



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Gillingham St Michael's Church of England Primary Academy

The Boundaries
Geldeston Road
Gillingham
Beccles
Suffolk
NR34 0HT

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Norwich

Local authority: N/A

Date of inspection: 9 December 2015

Date of last inspection: 10 December 2010

School's unique reference number: 141778

Headteacher: Heather Brand

Inspector's name and number: David Bunkell 815

School context

Since the previous church school inspection the local reorganisation of schools has finished, and pupils now stay to age 11 rather than 9. Next year the school will mark its fiftieth anniversary. It has always been smaller than most primary schools, and currently has 69 pupils. In March 2015 the school became an academy under the Diocese of Norwich trust, establishing the Kingfisher Partnership of church schools along with Ditchingham Primary Academy. The two schools remain separate entities, but the same headteacher leads both. They have a joint governing body, with the incumbent for Gillingham as an associate governor.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Gillingham St Michael's Primary Academy as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The Christian ethos permeates all aspects of school life.
- High quality religious education (RE) has a high profile in the curriculum.
- Governors are fully committed to supporting the school and challenging staff to ensure that the Christian ethos is maintained and further strengthened.

Areas to improve

- Review and extend the use of indoor and outdoor places for reflection to enhance pupils' spiritual journeys.
- Develop the rationale of the 'Shining Group' to enable pupils to plan and lead collective worship (CW) more often.

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

Pupils attribute much of their happiness and success at school to its Christian ethos, demonstrating clearly the Christian value of friendship in the way in which they support each other and their considerable patience with their peers. They are enabled to achieve to the best of their ability in a compassionate and caring community, where everybody is valued regardless of ability or background, and whether they have other faiths or none. Pupils who have found life difficult at larger schools have been empowered to flourish here. The Christian character of the school is highly supportive of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of all pupils, who are able to speak freely and openly without fear of ridicule or rejection. Some pupils appreciate and make use of the reflection areas in each classroom and in a corridor, but others seemed confused about some recent innovations, for example thinking that a prayer tree was only for the Christmas period as it had been decorated with tinsel. Behaviour is nearly always exemplary, with older pupils often seen to go out of their way to look after younger ones. In addition to caring for one another, pupils were seen to be compassionate in looking after the school's pet guinea pig, and in the summer gather flowers from the school's large grounds to adorn the worship table in the hall. Pupils learn about other major religions in religious education (RE) lessons, and show considerable knowledge of diverse communities. Following a recommendation of the previous inspection to 'extend opportunities for learners to explore variety in religious belief and practice' links were established with a multi-cultural school in Peterborough, but these were not practicable to sustain. Despite this, the recommendation has clearly been met in the light of the extent of pupils' understanding and respect for those from different backgrounds. RE makes a considerable contribution to the Christian character of the school, pupils demonstrating mature thinking about theology when discussing which the most important Christian festival is.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

