

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Milldown Church of England Primary School

Milldown Road
Blandford Forum
Dorset
DT11 7SN

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: Dorset
Dates of inspection: 20th March 2014
Date of last inspection: October 2009
School's unique reference number: 113755
Headteacher: Sue Ryall
Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field NS151

School context

This is an oversubscribed, one form entry primary school on the edge of the town of Blandford. The school moved to a new building in 2010 and now shares a campus with the secondary school and a pre-school. Few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds but the proportion eligible for free school meals is growing close to schools nationally. More pupils than usual have special educational needs or disabilities, some of which are complex medical conditions. Staffing at the school is very stable. The vicar who was very active in the school, has recently moved to another parish and has yet to be replaced.

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

- The passion and drive of the deputy headteacher has revitalised the Christian character of the school
- The strong partnership with local churches enriches pupils' experience and understanding of Christianity
- Learning about Christian values has given pupils a moral compass in their lives
- New initiatives in collective worship and religious education (RE) are helping pupils to reflect on spiritual issues

Areas to improve

- To make use of opportunities for spiritual development across the breadth of the curriculum, including indoor and outdoor spaces, so that pupils become independent in using these resources for themselves.
- To develop systems for pupils to prepare and deliver worship on a regular basis

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

Since the last inspection, the school has revisited its mission statement and identified a set of six core values, 'selected from the biblical fruits of the Spirit'. These are patience, joy, love, peace, kindness and self-control. The impact of each one can be seen in the strong relationships throughout the school. Although the values are not specifically referred to as Christian in documents and displays, this is how pupils understand them. Older pupils have no hesitation in recalling Bible stories and quoting specific texts that explain each value from a distinctively Christian standpoint. The emphasis on values has led pupils to take more responsibility for their own actions and has given them the vocabulary to explain what is right and what is wrong. Parents quote instances where children apply these values to what happens at home. The school's values give pupils a moral compass but they also influence how pupils approach their learning. They support each other and respond well to challenging targets because they know that help will be close to hand. As a result they make good progress, often from low starting points to achieve results in line with schools nationally. Attendance is improving and above average. The ethos statement refers to pupils being nurtured in a secure and caring Christian environment. This is reflected in the way the school has totally embraced pupils with complex medical conditions. Everyone agrees how much their presence enriches the life of the school. Numerous support groups are in operation to support both pupils' academic learning and their wellbeing, and the Christian character of the school plays its part in this. One group meets for pupils who have been affected by bereavement. Pupils understand the purpose of this and some now make the decision to attend for themselves. The Art and RE club was so popular that there have been numerous requests for it to be repeated. Although these activities meet the spiritual and emotional needs of pupils the school is aware that there has not been a well-defined approach to spirituality across the curriculum. Training for staff from a diocesan consultant has provided a starting point and given teachers confidence to plan for this in all subjects, not just RE, but this is still in its early stages. Spiritual areas have been created in classrooms but pupils are unsure how they might use them. Similarly, although the school grounds offer rich opportunities for spiritual development, including a special garden, the use of this resource is too often limited to a place for quiet activities. This is partly the result of weather damage and the school is seeking help to revitalise the garden planting. The assessment data for RE was showing that not all pupils were doing as well as they might. Prompt changes have been made to the syllabus and there is now a strong focus on developing pupils' skills of enquiry and analysis. Pupils enjoy these new lessons, particularly the freedom they have to raise questions of their own. The story of Easter, for example, has prompted some lively discussion about what different religions believe about what happens after death. This is having a good impact on pupils understanding of other cultures.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship has been re-shaped in response to feedback from pupils. The changes have been well received by both adults and children and are gaining momentum as a result of a more structured and purposeful approach to planning worship. The school has adopted the 'Open the Book' scheme where a group of church members, representing different Christian denominations in the town, present a dramatic presentation of a Bible story each week. These acts of worship have captured the imagination of pupils who then find it easy to remember the detail of the stories. However, it is the way the school follows this up with pupils that has made the most difference. The deputy head works closely with the church schools' worker to devise a set of reflective questions that form the basis of worship the following day. Although these follow-up assemblies are unconventional as acts of worship, there is no doubt that they enhance both pupils' spiritual thinking and their knowledge of key Christian beliefs. This is why they are confident to explain Christian values in the context of everyday life. Teachers leading worship follow the planning closely so pupils throughout the school receive a consistent message but made relevant to their age. Older pupils have a mature understanding of the nature and purpose of worship. This means that although a candle may only be lit for the time of prayer and reflection, they recognise that Bible stories and

songs of praise to God are equally part of the pattern of worship. They are able to evaluate whether certain activities might 'qualify' as worship and this indicates that they are ready to take a greater role in preparing and leading worship themselves. Pupils experience a wide range of leaders and styles of worship each week. Although they are uncertain about what is specifically Anglican, they can make comparisons between what they experience in different churches and have benefitted from activities such as 'Experience harvest'. Prayer is very important to pupils. They are beginning to make use of the spiritual areas in classrooms and like the way prayer often begins and ends the day. They understand the distinction between public and private prayer and seek out opportunities for this themselves.

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

The school has traditionally been perceived as a good school with the added dimension of its Christian character. This is now changing as new initiatives have revitalised both worship and RE. The Christian character is increasingly an explicit and integral part of what pupils experience on a daily basis. The catalyst for this has been the appointment of the deputy headteacher and her brief to take responsibility for reviewing the school as a church school. Her systematic approach to making improvements has proved highly effective. This is because the priorities agreed for action are the result of a thorough analysis of feedback from pupils, staff and parents. Before new initiatives are introduced however, training is provided for all staff so that they are equipped to deliver the new resources or methods of learning. The appointment of a schools' worker in the Blandford Deanery has provided timely support for the school. Good use is being made of her expertise and she and the deputy head have become a strong team. This post has been funded by the Blandford Schools' Development Trust to strengthen the bridge between the Church and its schools. This is an excellent example of how the Church is responding to the recommendations of the Chadwick report 2011 (The Church School of the Future Review).

Christian leadership is developing at all levels as opportunities for training, particularly with the diocese, become a regular part of the professional development programme for all staff. Although the deputy head is clearly taking the lead in developments, she has the full support of her colleagues because their feedback is sought and decisions are made open and transparent. Her research project on Christian distinctiveness has prepared her well for the role. Senior staff and governors make sure that their Christian commitment to nurture each individual child is made possible through the systems for pastoral care. They took prompt action following the last inspection to involve staff and governors in agreeing the school's core values. These are now monitored in discussion groups with pupils and are known to have an impact on pupils' lives both within and outside the school. The school's evaluation of itself is thorough and accurate. It shows that much has been tackled in the last year. This reflects the infectious drive and enthusiasm of the deputy head who knows that care must be taken to embed new initiatives in depth.

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