



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church**



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Helen's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Abbotsham
Bideford
Devon EX39 5AP

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Diocese: Exeter

Local authority: Devon

Dates of inspection: 15 January 2015

Date of last inspection: 26 April 2010

School's unique reference number: 113446

Headteacher: Zoe Batten

Inspector's name and number: Andrew Rickett 201

School context

St Helen's is slightly smaller than the average size primary school with 211 children on roll. It is situated in a rural setting. The school expanded in January 2014 from 159 on roll to meet local demand. Children come from a diverse community with a range of socio-economic backgrounds with a significant number coming from outside the catchment area. The majority of children are from a white British heritage. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average as is the number entitled to receive the pupil premium. Attendance is broadly in line with national expectations.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Helen's Church of England Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Explicit Christian values make a significant impact on the learning and wellbeing of children.
- An emphasis on enquiry throughout a creative curriculum provides children with many opportunities to explore matters of faith and belief in considerable depth.
- Acts of worship make an important contribution to the children's spiritual development.

Areas to improve

- Building on existing practice, create innovative approaches to provide high quality and challenging opportunities for staff to develop their potential as leaders of church schools and share this more widely across the diocese.
- Develop the current model of assessment in religious education (RE) so that it more closely reflects the school's teaching and learning through a creative curriculum.
- Create a more holistic approach to self-evaluation procedures as a church school so that they more fully reflect the impact of the distinctiveness of the school's Christian ethos.

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

The exceptional quality of the school's integration of an explicit Christian ethos driving a creative curriculum which gives children frequent opportunities to explore their spirituality is a key aspect of the school's distinctiveness. Faith has been identified as one of the four main drivers of the curriculum. This is exemplified through teaching and learning that challenges the children's thinking and encourages them to take risks in their learning. These challenges in turn are often linked to the school's overtly Christian values linked to the fruits of the spirit. Children make links between fruits of the spirit such as joy or forgiveness as they occur spontaneously in their learning. These opportunities help children to explore a deeper spirituality through discussion of what it means to be human in God's world. It is this close integration that ensures that the Christian ethos is embedded throughout the life of the school and makes a significant contribution to the academic achievement of learners which is consistently above national expectations. Children respond with enthusiasm to this approach. They share their thoughts and ideas eagerly and listen with respect to the views of others. It is a common classroom experience for groups of children to be engaged in deep discussion without the need for adult intervention. This is so successful because the quality of relationships throughout the school is based on mutual respect and an awareness of others as well as the children's own curiosity and thirst to follow an enquiry to a deep level. Religious education makes a very significant contribution to this. The school places a high priority on helping children to gain a better understanding that Britain is a diverse community with many cultures and faith traditions. Through such links as the school's commitment to building a relationship with a school community in Uganda, children are becoming more aware of cultures in other countries.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Acts of worship are outstanding because they make an excellent contribution to the children's spiritual development and in their understanding of the important contribution that prayer makes to the living out of a person's faith. Children recognise that collective worship is a special time in the school day and gives them a specific opportunity to be with God. An emphasis on quiet and reflection gives children 'time to think' about the Bible stories they hear and relate them to their own lives. Whether children have a personal faith or not, they agree that these times to think are important because they help them to 'make sense of the world and the people in it'. Children respond with an appropriate reverence to these quiet moments and to the opportunities for prayer. Explicit Christian messages are used to explore values such as forgiveness or trust and links are often made to the life of the school that help to make these values relevant to the children. Children have an exceptionally clear understanding of the power of prayer and how it can make a difference. One group of children, for example, explained with considerable passion how God answers prayer by 'filling you with the courage to take action'. Children from a very young age are developing a real enthusiasm for discussing the nature of the Trinity. The fact that they become more confused the longer they talk about the Trinity only seems to make them more determined to search for an explanation. Planning for worship is thorough. It is based on the fruits of the spirit and together with events in the church calendar complement the promotion of the school's Christian ethos. Children respond with enthusiasm to the regular opportunities they have to participate and engage in acts of worship. There are good opportunities for them to be involved in the planning and leadership of worship and have their views taken in to account to improve the quality of the impact of worship. Monitoring by school leaders also leads to identifying areas for development and these in turn become integral to overall school improvement planning.

The effectiveness of religious education is outstanding

By the time children leave the school at the end of Key Stage 2 the majority have attained standards in RE that exceed national expectations with a significant number achieving well at higher levels. All groups of children make at least expected progress in RE throughout the

school and outcomes in RE compare favourably against other core subjects. Teaching is of a very high quality. The consistency of the quality of teaching across the school leads to learning that inspires children who respond with enthusiasm to the many opportunities that challenge their understanding. A key element to the success of RE, and one that leads directly to the high standards, is the way that teaching and learning allows for concepts to be explored in depth over time. This 'giving of time' to enquire, and following it through, pays rich dividends as children's ability to learn from their studies in RE and apply it to everyday life makes a significant contribution to their understanding of Christianity and other major religions. Moreover, an emphasis on promoting the school's Christian values in lessons means that children are remarkably clear about the links between these values, RE and how they impact on their own lives. Children naturally refer to values and what they have learned in acts of worship and in RE lessons and use this to help explain their thought and ideas. In this way, the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of children is an integral aspect of RE teaching. The RE curriculum has been carefully adapted by the school so that it more effectively challenges the children and reflects the way that other subjects are taught through a creative curriculum. This has enhanced delivery and allows teachers to be innovative in the way that they plan lessons. Assessment is thorough and there is a good level of consistency in the teachers' understanding of children's progress and levelling across the school. The practice of regularly recording children's comments throughout RE lessons provides good evidence of ongoing progress. Current assessment procedures do not fully capture how the school's approach to teaching and learning, through an enquiry based model, allows children to respond at considerable depth. Leadership of RE is excellent. The subject leader has a very good grasp of the purpose of RE in a church school and ensures that it has a high profile in the curriculum. She has accurately identified what needs to be done to continue to develop the subject.

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

The passion and commitment of the headteacher has ensured that the school has made excellent progress as a church school since the previous inspection. Areas for development from the last report have been effectively addressed but the headteacher has also embedded further initiatives that mean the school has responded very well to the more rigorous expectations of the current inspection process. An outstanding aspect of the leadership and management of the school is the impact of ongoing discussions between headteacher, senior leadership and all members of staff, as well as governors that explore the meaning of being a church school and how that makes a difference to the children. Providing time to engage in these discussions, and to challenge each other, has meant that all adults in school have been able to develop an excellent understanding of the significance of the Christian ethos and its impact on wellbeing and learning. There is a high level of a sense of shared purpose which ensures that a commonly held belief in the school's Christian ethos is being constantly promoted. Parents too share this understanding and explain what it means to them in the same terms as school staff. These regular opportunities develop a shared understanding of the ethos, complemented by formal procedures to monitor and evaluate means that the leadership and management have an accurate understanding of self-evaluation that lead to identifying further improvement. Although there are these robust systems in place, current self-evaluation procedures do not allow for the school's distinctive ethos to be reflected in its full potential. Similarly, the quality of discussions to explore the Christian ethos means that all staff have an excellent understanding but this has yet to reach its potential to develop innovative opportunities for professional development that lead to change. The school has a good relationship with members of the local church community. Children and their parents regard the church as an integral part of the life of the school. The school has productive links with the diocese and, through links with other Christian organisations, in the wider community at home and abroad. The school meets the statutory requirements for both collective worship and religious education.