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THE CHURCH
IN WALES

Gwella Inspection of a Church in Wales School

St Nicholas Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled Primary School

St Nicholas, Vale of Glamorgan CF5 6SG

Diocese: Llandaff
Local authority: Vale of Glamorgan
Dates of inspection: 27 January – 1 February 2017
Date of last inspection: October 2011
School's unique reference number: 673/3037
Headteacher: Mrs E Harris
Inspector's name and number: Mrs Dilys Williams, NS Registration Number 511.

School context

St Nicholas school is in the village of St. Nicholas in the Vale of Glamorgan. The school consists of two buildings: the old village school built in the 1850s and a modern flat-roofed building. Alongside is a large playing field with a quiet garden, a climbing trail, planting beds, an outdoor stage and seating, a games pitch and a woodland area including a conservation area and pond. The school serves a mixed suburban/semi-rural area on the Vale's boundary, located a short distance from the Cardiff suburbs of Culverhouse Cross, Ely and Caerau, parts of which are amongst the most deprived areas in Wales. 83% of pupils travel from outside the county and 46% use the school minibus service. Pupils come from a range of backgrounds, from economically very disadvantaged to more prosperous homes. Many enter school with extremely low baseline skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing, numeracy and social skills. 27% are on the special needs register and 18% have free school meals.

The current roll is 125 out of a maximum capacity of 126. The school has an acting headteacher and a permanent deputy head, 5 teachers, 9 LSAs and 5 support staff. Classes are taught in Reception/Year 1, Years 1 & 2, Years 3 & 4, Years 5 & 6.

Established strengths

The strengths of the school are:

- its links with the priest, local church and community, which support all aspects of its work
- children's singing in collective worship, which is inspiring and appropriate to the style of worship
- the high standard of behaviour which makes an impact on children's learning and on their relationships with each other and all adults
- the inspiring Christian leadership of the acting headteacher and her deputy
- the support given by all adult members of the school community to the children in their care
- its Pupil Voice, through which children's views and ideas are listened to and acted upon
- the commitment of the Learning Support Assistants to the children and teaching staff.

Focus for development

The school has four areas in which to focus development:

- regular opportunities for the children to plan and deliver collective worship under the leadership and guidance of the worship group and local priest
- a robust tracking system for religious education (RE) so that staff, leaders and governors are clear about the standards and progress achieved by each child over a period of time
- improve the Faith Garden to reinforce the children's spiritual journey through the school
- more challenge in children's written work in RE, with more examples of extended writing and teacher comments linked to both literacy and RE

Prospects for improvement

The overall judgement of the school is **GOOD**. The school has **GOOD** prospects for improvement.

KQ1. The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is GOOD at meeting the needs of all learners.

The school's very distinctive Christian character encourages the positive relationships that exist between pupils and staff. Pupils get on well together and feel part of a welcoming and supportive Christian family: everyone including the caretaker, bus driver, administrator and dinner ladies has the best interest of the pupils at heart. A display in the entrance corridor shows the strong relationship the school fosters with the priest and local church. The parish priest is a regular visitor to the school. Pupils' enjoy his visits and know they can share worries or happy moments with him. He said, "Christian seeds are being sown in St Nicholas, they will be there for life".

Pupil behaviour is excellent and the school receives many positive comments about the way pupils conduct themselves when they are out of school on trips and educational visits. This high standard of behaviour is attributed to the Christian character and values endorsed by the school.

Strong emphasis is placed on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils, based on the school's Christian values. These values are well embedded and underpin all aspects of the daily life of the school. They are clearly displayed around the school and make a positive impact on the pupils. Reflection areas in the classrooms help pupils to reflect on the current value, and pupils take the opportunity to do this at various times during the day. Pupils are very aware of the needs of others and are pleased to talk about their involvement with charity work locally, nationally and internationally. They liked their 'Rags to Riches' project and were very proud that "we had to have a van because there were so many clothes".

The Christian character of the school makes a big impact on the achievement of the pupils. School performance data demonstrates the good progress which pupils who start from a low base line make as they move through each educational phase. The school encourages a good attitude to learning and promotes pupils' high self-esteem, through carefully considering the needs of the individual child.

RE has a high profile within the school and learners display a secure knowledge of many aspects of Christianity and other faiths. RE teaching is linked to the Christian values of the school and pupils are able to connect the values to the Bible stories they learn.

The inspector observed three lessons. The teaching was good to excellent, with many aspects of exceptional and stimulating lesson preparation. Careful questioning encouraged pupils to make mature and thoughtful responses. Teachers were supported by committed and effective LSAs.

