



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### The Coombes Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

School Lane  
Arborfield Cross, Reading  
RG2 9NX

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Good**

**Diocese: Oxford**

Local authority: Wokingham

Date of inspection: 11 June 2015

Date of last inspection: 19 July 2010

School's unique reference number: 8723373

Interim Headteacher: Matthew Dickson

Inspector's name and number: The Revd Dr Jason Phillips 598

#### School context

The Coombes CE Primary is in a semi-rural context. It has 540 pupils and most are White British. About 15% of children are from multi-ethnic backgrounds, primarily of Israeli and Nepalese heritage. There is also a significant proportion of forces families from the nearby garrison. The school has a mobility factor above the national average. An interim headteacher has led the school for the last twelve months.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of The Coombes CE Primary as a Church of England school are good

- Spirituality is central to the development of the whole child and the workings of the school.
- The inclusion of children of all faiths, social backgrounds, abilities and social need results in a generous and understanding Christian community where children, governors and staff demonstrate care for others and where children feel free to openly explore religious ideas.
- The drive, commitment and leadership of the interim headteacher and the religious education (RE) subject leader models the school's Christian values for the pupils and secures high standards in RE.

#### Areas to improve

- Secure successful leadership as a church school by ensuring as soon as possible that all governors and staff are trained by the diocese to use the school improvement framework (SIAMS) as an on-going and central evaluation tool. Ensure the church school aspect is evaluated as a priority at each termly full governors meeting and monitored regularly by the proposed SIAMS committee of governors.
- By working closely with the diocese and outstanding church schools, identify and adopt strategies and systems to ensure the school's Christian values are explicitly at the heart of continuous school improvement, a reviewed school vision, policy and practice and proclaimed boldly in printed and electronic documentation and in the internal and external school environments.
- Demonstrate the impact of the school's Christian character on academic achievement by embedding recent improvements in English and mathematics so that all pupils are challenged and the attainment gap between boys and girls is closed.

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

This is a good and improving church school. Spiritual development is at the heart of this school. It is an integral part of its child-centred, experiential approach to learning and child development. The school understands itself as a band of pilgrims on a journey of discovery both of the world and of self. The many spiritual opportunities such as the whole school spine-tingling Christian labyrinth reflections mean this school is a very spiritual place where spiritual development for children and adults is good. A wide range of Christian values gently underpins this daily spiritual experience and enhances the impact. However, these values are not promoted explicitly enough and are too diverse. As a result, their impact is not fully realized in behaviour choices, in establishing a conscious Christian community or in the decision making of the school. This is why the school, is not yet outstanding. There has been a focus on driving up standards of progress and attainment for all children over the last twelve months resulting in most pupils now making even better progress and attaining higher. However, this is not yet an outstanding church school because recent improvements are still not fully embedded meaning that some pupils are not yet attaining as highly as they should, especially at Key Stage 1 (KSI). Further, the attainment gap between boys and girls is still too wide. The school utilizes its church school ethos to enable positive conditions for learning based upon its spiritual core. This means that pupils feel safe, cared for and treated with respect. Consequently pupils are willing to take a risk to learn new things and are open to different cultures, religions, ideas and pupil abilities. There is an appropriate focus upon charity such as Sports Aid. This charitable focus helps pupils to develop empathy and responsibility and results in pupils making their own charitable endeavours for example in supporting the recent Nepal earthquake appeal. The school makes a positive impact upon community cohesion because it actively and successfully seeks to develop pupils' multi-cultural awareness through RE and the wider curriculum. Visits to Reading's Gurdwara and the positive involvement of Jewish, Sikh and Muslim families to demonstrate how faiths are being lived out locally, exemplify this. Pupils have a growing understanding of Christianity and some understanding of its multicultural nature for example through a study of Blessed Oscar Romero. Standards in RE are good because the subject is being led well and teaching is mostly good and better. The RE curriculum is interesting and based upon key questions such as 'What is a soul?' These key questions prosper the school's experiential approach and help pupils to develop the critical skills of RE. One parent said, 'Religion is part of life here and is discussed openly and seen as part of life and not just relegated to the home.' RE makes a good contribution to the church school aspect. Pupil behaviour is improving which results in positive relations and a generally calm atmosphere in the school. The school's Christian values and spirituality inspire behaviour choices but because the values are insufficiently explicit, most pupils cannot articulate how Christian values inform their decision-making. The school's exploratory approach does however give pupils a sense of responsibility for behaviour choices and opportunity to self-regulate, which they value. One child said, 'teachers trust us a lot and demand we respect and take care of ourselves and others, even when they are not there.' The school sees itself as expressing its caring Christian approach in the inclusion of all pupils. An example of this is its good support of pupils with a special education need who progress well at this school. Additionally, the school provides exceptional support for the distinctive needs of forces families. The school's commitment to inclusion ensures its Christian values influence an approach to attendance that is caring but also one of high expectations. This results in attendance that is in line with the national average and improving.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

