Woodchester Endowed Voluntary Aided Primary School
Church Road, Woodchester, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL5 5PD

Current SIAMS inspection grade | Outstanding
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Diocese | Gloucester

Previous SIAMS inspection grade | Outstanding
Local authority | Gloucestershire

Date of inspection | 18 January 2017
Date of last inspection | 25 April 2012
Type of school and unique reference number | Primary 115704
Headteacher | Glyn Jones
Inspector’s name and number | Margaret James 698

School context
Woodchester VA Endowed is a smaller than average sized primary school, with 145 children on roll, set in a semi-rural location. The school attracts families from a wide catchment area and numbers are rising. The vast majority of children are of white British heritage and numbers of children with special educational needs and those known to be eligible to receive Pupil Premium funding are low. Recent Fischer Family Trust data indicates that the school is in the top 5% and the top 3% of schools nationally for pupils’ progress and attainment respectively. The headteacher has been in post for two years and the deputy only since January 2017.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Woodchester Endowed VA Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The headteacher’s depth of understanding with regard to what constitutes a Christian education is fundamental to the clear and effective vision for the school. This, in turn, has a positive impact upon all areas of life and learning for the whole school community.
- Children are thoughtful, reflective, respectful, articulate and independent and are able to apply the Christian vision and values of the school to their learning, behaviour, decisions and aspirations.
- Members of staff, governors, parents and children live and work together as a cohesive family with due regard to the needs of each other, knowing that they are loved and valued as individuals. Consequently, this is a school family where all are enabled to flourish.

Areas to improve

- Develop a shared language and theology which will underpin the school’s understanding of, and approach to, spirituality, mindfulness, prayer and reflection so that everyone has a clear grasp of how these areas of school life may connect and overlap in practice.
- Develop and embed systems which enable class teachers to track pupils’ progress and performance in religious education (RE) termly. Use these as a basis for discussion between individual teachers and the subject leader, thereby informing the regular book scrutinies and focusing them upon the specific learning needs of individual children.
- Streamline and tightly focus the paperwork used by governors in their regular monitoring and
The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners

