

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### Elsenham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

High Street

Elsenham

CM22 6DD

Previous SIAS grade: Outstanding

**Current inspection grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese:** Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex

Date of inspection: 21 June 2016

Date of last inspection: May 2011

School's unique reference number: 115129

Headteacher: Linda Reid

Inspector's name and number: Graham Lancaster 713

### School context

Elsenham is a growing primary school with 219 pupils on roll. It is located in the centre of the village and draws pupils from both the local community and surrounding area. The proportions of disadvantaged pupils and those from ethnic minorities are below average. A small proportion of families attend church outside of their involvement through the school. Since the last SIAS inspection there have been a considerable number of changes in teaching personnel but the headteacher has been in post throughout. The school is awaiting the arrival of a newly appointed deputy headteacher from September 2016.

### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Elsenham Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Christian values are clearly demonstrated by pupils and by staff. This is evident in relationships, pupils' tenacity in their approach to learning and in the respect they demonstrate for people from different faiths and cultures.
- Leaders, including governors, show the highest levels of commitment to providing challenging learning opportunities for all pupils whilst also building their character.
- Outstanding religious education (RE) across the whole age range strongly underpins the ethos of the school.

### Areas to improve

- To expand the role of 'The Worship Crew' and other stakeholders in the critical evaluation and further development of collective worship.
- To extend opportunities for pupils to engage in reflection and prayer to support their spiritual development.

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

The Christian distinctiveness of Elsenham school is clearly recognised and highly valued by parents, staff and pupils alike. The school's values are understood by pupils of all ages and are reinforced through collective worship and RE. Relevant links between the values and biblical teaching are made. As one pupil wrote, 'they (the school's Christian values) help us to become a better person – more like Jesus'. Staff model these values in their relationships with one another which are then reflected amongst pupils whose behaviour is exemplary. In keeping with the school's Christian and inclusive ethos there have been no permanent exclusions and attendance is above the national average. As one parent said, 'this is a really close community, bullying is unheard of'. Teaching and learning in RE is excellent. Teachers use imaginative and creative approaches which engage all pupils and encourage discussions and directly fosters pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. 'Learning about other religions is really important because it will help you to understand and get on with people who believe different things'. Pupils from different faith backgrounds are confident and enthusiastic in contributing to lessons within and beyond their own class. However, opportunities for pupils to explore and grow spiritually are not as strong. Well-established partnerships with two schools in Uganda provide a valuable multi-cultural dimension as well as providing a focus for practical and financial giving. As one pupil said 'they are just like us, with the same hopes and dreams'. The School Council contributes to identifying and planning additional charitable giving, expressing the school's Christian care and concern. As an outworking of the school's Christian vision governors and the leadership team have arranged a wide range of extra-curricular activities for pupils from Year 1 upwards at no cost to families. This includes "Seekers", a well-attended after school Bible study group. Elsenham has an explicit commitment to the development and progress of every pupil, including the most vulnerable. This has resulted in there being a smaller gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers than is the case nationally. Effective marking in RE and across the curriculum ensures that pupils are able to reflect on their learning and improve it. There has been a rising trend in achievement in recent years and pupils' RE workbooks provide clear evidence of progress against the school's priority of raising standards further in writing.

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

Pupils clearly enjoy and appreciate collective worship recognising that it makes an important contribution to school life. Pupils are well engaged by worship. For example, they sing as they enter the hall, pay close attention to all that is presented and are able to feedback the key messages as they leave. Worship led by the incumbent makes a particularly lasting impression on the pupils. His involvement is also rightly appreciated by staff, governors and parents. Opportunities for learning about the person of Jesus and exploring Christian ideas about God as the 'Holy Trinity' are woven into planning. Frequent reference is made to Bible stories which Key Stage 2 pupils look up in the Bibles which have been given to them by the school. Worship positively influences pupils' attitudes and behaviour and their SMSC development. As one pupil expressed it, 'it makes me think about the kind of person I want to be'. All pupils and staff attend worship. There is a sense of reverence during worship. The school has begun to introduce more Anglican traditions as part of worship. For example, using responsive gathering and sending sentences at the beginning and end of worship. However, these are not embedded into school practice. Prayers are led at least weekly in Collective Worship by

pupils. These are sometimes formally written but often more spontaneous and said from the heart by the pupil concerned. Although reflection and prayer are well established within collective worship there are some missed opportunities for the development of informal prayer spaces across the school. Worship in school is extended through regular worship held in the parish church. This is well attended by parents, so much so that on occasions they can't all get in, reflecting the strength of community and belonging. Pupil involvement in planning, leading and evaluating collective worship has developed significantly. This is as a direct impact of the 'Worship Crew', which was established during this academic year. This group of pupils contribute significantly to the relevance of worship through incorporating a wide range of ideas into their weekly sessions. This includes appropriately drawing on the school's Christian values and presenting dramas around them. They gather the views of their peers and have acted on suggestions. For example, through a request to broaden the repertoire of collective worship songs a Christian group, 'ISingPOP' were engaged to teach, prepare pupils for performances to parents and produce a school CD of new songs. This has impacted powerfully on the quality and range of worship provided through the school's programme. Although governor visits make reference to collective worship and parents provide informal feedback processes for gathering and acting on their evaluations are at an early stage of development.

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

The headteacher has maintained her commitment to the Christian foundations of the school through a period of significant changes in staffing. She has built a highly effective team who share her clear vision and aspirations for the school and its Christian ethos of service. The Christian values have been embraced by all new staff and are lived out through their relationships and underpinned in each classroom. Areas for development from the previous SIAS inspection have been fully addressed. Self-evaluation is comprehensive and accurate. All stakeholders contribute to this process and alterations are made in response to suggestions and challenge by governors. Members of the curriculum committee monitor progress against the RE and collective worship development plan. The RE subject leader has excellent subject knowledge and contagious enthusiasm for the subject. She has accurate understanding of the strengths in teaching and learning in RE across the school founded on her monitoring and the support she provides. She knows which teachers are particularly skilful in exploring gaps in pupil understanding and knowledge through effective questioning and draws on their expertise to support others. The impact is evident in the depth of independent enquiry and discussions pupils are engaged in – and in the challenging questions directed to the incumbent on his regular visits to classes. The partnership with the parish church is strong and foundation governors lead regular class visits to the church as part of the RE curriculum. High priority is given to the identification and professional development of future Church school leaders. This includes firm plans to develop an associate RE subject leader role from September 2016.