Collective worship brings cohesiveness to all aspects of school life fostering pupil self-esteem, enabling spiritual development and a sensitivity to awe and wonder. Collective worship exemplifies the school's commitment to spiritual development and self-discovery. It is a positive experience that all stakeholders value because it brings them together as a Christian community. Collective worship increasingly relates all these aspects to biblical accounts and the example of Jesus. There is some understanding of God as Trinity by the children but this key Christian concept has not been modelled sufficiently in the forms and themes of collective worship to affect the pupils to any great extent. The forms and themes of collective worship are appropriate and relevant to the children, who are encouraged to make connections for themselves between the key ideas and Christian values. When made explicit, the ideas of Christianity, Anglicanism and the school's Christian values, especially of caring, increasingly influence choices and behaviour. The whole school,

adults and children, speak positively of the marking of festivals including the distinctive enactment of the Nativity and the huge investment of time and effort in exploring the Epiphany. They are positive about the celebration of festivals because they are actively involved. The school enhances children's understanding of worship and religious expression in the world faiths through marking Hanukkah and Diwali, for example, and noting the significance of the period of Ramadan for Muslim believers. The school plans well for collective worship and increasingly utilizes the expertise of the local Anglican Church team and Baptist Church members to weave biblical examples and Christian ideas into the themes. An example of this is the recent Jonah focus. However, the planning for collective worship does not involve pupils sufficiently and results in collective worship that is predominantly adult led with limited opportunities for pupils to lead. This is why collective worship is not yet outstanding. Governors are now monitoring collective worship. This represents progress since the last inspection. However, governors are not yet sufficiently trained to use the SIAMS school improvement framework to assist in evaluating their observations. As a consequence they cannot challenge the school to move forwards effectively in developing collective worship. Collective worship at this school naturally and genuinely results in an inclusive and affirming Christian community.

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

The governors have led the school through a turbulent period. They have remained steadfast in keeping their vision of a child-centred, experiential approach with a Christian spirituality for this school. However, the governors are not using the SIAMS framework as a tool to ensure continued improvement as a church school and have not established an explicit Christian vision and set of core Christian values to steer the work of the school. The interim headteacher, staff and governors have made a demonstrable difference since September by establishing a clearer direction for the school in raising standards. Due to the drive of current school leaders, effective staff and governor training and diocesan and local authority support most pupils are now making better progress. The instability of leadership and the drive to raise standards in English and mathematics has meant that the development points from the last inspection have been appropriately met with regard to collective worship but not tackled with sufficient rigour concerning making the Christian ethos explicit. Links with St Bartholomew's parish church have been revitalized since the appointment of the interim head enabling local church staff to make a good contribution to collective worship and the school's understanding of itself as an Anglican community. Similarly, links with the diocese are also improving, enabling effective support of the school for example in the appointments process for the new headteacher and in school improvement. The excellent support of the garrison padre has made a positive impact on the school's Christian character because the school has been open to his involvement. RE is very well led and has an appropriately high priority in school life. It enhances the school's inclusive and open nature where pupils can ponder and express religious ideas and the deep questions of life. RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. As a lecturer at Reading University, the RE leader also has a wider influence locally and supports other schools for example in RE network meetings. This raises the profile both of RE and the school. The interim headteacher is proactive in ensuring the well-being of all in the school community resulting in a positive atmosphere and a greater sense of cohesion across the staff team. In the last twelve months there has been a clear focus on developing staff leadership, responsibility and accountability developing school leaders of the future. However, this leadership capacity is not nuanced by a church school perspective because staff and governors are not sufficiently aware of the church school improvement framework (SIAMS). Parents express a renewed sense of engagement with the school since September as they are better informed and their views are actively sought. Parents recognize the many Christian gifts of this happy church school as well as its need to continue to improve. They rightly speak well of the school and are committed to it because of its Christian spirituality and pastoral care that results in their children having a positive self-esteem and an openness and respect towards others. As one school leader commented, this is a 'special and unique place.' In its distinctive way, the school fosters the Anglican Church's mission to rural communities.