child was able to link the school's learning power of 'Do not give up' to Joshua and the Battle of Jericho. The care and compassion pupils show for one another is characterised by the recent Herstmonceux Bake Off, initiated and organised by the School Council to raise money for Children in Need. However, pupils needed prompting to make explicit links between the school values and their knowledge of biblical teaching.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is a central aspect of school life. There are clear themes that ensure pupils have a broad range of worship experiences focused on Christian values linked to bible stories and relevant children's texts, giving children a good foundation in Christian teaching. The pupils are readily able to articulate the positive impact collective worship has on their understanding and beliefs. One child commented, 'It has changed my vision of God and made me trust Him more.' In addition, reflection journals and pupil comments highlight how worship impact on their choices. They described how the theme of peace had helped them to reflect on making the right choices by following 'Jesus's teaching of being kind and gentle with all people'. The incumbent works well with the school and is seen as an important part of the school family. He provides regular leadership of worship along with a member from the local free church, as well as weekly prayer support for the school. This is appreciated by the children and strengthens their awareness and sense of belonging to the wider Christian family in the area. The children described the incumbent as 'being a big part of school' and someone who 'makes learning about God' and 'things like the creed easy to understand'. One child shared how the knowledge that the incumbent prayed her prayer made her feel part of the local Church even though her family did not go to Church. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They listen attentively during the worship, clearly enjoying singing Christian songs with accompanying actions. There is a calm and respectful atmosphere during worship.

Prayer is highly valued by the pupils and a range of focused activities, such as the series of worship themes on the Lord's Prayer and the changes made to how pupils make prayer requests, have helped to increase the centrality of prayer in the life of the school. The prayer

space near the school entrance is a moving acknowledgement that this church school serves the community. Children contribute regularly to it and parents remark that their children demonstrate use of prayer within home life and that they often refer to the themes explored within collective worship. One parent described how the prayers 'reflect what is on the children's minds and their appreciation of others' needs,' and a pupil commented that 'prayer spaces give us a chance to reflect and think about ourselves and God.' The school used its exploration of prayer spaces at the start of the academic year to strengthen the reflective areas within the classrooms, which is having a notable impact on the spiritual development of the whole school community. For instance one class teacher described how the Bubble Tube prayer space was a constant visual and auditory reminder to everyone when they were praying of 'how their prayers were going up to God.' Another child described how the Fizzy Forgiveness prayer space had helped him to get rid of 'bad thoughts and anger and feel forgiven.' Evaluation of collective worship has taken place by discussion with children during 'Snack and Chat' sessions with the headteacher. This process is still being developed to include more stakeholders , such as the recently assigned role of a link governor for SMSC, in order to lead forward more informed improvement.

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

There is a shared Christian vision among all leaders, which is most clearly articulated by the headteacher and RE subject leader. This vision and actions taken to increase the school's distinctive character, have brought about improvements since the last inspection. The headteacher, together with the RE subject leader and incumbent, lead the self-evaluation process using the National Society framework. The school knows itself well and uses this knowledge to inform the church school element of the school improvement plan each year, which has increased the Christian distinctiveness. Through the strategic appointment of a specialist RE subject leader, as well as through monitoring and evaluation, governors have secured the prominent position of RE both within the school curriculum and as a key driver to enhance the school's Christian character. The RE leader's recent work with the staff team on the development of prayer spaces, has had a notable impact on the prayer life of the school and the recent RE training she attended is helping her to develop clear progression in RE learning and thus strengthen the teaching of RE across the school. Since the last inspection the governors have effectively supported school leaders to implement significant initiatives to develop the centrality of prayer in the life of the school. Governors are beginning to build upon this effective model of strategic planning and monitoring to bring about further improvements to the school's Christian character, drawing on expertise from the Diocese. Whilst some staff members and governors can articulate the links between the school's Christian values of love and caring and Jesus' two great commandments, there is a lack of explicit references to the biblical theology behind the school's vision and values in school documentation and on the school website.

Parents value the school as a caring and Christian community which is focused on the academic and personal needs of their children. They speak highly of the compassion of the staff in ensuring all pupils are nurtured and develop as fully rounded individuals, relating this to the 'Christian values of loving and caring being fully embedded in the life of the school.' J Club, an after school Christian club run by members of the Church community, provides further opportunities for the pupils to explore the Christian faith. This was evidenced by the good knowledge pupils displayed of Bible stories and how they related these stories to their everyday life. Christingles made by the pupils for the Church's annual Christingle Service, along with links in the school newsletters to the Sunday services and the annual school Carol Service held in Church, strengthen children's awareness of the wider Christian family in the area.

SIAMS report November 2015, Herstmonceux CE Primary School, BN27 4LG