



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Holy Cross Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Belmont Road
Uckfield
East Sussex TN22 1BP

Previous SIAS grade: Satisfactory

Current Inspection Grade: Good

Diocese: Chichester

Local authority: East Sussex

Dates of inspection: 8 June 2016

Date of last inspection: December 2009

School's unique reference number: 114562

Headteacher: Cathy Dart

Inspector's name and number: Anne Hanney 452

School context

Holy Cross is a small school of 113 pupils in the town of Uckfield. It is arranged in five classes: four of which have two year groups. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The percentage of minority ethnic groups and pupils with English as an additional language is in line with those nationally. The school had experienced a lengthy transition without a substantive headteacher until an appointment was made in April 2016.

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

- School leaders are ensuring that Christian distinctiveness is embedded in and central to school life resulting in pupils feeling valued and keen to learn.
- Effective planning and monitoring, supported by a strong working partnership between the school and church, result in pupils experiencing good quality collective worship that impacts positively on their self-esteem and sets a Christian pattern for them to follow both within and out of school.
- The effective leadership by the religious education co-ordinator is enabling good teaching and pupil attainment within the subject.

Areas to improve

- Enable pupils to take further responsibility for the planning and leadership of collective worship so that they have greater ownership and deeper understanding of the key elements.
- Extend the range of opportunities in religious education (RE) for pupils to have first-hand experiences in their learning about world faiths to deepen their knowledge and understanding.

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

Holy Cross has sustained a determination to develop its Christian distinctiveness. It lives out its motto, 'Love to Learn and Learn to Love' through the Christian values demonstrated and explicitly expressed by its community. Pupils say that 'Jesus gives a pattern' for their lives and this helps them to show Christian values of love and forgiveness towards others. They explain that the cross on their school badge is for Jesus and that the tree represents 'how we help each other to grow'. A pupil from another country speaks with pride about the school's welcoming approach and friendships made. Parents find staff very approachable and pupils say that they feel safe to voice any concerns because they 'are listened to and helped'. Displays encourage pupils to recognise that they are each 'unique and special to God', whilst also realising how 'amazing' they can be together. Pupils enjoy coming to school; their attendance is good and they behave very well. The school's drive for improvement, set within its caring Christian ethos, has brought about the good pupil progress and standards of attainment achieved in the 2015 national tests.

Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) development is good. Regular opportunities are planned across the curriculum to support this. Awe and Wonder days enable pupils to set up prayer/reflection areas within classrooms. Pupils seek to make regular contributions of poems and prayers that help them to express their needs or responses to the world around them. A high level of empathy is demonstrated in the compassion shown by pupils for those with special needs or homeless in the wider community. Within their '3 Star Award', each Year 6 pupil is expected to raise money for charities.

Pupils are encouraged to seek examples in their own lives to help them see the links with their learning in RE. When studying Christianity, pupils can also make the link between their studies in RE and their experiences in collective worship. They recognise Christianity as a world religion and show respect for differences both in this and other faiths.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Staff and pupils actively engage in collective worship. They sing with enthusiasm, show reverence in prayer and demonstrate in their responses to reflection that they recognise the central importance of Jesus and 'his light shining in our hearts'. Collective worship is distinctly Christian and Anglican in tradition and makes daily references to the gospel. Pupils' understanding of the Trinity is age appropriate; whilst younger pupils have experience of hearing about the blessing at a baptism and can talk about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, older pupils have a more developed understanding of God as 'three roles in one' and in learning about Pentecost, have an idea of God in different ways.

Strong links are planned between collective worship, class worship and the individual pupil's use of prayer areas; pupils in each age group speak confidently about their experience in collective worship and how it has influenced their writing of prayers and good relationships in school. They can talk about the biblical material that they experience in collective worship and make sense between this and how they can use Christian values in their own lives. When talking about the parable of the good shepherd, they can relate it to their own individual worth and how they should value each person as Jesus does. At home parents note the impact of collective worship on their young children: hearing them breaking into songs of forgiveness or saying a thank-you prayer at home for the toys with which they are playing.

Planning for collective worship is formalised with a clear overview recorded, monitored and evaluated by staff, pupils and governors. Monitoring is regular and is used to inform the next steps in church school improvement planning.

The parish priest leads collective worship regularly, contributes to its planning and monitoring, and champions the school in providing services and outreach to the wider community through the monthly 'Open Door' family worship (where pupils volunteer to read or help in church) and the school's weekly 'Share and Praise' celebrated either in school or at the parish centre.

Pupils are eager to take responsibility and are proud of the lead they took in planning much of

the service in church at Easter. More could be done to allow pupil leadership of school collective worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Pupils enthuse about RE and are very keen to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. It is given a high profile in school improvement planning, considered a core subject in the school and monitored regularly. The subject leader took up the responsibility two years ago and has developed an effective programme of support for teachers, a revised scheme and a cycle of monitoring to support evaluation. The new assessment practice in RE is consistently applied across the school and pupils take an active part in reviewing their own progress. As with all subject assessments introduced this year, leaders aim to see the practice in RE embedded. Monitoring involves regular evaluation of planning, scrutiny of pupils' work, lesson observations and pupils' self-assessment of their progress. This has resulted in further action planning, training of staff in looking for evidence in RE, extended writing opportunities for pupils and teachers enticing discussion through asking more open ended, 'big' questions. This has ensured consistently good teaching and pupil progress and standards of attainment for the vast majority that are at least in line with national expectations.

Within their RE homework older pupils consider the sacrificial nature of Christianity and can talk about Jesus' sacrifice. In turn, they can explain the relevance of sacrifice within their own lives. Through drama in Key Stage 1 children are encouraged to understand Old Testament stories, such as that of David and Goliath, and are confident in recounting them and learning from them. Across the school there has been a focus on developing an understanding of the purpose and place of prayer for Christians and for other faiths. Reception children, when studying different forms of prayer, are confident in writing their own and reading them to their class. In Years 3 and 4 the focus is developed through pupils considering the different ways Christians and Muslims approach prayer. They are keen to make comparisons but they are limited by lack of first-hand experience of visits to other faith places of worship or visitors to the school representing these faiths.

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

In addressing the areas identified for development in the previous inspection, good progress has been made by senior staff leaders and governors. During a significant period without a substantive headteacher, the assistant head, who is also the co-ordinator for RE, has been relentless in supporting church school improvement and has been a mainstay in providing continuity. Very effective links exist between the school and Holy Cross Church. The priest combines both a pastoral, chaplaincy role with that of 'critical friend' for governors and staff to ensure church school improvement. Leaders valued the guidance of an interim headteacher, acted at pace on recommendations and communicated their expectations clearly to the school community. The newly appointed substantive headteacher shares this passion and dedication to church school development.

Governors have shown determination in ensuring that the school has succeeded in embedding its Christian vision within school policies and practice. Systematic and accurate evaluation lead to a strategic view of the church school; within the regular monitoring cycle each area of church school evaluation is in focus in turn. The ethos group holds the staff to account for church school improvements, helps identify training needs and feeds back outcomes to the full governing body (FGB). This results in leaders being well informed about the school's needs and confident in their planning for future church school improvements. Evidence of this is documented in FGB minutes, monitoring reports, action plans and records of staff development. Staff share high expectations and are eager to contribute to school improvement. This is recognised by a member, new to the school in September 2015, who knows 'what the school can do' as a church school and wants 'to be part of that journey'.