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National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Withington Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Withington Gloucester GL54 5BQ

Diocese of Gloucester

Local authority: Gloucestershire

Date of inspection : 13th June 2012

Date of last inspection : 20th October, 2008

School's URN : 115703

Name of Headteacher: Angela Reed

SIAS inspector NS268 : Muriel Griffiths

Context

There are 23 pupils on roll in this rural school with a further 28 part timers in the 20-place full-day care pre school group for children from the age of two, which is managed by the governing body. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is higher than average. There are three classes; one for the playgroup and one for each Key Stage. The outdoor area has been attractively developed providing a good learning environment.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Withington Church of England Primary School are outstanding.

Withington is an outstanding Church of England school. The strong Christian ethos provides a distinctive and effective learning environment for pupils' spiritual and moral growth. The quality of relationships which exist between all members of the school community, the emphasis on Christian values, the strong links with the parish church and the headteacher's visionary leadership contribute to the outstanding ethos of the school.

Established strengths

- The strong emphasis on the school's Christian values which is the basis for pupils' excellent personal development.
- The secure and accepting ethos which gives children confidence in expressing their thoughts and opinions.
- The high quality relationships that exist between all members of the school community and the close relationships with the church and the local community.

Focus for development

- Provide more opportunities for pupils' involvement in planning, leading and evaluating acts of worship.
- In order to enhance pupils' spiritual awareness, further expand the school's outdoor area for quiet reflection.

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

Withington Church of England school is a caring and friendly community in which everyone feels valued and special. Children flourish as individuals. There is an excellent commitment to the development of the whole child within the context of a supportive school community. The school's chosen Christian values are an integral part of the daily life of the school. Children recognise them as the reason that the school is a 'happy place to be'. These values motivate the school community in their actions and decision-making and therefore, have a positive effect on pupils. Excellent examples of this are shown in the respect that pupils and adults show for one another and also in the pupils' outstanding personal development. The strong relationships throughout the school support the learning environment. Children are proud of their school and understand how the school's aims and Christian values impact on the school's every day life. Children feel supported through the care and guidance that they receive from adults in school. Pupils' attitudes to school are positive and they take responsibility for many aspects of school life through a vibrant school council and eco club. Relationships between all stakeholders are a particular strength of the school leading to an atmosphere of trust and respect. Children are confident to share their thoughts and opinions. Pupils know that what they say will be valued by both peers and adults. This was evident in lessons observed on the day of the inspection. They know that their contributions will be valued because of the caring ethos that is so much part of the school's ethos. Collective worship, religious education and the strong Christian ethos underpin and complement pupils' spiritual, social and moral development, which is outstanding. Spiritual development is a strength of the school and makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils' spiritual learning is developed throughout the whole curriculum through a creativity which is central to the ethos of the school. There are many opportunities given throughout the school day for pupils to quietly reflect about their learning and their feelings. Parents feel that the emphasis on Bible stories and Christian values helps pupils to understand the difference between right and wrong. It is evident that the school has a Church of England foundation through the many displays and symbols around the school. Children talk enthusiastically about

these and can explain their meaning and know that they celebrate the school's Christian distinctiveness.

