

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Fordcombe Voluntary Aided CE Primary School

Fordcombe Green, Fordcombe, Kent TN3 0RY

Diocese: Rochester

Local authority: Kent

Date of inspection: 23 January 2012

Date of last inspection: 25 February 2009

School's unique reference number: 118719

Headteacher: Ruth Bowers

Inspector's name and number: Jan Thompson No 92

School context

Fordcombe Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School is a small village school. Its original Victorian building has been adapted and extended over the years. It is full with 104 pupils who are drawn from the immediate locality. They are mostly White British with a very low proportion eligible for free school meals. There is an above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs. About 60 per cent are from committed churchgoing families. Ofsted recently judged the school to be satisfactory overall, with some good and outstanding features. An experienced church school headteacher was new to this school in September 2011.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Fordcombe CE Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

Fordcombe Church of England Primary School has improved since its last inspection and is now an outstanding church school with a very strong Christian ethos that permeates all aspects of school life.

Established strengths

- God is recognised as being at the heart of this prayerful school community.
- Pupils have a very good knowledge and understanding of Christianity.
- There is strong Christian leadership and management of this church school.

Focus for development

- There are no major areas for development, but at a time when the school is focusing on raising standards, following its Ofsted inspection, it is important that it maintains its Outstanding church school status by on-going monitoring, evaluation and improvement.

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

The school acknowledges that 'God is at the heart of what we are and what we do' and all stakeholders are aware of this. The governing body has identified love, forgiveness, tolerance, self-worth and thinking of others as its fundamental Christian values. These are promoted in the context of Christian teaching. For example, the anti-bullying week message was taught in the Christian context of loving our neighbours as ourselves. Pupils are enthusiastic about raising money for charities and know that they are following Jesus' example in helping people in need. The school's eco committee members also understand the Christian motivation for what they do and spoke of looking after the world that God created. The school is a friendly, caring, 'family' community, where pupils are happy and behave very well. Relationships at all levels are very good and pupils say that staff are kind and helpful. Pupils' spiritual development is outstanding. A significant number of staff are Christians and are able to share their faith at school. One parent said, 'We know the teachers work hard to instil a love of God in the children.' The school environment is effective in helping pupils to pray, which is an improvement on the last inspection. Prayer stations in common areas and each classroom are well used by the pupils, with prayer trees, prayer boxes and some other interactive displays.

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

Pupils enjoy collective worship and participate very well. They say that everyone gets a turn to do things such as leading the singing, lighting the candle or being chosen to help in the teaching section. Pupils are confident to lead others in prayer and four are picked to do this at each act of worship. Pupils of all ages also lead by saying the liturgical greeting at the beginning of worship and lead the Grace at the end. Prayer plays an important part in worship and helps pupils to know that they can pray to God about anything. Both staff and pupils speak of the spiritual value they get from worship. One boy said it gave him 'inner peace.' They know that worship is directed to God and is an opportunity for God to speak to them from the Bible. Collective Worship contributes to pupils' very good knowledge and understanding of Christianity in the context of the Church of England. This is because it is Bible based and follows the Church's year. Major festivals are celebrated in the nearby church of St.Peter's. Last year both Pentecost and St Peter's Day were celebrated with each class spending time on thematic prayer stations set out in the church. Pupils remembered from this that Pentecost is the birthday of the church with the symbols of wind and fire. The Rector is now much more involved in the school's worship, which was recommended in the last inspection. Pupils enjoy his stories and parents value his teaching of Christian beliefs. Year 5/6 pupils attend the Eucharist at the Church Schools Festival, and governors are now considering introducing a school Eucharist. The planning and monitoring of collective worship is well organised by the headteacher, and preparation and delivery is always very thorough.

The effectiveness of Religious Education (RE) is good.

Pupils enjoy RE and work well in lessons, leading to good progress across the school. They attain standards above national expectations and better than the core subjects in the school. All teachers of RE have an active Christian faith that encourages pupils to speak openly about belief, as well as respecting differences. Teachers' sound background knowledge results in good teaching which means that pupils make good use of religious vocabulary and demonstrate good Bible knowledge. Pupils' understanding of religious material enables them to compare and contrast other religions with Christianity. They can also use their knowledge to support their own ideas. For example, in a Year 3/4 lesson on Jesus, pupils were able to suggest what Jesus' character was like by deducing from examples they remembered from his life and ministry. The school uses the Diocesan RE Syllabus and consequently there is a good balance of learning about religion and also applying it to their own lives, for their own personal development. The syllabus focuses on Christianity, but pupils learn about four other religions at Key Stage 2. Older pupils understand the importance of studying other religions for community cohesion. Responsibility for RE has recently been given to a teacher (since the headteacher of a small school has so many other responsibilities). She has already begun to monitor the subject and she will benefit from Diocesan RE in-service training.

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

The headteacher and governors have a clear vision of how distinctive Christian values are central to every aspect of school life and this has a demonstrable impact on pupils. The governing body has addressed the issues from the last inspection and now takes a full role in the on-going monitoring and evaluation of the church aspects of the school. Their commitment was demonstrated in their concern to appoint a new Christian headteacher when the previous Christian headteacher moved on. They went through the appointment process twice in order to find the right person. Parent and pupil questionnaires demonstrate strong support for the Christian nature of the school in all its aspects. Some parents attend a monthly prayer group for the school, set up by a governor. The headteacher also leads a prayer group for staff and others at the beginning of each term. There are strong ties between church, school and families in this small community, with mutual support given. The church makes the school very welcome when they use the building for services, worship activities and learning. The school continues to run a monthly Sunday all-age worship in the local church, which is attended by 70 per cent of pupils and their families. Parents appreciate the fact that the new headteacher has accepted leadership of this service, even though she lives some distance away. Governors have begun a new Sunday club on another Sunday a month, which is held in the school building. All this is having an impact on church membership, resulting in confirmations and baptisms connected with the school.