



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Penshurst Church of England Primary School

Penshurst
Tonbridge
Kent TN11 8BX

Diocese: Rochester

Local authority: Kent
Date of inspection: 8 July 2013
Date of last inspection: 24 February 2009
School's unique reference number: 118720
Headteacher: Julia Armstrong
Chair of Governors: Pat Middleton
Inspector's name and number: Jan Thompson 92

School context

Penshurst Church of England Primary School is a small Voluntary Aided Church school. Set in the picturesque village of Penshurst, near Tunbridge Wells, it was established in 1846 and now enjoys modern extensions to the building and landscaped outdoor spaces. Its 108 pupils come from the village and surrounding areas. They are mostly White British, with about one sixth from ethnic minority backgrounds, but all have English as their first language. 31% of pupils are from Church-going families. The headteacher, incumbent and many governors are well established.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Penshurst Church of England Primary School as a Church of England school are satisfactory

The school has a largely implicit Christian ethos that supports pupils' spiritual and moral development well. However, the main areas for development at the last inspection have not been adequately addressed. Some recent initiatives in relation to the school's distinctive Christian character have begun to have some impact.

Established strengths

- The Religious Education (RE) syllabus is used to good effect, and pupils achieve well.
- The teaching staff is very supportive of the Christian ethos of the school.

Focus for development

- Implement a rigorous system of self-evaluation and strategic development of the school as a Church school, led by the governing body.
- Introduce formal monitoring of collective worship, with pupil involvement.
- Ensure that theological input from the incumbent impacts upon the school's Christian documentation (such as the school prayer, relevant entries in the prospectus and the collective worship policy statement).
- Promote the school's distinctive Christian character, under the leadership of the governing body.

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

Pupils do well at this school and the recent Ofsted report judged the school to be good in all areas. Their achievement is good, and pupils make especially rapid progress in Reception and Key Stage 1. The school's teaching and learning policy makes an explicit link with their Christian ethos and values 'which guide how we live, learn and educate at Penshurst.' In other policies, such as the Behaviour Policy, the links are implicit rather than explicit. Following a focus on the national Olympic values, pupils chose the four that most reflected their school, which are friendship, respect, excellence and determination. The senior teacher linked these with general Bible teachings, and her Key Stage 1 pupils made posters to promote these 'Christian Values' throughout the school. However, pupils cannot readily recall them. The values of excellence and determination relate especially to achievement, and pupils know that they must always do their best. The other values of friendship and respect underpin pupils' good behaviour and the excellent relationships throughout the school. Pupils are taught that 'The Bible says, "Treat one another as you would want to be treated."' The school supports the major national charities, like Comic Relief and Sports Aid, and pupils know that Jesus helped others and that 'Jesus was kind so we should be kind.'

Interactive prayer stations in Reception and Key Stage 1 make a significant contribution to pupils' Christian spiritual development, in that they help and encourage pupils to pray. Their prayers in the prayer-box are used in class at the end of the school day. Prayer stations in the Key Stage 2 classes encourage pupils to reflect on themselves and the world, rather than helping them to put these thoughts into prayers. The Penshurst school prayer, which was on display, is not directed to God and is not explicitly Christian. Prayers are said at lunchtime in the dining room, but prayers are not said at the end of the day in Key Stage 2. However, in an RE unit on Pentecost, Year 5/6 pupils devised six very good interactive prayer stations which were well used by the rest of the school. During the inspection, there were good RE displays in three of the four classrooms. The display on the Lord's Prayer demonstrated the close connection seen between RE and worship, thus strengthening the Christian ethos of the school. The RE display on Sikhism demonstrated the respect shown at this school for other religions but, when asked, older pupils could not articulate this.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The school uses the Diocesan scheme, and therefore collective worship is explicitly Christian, follows the Church's year and has an Anglican structure. During the inspection, the week's theme was that of God the Trinity, which the headteacher explained by reference to other things that were three in one, such as an egg and a coconut. Pupils were well behaved and attentive. They joined in with the song 'There is one God', and all knew the Lord's Prayer. The school has a good 'sending out' prayer at the end of worship which speaks of walking in God's light and reflecting God's glory ... 'In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.' During the inspection, pupils set up the hall for worship and gave out the hymn books, but they did not take any other leading role in this act of worship, although they sometimes read the Bible passage. A teaching assistant has begun the 'Leading Lights' scheme, recommended by the Diocese, to build up pupils' confidence as worship leaders. Currently, four pupils have been chosen to do this. Each week's worship is planned and led by a different teacher, which has the advantage of variety of approach. The headteacher, as worship co-ordinator, works with the senior teacher and the RE subject leader on the Worship Committee, but the incumbent is not part of this team and has little input into the daily collective worship of the school. Following the last inspection, there has been some evaluation of worship with pupils, but no formal and systematic monitoring has taken place. Pupils like having quiet time for personal reflection. They know that worship is directed to God, and that they can talk to God in worship and thank him. However, the policy statement does not include sufficient emphasis on Christianity and on worshipping the Christian God. The Bible is not mentioned. Collective worship was used to explain the Bible's teaching on the school's four Christian values when they were first chosen but, in implementing the Diocesan scheme, the school has not yet embedded its own values into its planning.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The Diocesan RE Syllabus (2009) is now well established and closely followed, with good results. Pupils make good progress across the school and attain standards in line with, and sometimes higher than, national expectations. In Reception and Key Stage 1, RE concentrates on Christianity, which gives the younger pupils a firm foundation for their knowledge of Jesus, the Church and the Bible. Key Stage 2 continues to focus on Christianity, but pupils also gain an understanding of four other religions and use key words well. Pupils have produced a lot of work in their books, which is an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers assess the work thoroughly, highlighting 'I can' statements in pupils' books for each unit of work. Marking confirms what pupils have achieved but does not give enough help for further improvement. RE lessons are varied and make good use of a range of resources, including artefacts. Consequently, most pupils find the subject interesting and they work hard. Pupils develop a variety of skills. For example, Year 1/2 pupils made up their own searching questions to ask the rector about his job. There is a strong emphasis in RE on relating the lessons to pupils' own lives. This sometimes reinforces the school's Christian values. For example, Year 1/2 pupils made friendship bracelets in connection with the Bible story of Ruth and Naomi. It also leads to spiritual development, for example, when Year 5/6 pupils wrote their own psalms in a unit on Bible literature, and when Year 3/4 pupils explored different types of prayer.

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

Of the three areas for development from the last inspection, over four years ago, only RE has improved sufficiently. The other two have not been successfully addressed and they remain the first two areas for development in this report. The governing body has not accepted its responsibility for evaluating and developing this school as a Church school, but has left this to the headteacher and her supportive staff. Governors have not been involved in the most recent judgements as the school has transferred to the new inspection framework. This new system is not yet being used to its best advantage, and the school's self-evaluation is not sufficiently focused on the new expectations and is too generalised. Pupils have recently been involved in a Church school questionnaire, but not their parents. The governing body played no part in choosing the school's core Christian values and is still not promoting the Christian distinctiveness of the school adequately on the website and in the school's prospectus. Good relationships exist between the school and the parish church of St John the Baptist. School services take place there each term (six times a year) and the school contributes to Sunday services there twice a year. Year 5/6 pupils usually attend the Church Schools Festival at the cathedral, and the rector helps to prepare them by going through the Eucharist service with them. However, the rector is not proactive on the governing body, even in those areas where he has the professional, theological expertise that is needed. The RE subject leader has made good use of Diocesan training this year. A new Foundation Governor has just been appointed as the new link governor for RE and collective worship.

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