Bible teaching and a shared understanding of the Christian narrative underpin life at this outstanding Church of England school, which is a learning community for all. The unambiguous, yet inclusive, emphasis on biblical teaching, and the Christian values which arise from this, ensures that all members of the school family have a good and growing depth of understanding of how the Christian faith offers a way of life which focuses on community. Within this school family, the needs of each individual, adults and children alike, shape decisions and priorities. This has an impact upon ways in which money is allocated and, for example, has resulted in the appointment of a psychotherapist and educational psychologist, so that children’s mental and emotional health are nurtured and cared for. Similarly, children choose to raise money for a range of charities because they understand that giving to others is one of the ways in which the Christian values which they live out can benefit others. The shared understanding of a Christian education also drives ways in which all members of staff focus on the learning needs of each child as an individual with the result that children make very good progress during their time at the school. The belief that education is about more than high levels of academic achievement, although this too is a priority, ensures that depth and richness are key elements of all learning experiences. The school motto – Memories for LIFE (Learning, Inspiration, Faith, Everyone) – and the six core Christian values – Friendship, Forgiveness, Respect, Responsibility, Trust and Truthfulness – together create a framework for the education which the children enjoy at Woodchester. Children understand that they, too, have a responsibility in their learning. They apply Christian values such as Respect and Trust to their approaches to learning and describe how, for example, they can make themselves into better mathematicians when they consciously decide to respect their teachers’ commitment to them and do their best. They describe, too, how all people have different gifts and abilities and explain how helping others who struggle is a natural part of teaching and learning in their school. They explain that this is because “all are loved by God and should therefore be loved by each other” and readily describe that the best thing about their school is “the people”. They know, with an impressive confidence and ease, that all excel at something and that everyone needs support and can offer help at different times. This attitude develops within the culture established by the headteacher which encourages each person to understand the difference between “not doing the wrong thing and going all the way towards doing the right thing”. Adults and older children have an excellent understanding of spirituality and interpret it as “building a relationship with God”. This definition is inclusive of people of faith and of those of no religious faith due to the belief that all are loved and of value whether they believe in God or not. Different strategies such as reflection and mindfulness are routine aspects of day-to-day life at the school, within both the taught and the wider curriculum, and children value the time and space they are given to reflect, think and pray. However, these different activities are not understood by children as being aspects of spirituality and spiritual development. All in the school community recognise the limitations of living in a relatively mono-ethnic, mono-religious community such as Woodchester. Consequently, specific and ongoing efforts are made to ensure that children develop a knowledge, understanding and respect for people who are different from themselves. RE is a key part of the successful work in this regard and children consider that learning about a range of faiths is important in enabling them to live out the Christian values which they espouse.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The shared belief that collective worship lies at the heart of a successful and deeply Christian school community is demonstrated by the headteacher’s leadership of worship. In this way, he ensures that he leads by example and provides a biblical role model for boys and girls of all ages as well as for members of staff. As a result, collective worship has a very high status in the life of the school community and is enjoyed by children, members of staff, governors and parents. Feedback by children, both immediate and termly, is an ongoing feature of worship and has a direct impact upon planning. It focuses on impact and ensures that approaches to worship, and the Bible teaching which forms a significant aspect of these times, is relevant and inspirational for all. Child-led worship is a relatively recent development but is already having a significant and positive impact. Children describe how leading worship not only helps them to grow in confidence as leaders, but also enables them to grow spiritually and to better understand the messages of the Bible teaching. They explain that, in order to be able to teach it to others, they must have a good understanding themselves and be able to apply it to their lives and to the lives of others. In
explaining this, they make links with the approach to teaching, learning and assessment in the taught curriculum. They describe how worship, too, is an important element of what they learn in school and are able to apply to their lives out of school. Prayer and Anglican liturgy are routine elements of worship and provide opportunities for children to be involved in its leadership on most days. Two children write a prayer together during collective worship, which reflects their response to the teaching and demonstrates the depth of their understanding. Adults take note of this as part of their own reflections and feedback on the impact of worship and have the flexibility and confidence to make changes to acts of worship based on the ongoing feedback and responses which they receive. The termly formal pupil conferences about worship provide additional feedback for staff and they use all of this information to ensure that changes are made in order to continue to inspire and challenge the school community. Governors are regular visitors to and leaders of collective worship and they, too, feed into the ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The vicar is a highly valued leader of worship and works closely with the headteacher in planning and developing this spiritual part of the life of the school community. Children are thoughtful and reflective in their thinking about God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They have the confidence and ability to express their own, well-informed opinions and apply this to their developing views of God and their own potential relationships with Him. Due to opportunities provided within the school day for prayer and reflection, they are able to talk with interest about prayer and know that they are free to develop their own thoughts and beliefs, whilst also respecting those of others.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Standards of both learning and teaching in religious education are very high. The subject leader knows this because she regularly monitors the quality of both by means of lesson observations, discussions with teachers and children, book scrutinies and learning walks. Current systems allow for this degree of monitoring but stop short of ensuring that individual pupils’ progress is monitored termly in order to enable early intervention should it be necessary. Nonetheless, the vast majority of children make excellent progress in the subject, have an impressive knowledge of a range of faiths and achieve very well. Initiatives such as the RE Focus Week on world faiths and regular visits to places of worship as well visitors from faiths other than Christianity result in children developing an excellent knowledge and understanding of and respect for people regardless of their religious beliefs. Teachers across the school adopt creative and engaging approaches to teaching in RE and consider it to be an important aspect of the life of the school as a church school. Consequently, children enjoy the subject and discuss their learning with maturity, insight and a notable degree of theological literacy, growing and developing in their opinions as they listen to each other. The subject leader is passionate about RE. She ensures that she is up-to-date with national changes and initiatives and passes these on to members of staff within a culture of support and challenge which enables other teachers to also grow in their knowledge, understanding and confidence. She has attended diocesan training on the Understanding Christianity resource and the whole school is currently involved in the process of familiarisation and implementation of this. Although a very recent initiative, it is already having a positive impact upon RE and teachers are considering ways in which their teaching of faiths other than Christianity might benefit from this new theologically driven approach. Governors are also part of developments in RE and seek ways in which they might support and ensure high quality provision for children. This whole-school shared commitment to religious education, along with a shared understanding of the purpose of the subject in a church school, ensures that provision and outcomes in the subject are outstanding.

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

Fundamental to the outstanding nature of this church school is the clarity and strength of the headteacher’s vision for it as a Christian learning community. The way in which he brings together his understanding of the Christian Gospel with an educational philosophy that focuses on the value and worth of every individual creates a culture in which all are enabled to flourish as unique individuals made in the image of God. This is evident, for example, in the way in which all children from an early age are encouraged and enabled to be independent learners, with a freedom and creativity of thought and opinion. They are supported in their development of this, challenged to stretch themselves and to achieve highly across the curriculum. Within this culture of challenge and achievement, all children also know that they are valued simply for being themselves and, as a result, they give and receive love with confidence and self-belief. Governors know the school very well and are committed to the part they can play in its continuing development. They are engaged in regular monitoring and evaluation, including of the impact of the Christian vision and values on school life. Current systems involve the use of a somewhat confusing suite of documents which, at times, limits the effectiveness and tight focus of their work in this regard. The outcomes of monitoring do,
however, consistently lead to evaluation of and reflection on current practices in order to subsequently bring about improvement and change. This happens at all levels of leadership in the school, including with class teachers who are acknowledged as being leaders in their classrooms for the sake of the children and their families, and with children who are confident in their own positions as young leaders. In this way, all are nurtured into growth and consequently the whole school community benefits. Partnerships with the parish church are lively, deep and beneficial to all. Clergy and church leaders are regarded as valued members of the school community, as are members of the congregation who lead various clubs and initiatives in and for the school. Links with the diocesan education team are more limited but members of the school family do benefit from training offered. Parents and grandparents speak very highly of the school and know that they are also valued members of this community. There exists a high level of trust between all because of a shared belief in the headteacher’s vision and its consistent outworking in practice, which encourages and enables each person to live life in all its fullness.

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