



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Wantage Church of England Primary Academy

Newbury Street

Wantage

Oxon OX12 8DJ

Previous SIAMS grade: **Satisfactory**

Diocese: **Oxford**

Local authority: Vale Academy Trust

Dates of inspection: 30 January 2015

Date of last inspection: 16 March 2010

School's unique reference number: 9313246

Headteacher: Clare Morgan

Inspector's name and number: Jane Tuckett 668

School context

Wantage CE Primary Academy is a large school formed when two church schools combined in 2003 and moved into spacious, purpose-built accommodation. Its previous head resigned in 2013. It became a founder member of the Vale Academy Trust in October 2013, at a time when the school needed significant improvement. Acting and executive heads were appointed for the year 2013-2014 and began the process of school improvement. An experienced head, appointed for September 2014, has continued this by setting a clear vision and establishing rigorous monitoring. The school has 438 pupils mostly from white British backgrounds with average free school meals, special educational needs and pupil premium pupils.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Wantage CE Primary Academy as a Church of England school are good

- A dedicated and visionary head and deputy, effective and committed governing bodies and hardworking staff all contribute to creating a school with a strongly distinctive Christian ethos. Values are firmly and explicitly grounded in Biblical teaching and colour all of school life. It is clearly well on the way to becoming an outstanding church school.
- The focus on teaching and learning, monitoring and tracking, and the teachers' willingness to embrace change all contribute to significant improvements in achievement for all pupils, reflecting the school's Christian motto.
- Strong links with the local church broaden pupils' understanding of Anglican traditions.

Areas to improve

- Embed and then monitor the impact of developments in Christian distinctiveness and communicate them to all stakeholders through meetings, publications and the website in order to create a consistent and articulated message.
- Find strategies to broaden pupils' horizons in terms of religious, social and cultural diversity and their understanding of other world religions and Christianity as a global faith.
- Develop frameworks which allow pupils to be more involved in planning and leading collective worship thus enhancing spiritual development and their sense of ownership.

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

The school is clearly based on the Christian values of forgiveness, honesty, service and respect, which are overtly linked to Biblical texts. The values are visible throughout the school premises along with the new motto, 'Aiming for Excellence: Use the gifts God has given you'. This was chosen recently after consultation with all stakeholders and again is Biblically referenced wherever it appears, the slogan and values appearing increasingly on newsletters and documentation. There is a strong and effective focus on the needs of all individuals with a special emphasis on pupil premium and other vulnerable pupil and attendance and inclusion as aspects of the school's Christian distinctiveness. Behaviour and personal development are good with a strong focus on tolerance and respect for others. Behaviour issues and their impact on achievement are increasingly discussed with reference to the Christian values and slogan. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are all good as a result of sensitive teaching and the time staff spend with individuals. The school promotes self-esteem and confidence celebrating successes and achievements in weekly assemblies, linking with the positive 'Mindsets' approach which the school has adopted. Parents confirm that worship themes are now more integrated into everyday life and that the values are now mentioned regularly at home by pupils. One rather timid boy was recently spurred on by a focus on courage to take part in a swimming gala which he would not previously have dared to do. Pupils are encouraged to think deeply and to ask and answer challenging philosophical questions through 'I wonder' debates and displays. Pupils are proud of their school and keen to learn within the caring, tolerant and cooperative ethos. As a result relationships throughout the school community are positive and supportive and all pupils are given opportunities to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Attendance has improved significantly with support from the Home School Link Worker who develops and maintains relationships with vulnerable families. Religious education has a high profile within the school and is taught through the 'Discovery' scheme which uses an enquiry based approach. The subject leader is enthusiastic and progress in the subject is increasingly monitored. Standards are rising in line with those in other key subjects and in cases of the best marking pupils are given indications of how to improve their work in the future through next steps and subject specific targets. RE contributes significantly to pupils' understanding of Christian beliefs and the life and work of Jesus as well as their knowledge of other faiths and cultures. Staff are very aware of the need to foster their pupils' awareness of religious and cultural diversity given the school's mainly White British demographic while the underlying values of respect and tolerance ensure enthusiasm for learning about different faiths and customs. The school has very good links with the local church community through clergy and lay church members who know the school well and regularly attend or lead worship. The school logo links it with the local parish church, although pupils are not very clear about its significance. There are other secular links with the local community such as visiting residential care homes for the elderly. The school council gives pupils opportunities to air their opinions and take responsibility for aspects of school life. The school has good links with other schools in the trust, combining with them for events such as concerts and pupils benefit from specialist teaching at trust level in subjects such as physical education.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Daily collective worship is clearly central to school life and important in relating the values which shape behaviour, relationships and attitudes to Christian teaching. Pupils are enthusiastic about worship and its impact permeates school life. Parents comment that it is now more relevant to daily life, that they hear more about what takes place and that it is having a very positive effect. Worship always has a distinctively Christian framework with a liturgical greeting but also a plenary session which relates the content and the Biblical elements to life in the classroom, playground and at home. All teachers attend worship with their classes and teaching assistants also attend regularly, thus ensuring its impact on all in the community. Collective worship is efficiently coordinated by a committed and enthusiastic coordinator in