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

Collective worship is central to the daily life of the school and is used to express, develop and celebrate openly the Christian character of the school. Children recognise that it is a special time in the day and describe it as 'a time when we get together to pray to God'. Acts of worship are both meaningful and enjoyable. Since the previous inspection, clear planning for worship is in place linking acts of worship to the school's Christian values, the Church year and also to current events such as the Olympic and Paralympic games and their associated values. The vicar and the curate contribute to the planning of collective worship and this further enhances the excellent links between church and school. Children talk about acts of worship that they especially remember and have found helpful in learning how to live their lives. The impact of collective worship on pupils is monitored and evaluated through consultation with pupils. The school has acted on their comments for example by holding worship in church once a week. Pupils appreciate this weekly visit to church with the vicar or the curate leading this special time. The parish church is also used once a term for a Communion service, so helping pupils to understand the special importance that this has for Christians. During these visits children meet members of the church community as well as clergy, so giving them opportunities to get to know local Christians. Children especially enjoy being involved in planning and leading worship, both in school and in the services that are held in church. Prayer plays an extremely important part in the life of the school. Children have opportunities to write prayers for the prayer tree in the reflective area, which are used during collective worship and they are aware that prayers are 'a way of talking to God'. A delightful opportunity is given during daily worship for pupils to pray their own prayers aloud. They take part confidently, linking their prayers with the theme. After hearing the Bible story of King Darius and the courage that Daniel showed, one child prayed, 'Help us to show courage when things are difficult. We are in your hands'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

Religious education (RE) has a high profile in school. Standards match or are higher than those in other subjects and pupils achieve well. This is evident in their written work and also in their responses during lessons. There is a broad and effective curriculum with Christianity as the main focus. Pupils enjoy the subject and appreciate learning about both Christianity and other major world faiths. This engenders a respect and appreciation for the beliefs of others. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and imaginative way of presenting lessons enable pupils to be challenged and reflective. The outstanding teaching that they receive enables them to apply what they learn to their everyday lives. This was evident in a well planned lesson during the inspection when older pupils were discussing the character of Joseph. Their thoughtful comments showed that they were able to empathise with the feelings of Joseph and his brothers. The teacher was highly effective in her use of questioning and so moved the children forward in their learning. All children listened with respect to the opinions of others and talked confidently about beliefs and how they help our thoughts and feelings. Planning is effective, ensuring that lessons are interactive and so enhance pupils' learning. This was evident in a lesson in Key Stage One when children were discussing dreams in relation to the story of Joseph. Their teacher, through various interactive activities such as blowing bubbles and making dream catchers, helped pupils to understand that God hears their prayers if they are made unhappy by bad dreams. The headteacher, who is

also the RE subject leader, gives RE a high profile through her excellent subject knowledge, her enthusiasm and leadership skills. Assessment is well embedded and thorough and used to raise standards and children's progress is carefully tracked. Assessment also includes elements of self assessment by pupils so that they know how well they are achieving and how they can improve their work.

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

The headteacher provides excellent leadership in promoting the school as one with a Church of England foundation. The headteacher, staff and governors share a clear vision to enhance further the school's distinctive Christian character. The impressive quality of the leadership and management derives from an excellent understanding of the difference that a church school can make to children's lives. Since the headteacher came to the school, a set of core values has been chosen by the whole school community, based on the 'Fruits of the Spirit'. A community has been created where Christian values are not only expressed but are lived out and are part of the school culture. The headteacher and governors, through on-going self evaluation, seek constantly to promote the school's Christian foundation further. Governors, who are very experienced, know their school well. As a result of visits to collective worship, RE lessons and 'Ethos Learning Walks', their monitoring and evaluation is excellent. Due to the commitment of the foundation governors and also members of the local church community, links with the parish church are very strong. The school's relationships with the church and its members are mutually beneficial. Governors are regularly involved in day to day activities such as hearing pupils read, helping on class visits and with extra curricular activities. For example on the day of the inspection, pre school children enjoyed a weekly Bible story told to them by a Foundation Governor. They listened carefully to the parable of 'The Lost Sheep' and added their own thoughtful contributions. Children regard the involvement with the church as an important way that they express their church school status. Parents like the 'family feel' of the school and the fact that the school is a church school because they recognise that Christian values are given a high profile. The school has strong links with the Diocese and governors and staff have benefited from training in various aspects of Church school distinctiveness and 'Living Values'. There is a great commitment by the school's leadership and management to ensure that the children of the school have every opportunity to grow and develop into knowledgeable and caring young people. The school lives out the words of its vision, providing a 'Christian voice in the education of children from Withington and the surrounding area'.