From Monday to Thursday collective worship (CW) takes place in the middle of the morning, attended by all pupils and the majority of staff, all of whom are involved in planning and leading CW. On Fridays CW takes place at the end of the afternoon, and is attended additionally by many parents and carers. Pupils gain most benefit from the many opportunities they have to participate actively in CW, for example by acting out Bible stories. They said that they particularly enjoy the sessions taken regularly by a local 'Open the Book' team and the fortnightly CW led by the incumbent. They also mentioned their Monday sessions where a BBC resource is enabling them to consider specific needy children around the world, and the positive impact that this has had on their own attitudes and behaviour. CW is distinctively Christian, reinforcing the school's values. Pupils said that the story of Adam and Eve helped them to know right from wrong, and to make correct choices themselves. A prominent worship table is covered with a cloth, coloured to reflect the current Anglican liturgical season. Next to a homemade wooden cross a candle is lit, after a Christian greeting and response. On the day of the inspection CW was led by the headteacher, who read a story about a busy mother seeking five minutes of peace. When helpers were required to assist, nearly every pupil wanted to volunteer. The story was then linked directly to the Bible as a pupil read a relevant passage. Pupils showed in response to questions that they understand the Holy Spirit to be the part of God that can be of use to us following the death and resurrection of Jesus. Time for reflection is always included in CW, on this occasion to think about ways in which each individual might be able to find peace. Each day either the Lord's Prayer is said or a school prayer, written by pupils. CW very effectively helps develop personal spirituality, and pupils said how much they appreciate having time each day to pray and think. Governors regularly attend CW, and their feedback helps future planning of CW. The school council has also discussed the effectiveness of CW, and has led to changes such as further active participation by pupils. A 'Shining Group' has recently been formed, and although much of their role is currently in helping to set up the hall for CW, they are beginning to play a part in evaluating CW, and are keen to have a more substantial role in leading CW themselves.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Now that levels are no longer applied, creative tasks are used at the ends of units of work to assess the understanding and achievement of individual pupils. In conversation, pupils could name the five Pillars of Islam and showed a considerable degree of knowledge, typifying the very high standards of achievement, also recognised by Ofsted in core subjects. The aim of RE in the school is to equip pupils with the knowledge needed to make their own decisions when they are older. In the three lessons observed during the inspection high quality teaching was seen, enabling pupils to enjoy the lesson and participate actively in it. In decorating Christmas crackers the youngest pupils could explain the religious significance of stars, and could elucidate why crackers contain crowns, linking this to the Nativity story. Older pupils acted out Biblical scenes to show their understanding of salvation, linking this to their own behaviour. In work about the prophet Muhammed the oldest pupils showed mature insight when discussing the difference between secular and religious role models, idols and heroes. The curriculum is carefully planned, with due prominence given to Christianity in diverse forms. Younger pupils study each religion separately, with the older pupils using their strong understanding of what makes Christianity distinctive to compare and contrast it with other religions, always emphasising the similarities. RE is led very effectively in the two schools of the partnership by the same teacher, who supports the lesson planning of colleagues, scrutinises work, and at least once a year observes lessons, all confirming that teaching of RE is consistently of a high standard.

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

Senior staff and governors consistently demonstrate that Christian values are at the centre of the school. The mission statement 'Small school, big imagination' is applied consistently to a community in which compassion, trust and service can be seen in the excellent relationships that enable pupils to achieve their full potential. With so few pupils in each year group, comparison with national expectations of attainment is not feasible, but Ofsted recognised in 2013 that 'in Year 5... pupils have already reached the levels expected in Year 6' and acknowledged that all are above average. The wellbeing of all in the school community is seen to be of paramount importance, and all adults and children clearly know each other very well. Evaluation of the Christian ethos by senior staff and governors is thorough and insightful and has brought about improvements, such as a new curriculum for RE earlier this term. A commitment by the governors to preparing for leadership of church schools can be seen by the progression from the headteacher initially being appointed to a temporary secondment to one school, followed by a substantive appointment, and now leading two schools. This has also led to the effective appointment of a 'head of school' to take full responsibility when the headteacher is at the other school. A newly qualified teacher is shadowing the teacher with responsibility for CW, with a view to leading sessions herself and ultimately to be able to have management responsibilities for CW. Partnerships with nearby churches are strong. St Mary's Church Gillingham has only occasional Sunday services, and its structural condition causes only infrequent use by the school. St Michael's Church Geldeston (after which the school takes its name) is used more regularly, for example for school Christmas services, but as the road has no pavement it is not safe to walk there. Stockton Parish Church is too small to accommodate the whole school. Pupils visited all three churches last month to lay remembrance wreaths. Links with the diocese are strong, pupils saying how much they had enjoyed their second visit to an event at the cathedral, and were very proud of the recent visit by the Bishop for a dedication service. In conversation with some parents and carers, they invariably said how much they appreciate the Christian ethos of the school, and the compassion with which staff treat their children. Parents attend Friday afternoon CW in large numbers. A governor has oversight of RE, and has particularly been working with pupils in Year 6 to consider the use of reflective spaces in the school, and how the concept might be extended to the exterior. The arrangements for RE and CW far exceed basic statutory requirements.

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