liaison with the head and the parish priest and it is led by different members of staff. Theological teaching occurs mainly through the medium of collective worship with a strong focus on Gospel stories, the life and person of Jesus and the nature of the Trinity. On the inspection day pupils in a Year 3 RE lesson were engaged in a challenging discussion about the Trinity through looking at the Rublev icon and a John Piper tapestry. The local parish priest leads worship regularly and some pupils join confirmation classes at Year 5. Termly school masses are held in the school or the parish church for pupils in Key Stage 2 to receive the Eucharist. Mass and services in the local church reflect key points in the liturgical year with children and their parents attending Harvest, the Christingle Service before Christmas and a range of nativity plays by younger pupils. 'Open the Book' worship is held every week; it is eagerly anticipated by all and much enjoyed. It is led by a committed team of lay church members who along with pupils re-enact a Biblical story. 'I wonder' questions, such as 'Where does courage come from?' are drawn from both collective worship and RE and further contribute to the sense of a very cohesive and holistic development of spiritual and moral awareness. Year 5 pupils visit Wantage Convent to prepare for the Easter Passion Play and find it a deeply spiritual and transformative experience. The children write the narrative of the play which is a very powerful and significant event in the spiritual life of the school and the wider community. The annual Prayer Space event in school is facilitated by the churches and Christians around Wantage and helps learners develop their capacity for wonder and prayer outside formal worship. Children are encouraged to write their own prayers for use during the school day and each class has a collection of prayers written or chosen by its members for use in different circumstances. A new prayer tree in the hall will be a focus for the school's collective prayer life. Each classroom has a cross and prayer corner but it seems that so far there has not been a great emphasis on more meditative reflection. The children's voice is listened to in shaping the development of worship although as yet there is limited analysis of its impact and pupils are not fully involved in planning or leading worship. This would bring a greater sense of ownership and involvement.

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

Wantage Primary Academy has seen very significant organisational changes since joining the Vale Academy Trust in early 2014. It has an almost completely new group of highly effective and committed governors and a further layer of management in the directors of the Academy Trust. All are committed to maintaining and furthering the distinctiveness of each school in the trust including the church schools. This is enshrined in the articles of the Academy Trust and distinctive Christian thinking is seen to be influencing policies of the Trust in areas such as sex education. Directors and governors are beginning to monitor the impact of the Christian distinctiveness on church schools within the trust and their broader communities. The directors and governors support the new head who has a strong Christian vision; together with her deputy they are transforming the school into a highly effective church school where all pupils fulfil their potential within a distinctive Christian ethos. Staff, who mentioned a feeling of being 'neglected' before these changes, have worked with great dedication to improve the standards of teaching and learning while maintaining and enhancing the Christian ethos. They are benefitting from professional training and opportunities for mentoring and consultation. Succession planning is also taking place at governor level and governors are benefitting from high quality training provided by the trust. All in leadership fully endorse and articulate the overtly Christian vision and motto, and documentation is beginning to include it. However, as yet the prospectus, parts of the website and policies are not fully consistent with the school's Christian values and new motto. The scheduled Vision Evening for parents should enable them to become more aware of the overarching vision shaping new developments and involved in consultation about future plans. They welcome the changes they have seen so far and value improved communication about school life. Links with the diocese at director and governor level are good, ensuring preservation and enhancement of the Christian ethos and providing specific and detailed guidance within the school. Links with the local church are strong and beneficial at many levels of school life, not least the very effective foundation governors.