The school uses the Diocesan scheme of work. Book scrutiny showed some effective teaching and learning is taking place, but there is insufficient focus on extended writing opportunities. Teacher comments should support the improvement in pupils' learning in both literacy and knowledge of the RE topic being taught. The school would benefit from making the scheme of work fit the needs of its pupils.

Some monitoring and tracking of pupil progress in RE is taking place, but it is at an early stage. It does not yet encourage teachers to challenge pupils by setting targets which should feed changes to the RE curriculum. A levelled portfolio of evidence enables staff to be consistent in their marking and evaluation of pupil work.

KQ2. The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is GOOD.

Collective worship (CW) reflects the school's Christian ethos and is at the heart of school life. Daily acts of worship reinforce the pupils' understanding of the importance of having a Christian faith. It helps them to have a growing knowledge of the Bible and how the Bible stories they learn enhance the way they live, in and out of school. Pupils are confident when they talk about CW and they have positive attitudes about the importance of prayer and reflection, demonstrating a developing spiritual maturity. They are happy to write their own prayers and pray spontaneously if requested to do so. One pupil said "collective worship is like a giant family and can be very peaceful".

Behaviour in CW is exemplary and the singing is a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy worship and love to sing and pray. One child said, "worship makes me feel calm" and another said, "I feel peaceful and that God is with me in worship". Pupils are confident about leading worship. A recently formed worship group is excited at being involved in planning and implementing different styles of worship.

The parish priest takes worship once a week and the pupils talk about his worship being “very special”. Once a term he takes Eucharist at the school and involves the older pupils in preparing for this service. Everyone enjoys these acts of worship and the priest feels they are learning about the traditions and practices of the Church in Wales without realising it. Worship takes place at the church for festivals and special occasions, and families make an effort to attend to support the children.

Class and Key Stage worship are part of the weekly plan for worship. Pupils enjoy the variety of worship on offer at the school and feel that worship in smaller groups is encouraging and comforting. The inspector enjoyed the two observed. In one, the younger children were generally well behaved and responded quietly to the lovely atmosphere the teacher created. The other was part of a lesson which focused on Sikhism, and the plenary became an act of reflective worship which focused on Holocaust Day. A candle was lit and a prayer written and read by one of the pupils was very moving. The class responded quietly and thoughtfully; pupils behaved with maturity.

The inspector observed three very different styles of whole school worship. In all three, pupils sang with reverence and when appropriate with enthusiasm. They were attentive and responded confidently when asked questions. The leadership of all three was very good with elements of excellence, and held the interest of all pupils. The worship led by the school caretaker was a highlight: his message was well thought out and planned. He is a real Christian witness to the children in all his actions, from keeping the school clean to reinforcing the gospel message.

Planning and evaluation of worship is in place. Evaluations written by staff and pupils are positive and include ideas for improvement which are taken into consideration when plans for the future are considered.

In the outside area of the school, the Faith Garden and reflection areas, if revamped, could give the school extra space to enhance worship, prayer and the exploration of other faiths.

KQ4. The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is GOOD.

The acting headteacher and her deputy have a strong personal Christian faith. Their Christian values permeate the life of the school. They are committed to keeping their values and ethos at the forefront of everything they do and they are ably supported by a team of dedicated teachers and support staff. Their vision is to run a church school where every child is encouraged to achieve their very best academically, spiritually and morally.

The local Church community is very supportive of the school and the parish priest commits time and energy to his work as a governor, RE adviser and worship leader

Governors are committed to supporting the Christian distinctiveness of the school and are well aware of their roles and responsibilities. They are linked to subject areas and they challenge and support the acting headteacher.

The acting headteacher has been in post for just over a year and it is clear that in that time she has made a big difference to the school. Everyone speaks highly of her commitment to moving the school forward. She is approachable and has an open door policy for parents, staff and pupils. The caretaker said, “she has a lovely attitude which encourages everyone who works for her to go the extra mile”.

The staff have worked together to develop a clear and consistent profile of leadership. There are good opportunities for professional development and a strong INSET programme to support staff needs.

Parents are happy with the school and feel it is “exceptionally supportive of the pupils”. The children talk about the Christian ethos of the school at home and also show awareness of other faiths: “you pray to your own God”, one child explained to a parent.

Pupil Voice is a strength of the school. Pupils are encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas for improving the school and feel their ideas are listened to.

The school meets the statutory requirement for collective acts of worship	YES
The school meets the statutory requirement for religious education	YES