

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ulcombe Church of England (VC) Primary School

The Street Ulcombe Maidstone ME17 1DU	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Canterbury
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Kent
Date of inspection	9 November 2016
Date of last inspection	12 December 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	118631
Executive Headteacher	Emma Hickling
Inspector's name and number	Virginia Corbyn 86

School context

Ulcombe Church of England Primary is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. Most of the pupils come from Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) backgrounds. There are very high numbers of pupils who enter and leave the school at different times of the year. The amount of time pupils are at the school varies considerably. Many do not attend other schools during the months that they are away. The school is part of a collaboration of three small schools (two Church of England schools and one community school), all with the same executive headteacher. Each school in the collaboration has its own governing body. There are good links with the local church. At the time of inspection, there was an interregnum. OfSTED judged the school as good in April 2016.

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

- All leaders and staff are dedicated to meeting the individual needs of all pupils by fulfilling the expectations set down in the vision and Christian values of the school.
- These values have a very positive impact on the wellbeing and personal development of pupils across the school.
- Pupils and families understand that they are valued by each other, by the adults in school and by God.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is well supported across the curriculum, especially within religious education (RE).

Areas to improve

- Review the current Christian values so that they drive learning and achievement for pupils as explicitly as they do for wellbeing and for personal development.
- Embed pupil leadership of collective worship by extending current practice and increasing pupils' confidence in their various roles.
- Ensure that pupils are fully involved in the monitoring and evaluation of Ulcombe as a church school so that any improvements made reflect their ideas and opinions.

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

The school serves its local community in unique and effective ways which take careful account of the needs of all pupils including those drawn from Gypsy Roma Traveller families. The school's current core values of friendship, forgiveness, trust, endurance, thankfulness and compassion are lived out and understood in relation to Christian teaching by stakeholders. As a result, behaviour is excellent and relationships are characterised by trust and mutual consideration. 'I trust my teacher to always be right', said several of the pupils when speaking about their relationship with their teacher. Pupils were less confident when articulating how their school values could be applied to their own learning, instead seeing them as applicable only to their behaviour and to their attitudes. However, for parents, governors and staff, the most important demonstration of the school's Christian values is seen in the ways in which acceptance and inclusion are experienced by pupils. This includes the expected progress which is made by all pupils, with many making accelerated progress. This is true of many of those large numbers of pupils who spend only short periods in school as well as those who attend regularly. These standards are achieved by setting high expectations and aspirations. Individual needs are fully met through a broad and imaginative curriculum. For example, the school provides alternative opportunities for Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils to develop life skills which are especially valued by that community, for example sewing and knitting and gardening.

In addition, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported across the curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to ask and explore their own questions with time given for them to reflect and respond. This is particularly well developed within the RE curriculum where learning from religion has been a recent focus for teachers, leading to improvements in knowledge and understanding for pupils. The rich cultural background of the school population is used to promote an understanding of diversity. Pupils talk about the importance of valuing 'different religions, different people and our own religion'. Prayers, often written by the pupils, frame the daily life of the school in the morning, at lunchtime and at the end of the day. They understand that prayer is a means through which to give thanks and also to ask for forgiveness.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship provides time during which Christian values are explored. One pupil explained that this is because 'Jesus and God have shown them (values) to the world to make it a better place'. Pupils are eager to apply these values to their everyday lives because the values are rewarded and celebrated within worship. They know that it is as important to recognise the values in others as well as demonstrating them for themselves. Worship has a biblical basis with simple and memorable messages such as, 'You can be rich with money but you might not be rich with love'. Pupils respond well to opportunities to praise God through singing and to reflect through quietness and through prayer. They know that worship is a particular period in the day to spend time with God. They can articulate the importance of the example and teaching of Jesus but their understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is underdeveloped. A group of older pupils lead various parts of worship, including the greeting and the prayers, from a selection provided for them. They are growing in confidence in these roles to equip them for more independence in and ownership of worship. Despite an interregnum, members of the church community lead worship on a weekly basis which continues to strengthen the relationship between school and church. Parents are invited to worship with their children on Fridays as well as for the major Christian festivals. They see that this is an important way to 'bridge the gap' showing that church is not just about what happens in the church on Sundays.

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

Having been brought close to closure with just 30 pupils in 2014, the school has been on a rapid journey of improvement since joining a collaboration with two other local schools. The number on roll has more than doubled. The executive headteacher of the collaboration is based at Ulcombe school, supported by a senior teacher. The governing body has changed completely. Despite considerable changes in school leadership, the recommendations from the previous denominational report have been addressed. Amidst these changes, the six Christian values have been retained as the means by which, as one of the new governors said, 'God is at the forefront' of the life of the school. The values have been used as the means of integrating pupils from a wide range of backgrounds into a safe and nurturing community. It is also a community where progress is at least good for all pupils and rapid for many, based on the expectation that, by working together, each person will achieve their individual goals. The values of trust and endurance have been particularly important in achieving this vision. School leaders have been rightly focussed upon improving outcomes for all pupils in recent times but this has been underpinned by 'all the things

God has shown us' as summarised by a pupil. However, the voice of pupils in actively moving the school forward as a church school is limited.

Whilst successfully maintaining its individual Christian character, the strategic development of the school in partnership with others has been rapid. This reflects very strong leadership, especially from the executive headteacher. Her vision and determination on behalf of the Gypsy Roma Traveller community has resulted in improving their outcomes and aspirations. Compassionate relationships with these families have resulted in a clear understanding of the expectations of the school and a deep trust that staff act in the best interests of their children. Staff members are very well supported in their understanding of the outworking of Christian values in the unique context of the school. Effective joint training for RE and for collective worship has been based on the skills of a number of teachers across the collaboration who lead and manage these areas well in the two church schools. This has resulted in more effective teaching which has improved learning from religion and in more effective assessment systems for RE. This has been well supported by Diocesan training sessions. Partnerships with the church are being well maintained during the interregnum. Statutory requirements for RE and worship are met. There is considerable capacity for continued and sustained improvement for the school as a church school, particularly in the light of plans to formalise the current model of collaboration.

SIAMS report October 2016 Ulcombe CE Primary School (VC) Maidstone ME17 1DU