

Thurnham Church of England Controlled Infant School

The Landway,
Bearsted,
Maidstone,
Kent.
ME14 4BL

Diocese: Canterbury

Local authority: Kent
Date of inspection: 1st March 2013
Dates of last inspection: 22nd June 2009
School's unique reference number: 118629
Head teacher: Christopher James
Inspector's name and number: Matthew Crick 758

School context

This popular Church of England controlled three-form entry infant school currently has 271 pupils on roll. The vast majority of the children come from white British families, with 15%-20% having links with a worshipping community. A new Headteacher was appointed in 2011 and new Deputy Head Teacher in September 2012. The school continues to perform at a high level.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Thurnham Church of England Controlled Infant School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The school is highly regarded in the community for the way in which it cares for all children and supports families. Under its recently appointed leadership the biblical basis and motivation for this care has been highlighted well and invigorated.

Established strengths

- Strong expression of the school's distinctive Christian character.
- Shared understanding that children are cherished.
- Imaginative use of a wide range of resources and media fully engage children in worship.
- Clear strategy, thorough planning and effective monitoring of improvement programme.

Focus for development

- Clearly express the school's key Christian values and the Church's teaching behind them to all stakeholders.
- Ensure that all assemblies have a distinct time of worship.
- Further enhance the use of Anglican tradition to reflect the Church year.
- Seek to develop areas for quiet reflection in the outdoor environment.

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

The impact of the school's Christian values is evident in the clear understanding parents and children have of the key role Christianity plays in the life of the school. Parents say that, "The Christian element is tangible," and significantly enhances their children's learning. The school consistently offers effective support to families. The way in which children are encouraged to explore belief and seek answers to difficult questions is perceived by parents to be a particular strength of the school. Children are keen to discuss what they have learnt in both Religious Education (RE) and collective worship out of school. In September 2012 the school introduced six key Christian values (friendship, forgiveness, trust, compassion, thankfulness and humility) and these have been enthusiastically embraced by children. A carefully planned programme to develop children's understanding of the background for each value over the year has had immediate impact. Some parents were aware the values exist, but which values have been adopted and the Church's teaching on them had not been effectively communicated by the school. Children have a strong sense of the school as a family in which they are cherished and they care for each other. They are well supported by

adults who encourage them to take responsibility. Through enthusiastic participation in fundraising activities like Mary's Meals, pupils are developing an appreciation that there is a Christian motivation for such actions. The study of other religions in RE plays an effective role in developing an awareness of other cultures and beliefs. The use of Christian symbols in key areas throughout the school building, along with Christian focal points in all classrooms, prayer boxes and printed prayers, offers scope for spiritual development. The outdoor environment does not provide as much encouragement for pupils to pause and reflect, with children unable to identify any quiet areas outside. The school's literature and website clearly articulate the its Christian ethos and commitment to a nurturing environment for all children and their families

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

Worship in the school benefits from a well thought-out strategy, clear planning and recently introduced changes. Work on developing detailed sets of age appropriate worship plans and resources to support staff is making good progress. The school's leadership has taken key decisions to ensure that from September 2013 all staff will be able to attend collective worship and so will have addressed the key issue from the last inspection. Children value and enjoy worship and speak about it with enthusiasm at home and in school. They readily explain how themes explored in worship are relevant to their lives in school. The variety of visitors and worship styles contributes to a strong sense of anticipation on the part of the children with regard to worship. The widening range of worship leaders has helped to vary the styles of worship experienced, while retaining a range of Anglican practices and traditions. There are still occasions when there is scope for the worship elements to be more distinct and for more references to be made to the Church year. However, it is clear that parents in particular feel that assemblies and worship are times when children are made to feel both special and valued. The monitoring of worship is well planned and implemented. Observations are discussed and actions agreed that have enhanced the quality of worship. The worship observed fully engaged and involved the children. The Headteacher made creative and imaginative use of a range of media and props to relate a story from the Bible and explore one of the school's key Christian values.

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

The Headteacher has demonstrated sensitivity and dynamism in addressing key issues to do with the leadership of RE and worship. The establishment of the Church Steering Group has ensured that the range of stakeholders involved in developing and enhancing the distinctive Christian character better reflects the school community. The appointment of a new collective worship leader and development of the RE leader are indicative of the school's move to distribute responsibility and develop succession planning. This has further enhanced the school's capacity to deliver sustained improvement, as does the pastoral and spiritual support available to staff. The strong links with the local church and other groups, through the use of school buildings for Messy Church and at the Lighthouse club, demonstrates how the school is seeking to make a wider contribution to the community it serves. Governors and senior leaders have developed a clear vision for the further development of the school's Christian values. Stakeholders are able to describe the positive part played in school life by the school's Christian ethos. There is still scope for the recently adopted key Christian values to be fully articulated to all stakeholders. The approach and structure adopted by the Steering Group to implement change makes robust use of self-criticism balanced by consistent support and effective use of resources. As a result, school leaders are well informed and able to clearly demonstrate that both the impact made so far, and the on-going commitment to developing the spiritual well-being of all those involved in the school.