

# National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

## **Surrey Hills, Church of England (VA), Primary School**

School Lane

Westcott

Dorking

RH4 3QF

### **Diocese of Guildford**

Local authority: Surrey

Date of inspection: 10 & 11 January 2012

Date of last inspection: Not previously inspected

School's unique reference number: 135953

Headteacher: Mrs H Weaver

Inspector's name and number: Dr Glyn Willoughby (NSI 637)

### **School context**

Surrey Hills Church of England Primary, with 222 children, opened as a new school on two sites in September 2010 following the amalgamation of Westcott and Abinger Common schools. Serving the surrounding rural communities of Abinger Common and Westcott, children come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The vast majority are of white British heritage and the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Surrey Hills, Church of England (VA), Primary School as a Church of England school are good**

Surrey Hills has a strong Christian ethos and is already recognised by parents and children as a purposeful and harmonious Christian community which is very much at the heart of church and village life. The commitment and care shown by the headteacher and her staff ensure children thrive personally and academically and develop into compassionate and responsible young people.

### **Established strengths**

- The strong and effective leadership of the headteacher, chair of governors and local clergy in forming a united and harmonious Christian community.
- The high quality of care and encouragement shown by staff to ensure the pastoral and academic needs of each child are met.
- The variety of ways in which spiritual development is enhanced.

### **Focus for development**

- Explore how core values underpin the promotion of spirituality across all areas of the school.
- Embed strategies to strengthen assessment in RE in order to assess both attainment targets fully, inform planning and involve children.
- Increase the formal involvement of governors in the systematic self-evaluation of the school as a church school.

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

A distinctive Christian ethos at the heart of the school enables children to develop their own sense of values, and promotes their spiritual growth and development. The headteacher, governors and staff demonstrated trust and openness in the detailed planning of the new school in utilising the partnership with local churches and fully engaging with families to listen to, and take on board, ideas and concerns. Families have therefore felt supported and involved and have developed a sense of pride in their school as they have joined together in a cohesive and united community. As a result, relationships between staff, parents and children, based upon Christian values of trust and respect, are excellent and, in turn, children show a high level of care and respect for each other as confirmed by one child who explained: 'I have lots of kind friends here'.

The headteacher and her staff are excellent role models and through their commitment and encouragement, children gain confidence and are able to flourish personally and academically.

Children gain an understanding of their role in local and global communities through having the opportunity to become involved in a wide range of activities, such as sport, gardening and drama workshops, as well as initiatives to support others, such as school council and fund raising for charities. Music is very important in the life of the school and enhances spiritual development, with many opportunities for singing with the choir, performing in community concerts, or playing steel pans or the violin.

The external school environment and displays around school also contribute to spiritual development, for example with the quiet areas in the school grounds and the children's own personal reflection through the display of their prayers. The school plans to explore in greater depth how core values underpin the promotion of spirituality across all areas of the school.

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

Worship, referred to as assembly, is recognised by the children as central in the life of the school and they appreciate its importance and relevance to their own lives. In the assembly observed, led by the deputy headteacher and with children participating, they were fully engaged and enjoyed listening to the story that was portrayed in a lively way of how Gideon became the unlikely hero as he gained courage from God to defeat the Midianites. The opportunity for quiet reflection as their peers read prayers they had written acted as a transition time to listen and be alone with their thoughts. Throughout there was a high level of participation and, with effective use of calming music and joyful singing, made an evident contribution to their spiritual growth. All staff were in attendance and this sends a clear message to children about the importance of the occasion.

Children spoken to described the importance of prayer; one child explained how it 'helps me to think about other people' and another was able to 'pray for ill families to get better'. They also explained the importance of assembly to them and showed their concern for the care of others as they spoke of how they like learning about other children's achievements in the celebration assemblies and also stories of 'how Jesus and God have helped people'.

There are good links between the provision in assembly and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) as well as Religious Education (RE). The planning and record keeping are carefully organised and the evaluation that involves the children's views as well as those of staff and governors, shapes future planning and improvement. The half-termly themes follow a Christian value and develop the children's understanding of the Anglican calendar, traditions and practice. As a result, worship becomes a central focus enabling them to gain a clearer understanding of the school's core values. This understanding is enriched through church visits to celebrate festivals and also as a result of regular visits from local clergy to take assemblies and assist with relevant areas of the curriculum.

The school meets the statutory requirements for collective worship.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good**

Standards achieved are good, above the national average, and compare favourably with those achieved in other core subjects. Progress and achievement are also good.

The quality of teaching seen during the inspection was good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and a clear understanding of how well children are progressing, and shape tasks accordingly. Lessons were well prepared and teaching focused on learning outcomes that were understood. In a lesson considering what God may be like, children demonstrated their spiritual growth as they thoughtfully explored ideas, through drawing and discussion, of how pictures and words convey meaning. They enjoyed the active learning as they were motivated and engaged by the lively and challenging style of teaching.

Good progress was also seen in another lesson observed that considered the story of Solomon and how wisdom can be linked to the way we live our lives. Children developed spiritually and morally as they explored ideas together and reflected on each others responses arising from the story. The effectiveness of RE in promoting the school's distinctive values was demonstrated as children spoke confidently and listened carefully to the views of others.

The subject is co-ordinated by the headteacher who monitors very effectively and works closely with staff to complete the scheme of work and ensure that both Attainment Target 1, 'learning about religion', as well as Attainment Target 2, 'learning from religion', are fully assessed, involve children, and inform planning. The skills children develop in RE enhances the opportunities for spiritual and moral development in other subjects. Recognising this, the co-ordinator is placing increasing emphasis upon the teaching of Attainment Target 2 through linking themes with other subjects.

Children gain an understanding of religious and cultural diversity, locally and globally, as they explore traditions and cultures, for example Hinduism, through a creative style of learning including art and music. As a result they also develop a compassionate respect for other people's beliefs and rituals.

The school meets the statutory requirement for RE.

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

One of the strongest features of the school is the unity with which all members of the school community support the vision and development of the school as a church school. Together with the governing body and local clergy, the headteacher has played a key role in developing this unity. Supported by enthusiastic staff, her collaborative and caring leadership is developing a culture of trust and openness in which everyone can feel valued. Careful planning and good communication in a positive, open style has resulted in a community that has been actively looking forward to the development of 'their' new school.

Able led by the chair, governors make an excellent contribution to the work and direction of the school and are rightly proud of the way it is developing. Whilst already having a clear overview of the school's growing strengths they plan to extend their monitoring programme in order to become fully involved in the process of self-evaluation as a church school.

Staff are well cared for and, with governors, have good opportunities to develop professionally, personally and spiritually. There is strong and visible support from the diocese.

There are extremely close links with the congregations of local churches and the school is very much at the heart of the local community. Leadership of the school is strengthened significantly because it is rooted in partnership with the local churches.

Parents spoken to were very supportive and explained how they felt encouraged to become involved in the life of the school. They appreciated the 'friendly and approachable' headteacher and her staff and referred to the 'caring, valuing ethos of the school'. A parent illustrated this as she described the school as 'warm and welcoming' where there is 'lots of laughter from children and staff'. The Parent Teacher Association (FASH) is extremely active and plays a significant role in enhancing the welcoming community ethos as parents and members of the wider community attend various events.

The excellent progress made over a relatively short time provides a strong indication that the school has very good capacity to continue to grow as a highly distinctive and effective Church school.