



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### Ditchingham Church of England Primary Academy

Rider Haggard Way  
Ditchingham  
Bungay  
NR35 2RE

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Good**

**Diocese: Norwich**

Local authority: N/A

Date of inspection: 20 April 2016

Date of last inspection: 12 July 2013

School's unique reference number: 140545

Headteacher: Heather Brand

Inspector's name and number: David Bunkell 815

#### School context

The current headteacher was seconded from Gillingham St Michael's Church of England Primary School (now Academy) in 2013 following a prolonged period of instability. Her position as substantive headteacher of both schools was later made permanent. The Ditchingham school became an academy in February 2014 under the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT), and currently has 94 pupils. The two schools remain separate entities, but in October 2015 formed the Kingfisher Partnership, with a joint governing body.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ditchingham Primary Academy as a Church of England school are good

- Many pupils show a well-developed sense of spirituality by their use of personal prayer.
- Collective worship is distinctively Christian, enabling pupils to appreciate and to benefit from theological concepts.
- Excellent local links with the church have a positive impact on many areas of school life.

#### Areas to improve

- Review the location and use of the memorial garden to increase its effectiveness as an area for quiet reflection or prayer.
- Develop the role of the Shining Group to empower them to lead collective worship.
- Regularly seek the views of pupils on the effectiveness of collective worship to maximise its relevance and its benefit for them.

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

In conversation, pupils explained the importance to them of attending a church school and their awareness of its Christian ethos. Those who had previously attended another school invariably compared Ditchingham favourably with their other experiences of schools. An atmosphere in which endurance and trust are encouraged enables enjoyment of school and therefore academic success. Following a prolonged period of turbulence for the school, the oldest pupils were able to explain how the school has improved rapidly in recent times. All pupils are nurtured, regardless of their ability or background, and pupils clearly respect and care for each other. Attendance is now good, and any lapses explored in a sympathetic manner. The Christian character of the school makes a good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils, whether Christian, of other faiths or of none. This is shown for example in their enjoyment of raising money for charities, often chosen by members of the school council. Pupils show a good sense of spiritual awareness, as seen in the prayers written by many pupils of all ages. One pupil had written a heartfelt prayer thanking God 'for my kind and helpful teacher'. Many pupils chose to be marked with ash at an Ash Wednesday service last term, and their understanding of the events of Maundy Thursday was reinforced by carrying out symbolic washing of other children's feet. Pupils had enjoyed a Lent challenge to carry out forty acts of kindness. Relationships between most pupils are good, and the majority behave well. Some are able to link their positive relationships and attitudes to Christian values, understanding concepts of reconciliation and forgiveness. For a few pupils, links between Christian values and day-to-day school life are not yet entirely embedded, leading to occasional lapses in behaviour which are speedily resolved in a compassionate way. Pupils understand that Christianity is a multicultural world faith and are aware of Christian communities elsewhere in the world, for example mentioning Christians in France at the time of Remembrance services. Pupils enjoy the opportunity in religious education (RE) lessons to learn about other faiths, and are adept at noticing similarities between different religions rather than differences. One pupil said 'I like RE, learning about people who changed the world'. RE is an important subject, making a substantial contribution to the Christian character of the school, with its often cross-curricular approach resulting in a wider impact across the curriculum, as a result of deeper appreciation of the role that faith can play in people's lives.

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

Collective Worship (CW) takes place daily in the centre of the morning, except on Fridays when it is in the afternoon and also attended by many parents in addition to all pupils and most staff. In conversation pupils said that they enjoy CW, and they are able to make some links between CW and their behaviour, for example in caring for each other and connecting their attitudes to Bible stories, such as the obedience and compassion of Noah. On the day of the inspection, CW was led by two of the local clergy. Church members lead CW weekly, and pupils particularly appreciate these sessions. CW is always distinctively Christian, starting with a liturgical greeting and ending with a dismissal. A pupil always lights a candle placed on a table with a cloth. Pupils understand the significance of the colour of the cloth, which matches the colour used in church for the relevant time in the church year. They knew that it had been purple during Lent and is now white for Easter. The current Christian value being used as the half-termly theme for CW is 'wisdom', and pupils could explain that this means understanding the consequences of our thoughts and actions. On this occasion a link was made between accepting everyday things that cannot be seen such as electricity or air, and the message of the Easter story, looking forward to Ascension and Pentecost. This helped pupils to understand the simple theology of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pupils were keen to volunteer for a practical task, but were not so responsive in wishing to answer questions. The Lord's Prayer was said from memory by all. Prayers are also said at lunch and classrooms have reflection areas where pupils often write and display their own prayers. Some pupils also like to use a memorial garden to reflect or to pray, but its location limits its effectiveness, and it is used by other pupils as a play area. The parish church is used for CW on special occasions, but its

distance from the school prevents more frequent use. Three pupils have recently formed a 'Shining Group'. They help with the practicalities of CW such as choosing hymns or songs and lighting the candle, and they have made written evaluations of some CW sessions, resulting in the use of more action songs. One of these was used and sung with great enthusiasm during the inspection. The group does not yet have a role in leading CW, and other pupils' views on the relevance of CW are not routinely sought. Governors and staff together plan CW. Governors frequently attend, and evaluate CW to help improve its future effectiveness.

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

Senior staff and the governors demonstrate clearly a commitment to the Christian ethos of the school, benefitting pupils by creating a compassionate environment to enable them to feel safe and to succeed. The distinct Christian character of the school is always apparent, through many reminders of the Biblical mission statement 'Let your light shine', including a large version painted on an outside wall. Relationships are generally very positive. The staff work well with one another and with their colleagues at their partner school. Self-evaluation is thorough and honest, compiled by successful teamwork between staff and governors. Effective strategic planning has been demonstrated by the way in which the two schools have grown closer, to the point when the formal partnership was ratified last Autumn, with a dedication service at each led by the diocesan bishop. Leaders are also considering carefully future challenges and inevitable changes. The circumstances of the headteacher taking an executive role at both schools has enabled others to take on additional leadership responsibilities, and preparing for future leadership of church schools is always made a priority. Partnerships with the local church are particularly strong. The rector chairs the Kingfisher Partnership ethos committee. The minutes of meetings show the important part that governors play in maintaining and developing the Christian ethos of the school and in preparing for church school inspections. One governor is another member of the benefice clergy, the chair of governors is an experienced churchwarden and the benefice part-time schools worker is also an associate governor. They all put their knowledge and skills to good use. The school and the church are at the heart of the local community, despite being some distance apart. One monthly Sunday service is held in the school rather than the church. A local shop recently made the school's friends' association its nominated charity to support, as recorded along with other school news in the village magazine. Further links with the diocese include pupil visits to the cathedral and some staff and governor training. In conversation with parents, they all appreciate the Christian values, in some cases choosing this school specifically for that reason. Parents appreciate the chance to be present at Friday CW in school, and the special services in the church, attending both in high numbers. Arrangements for RE and CW are in accordance with statutory requirements, with each being allocated a wide range of useful resources.

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