

Debden Church of England Primary School

Debden
Saffron Walden
Essex
CB11 3 LE

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex

Date of inspection: 22nd November 2012

Date of last inspection: 2nd October 2008

School's unique reference number: 115128

Headteacher: Mrs Julie Gibbons

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Rosemary Privett 321

School context

Debden is a small school of 6 classes serving local villages. Around 50% of pupils come from the nearby Carver barracks. This means that there is a high level of pupil mobility due to army personnel postings. Some pupils are from minority ethnic background. The oldest part of the school is a listed building. This has been extended to provide modern and imaginative teaching spaces.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Debden as a Church of England school are outstanding

This is a distinctively Christian school which sits at the very heart of its local community. It remains outstanding because of strong leadership that is never complacent and ensures that the school continues to develop and provide a rich Christian environment for all its pupils. As a result, pupils develop into confident and compassionate individuals, equipped to play a leading role in society.

Established strengths

- The outstanding pastoral care given to pupils, enabling all to flourish spiritually as well as morally and socially.
- The strong leadership at all levels
- The links between the school, the church and the wider community which allows the school's distinctive Christian vision to be shared widely.

Focus for development

- Develop opportunities for pupils to both plan and lead significant aspects of daily collective worship.

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

The inspiring and committed leadership of the headteacher is key to the success of Debden school. She promotes a strong Christian vision. All stakeholders are supportive of this, being able to articulate it with meaning and conviction. This enables Christian values to permeate all aspects of school life. An outstanding feature of the school is the way in which pupils are at the heart of the development of its distinctive Christian character. This involvement not only enables them to mature into articulate and caring individuals, but also means that they have a clear understanding of what it means to be a Christian school. A recent review of the school's core values was led by the school council who worked with class councils and staff to agree on the Christian values they thought should be central to the life of the school. The overarching core value, 'God's love, and his love for us,' is fully owned by pupils. They are keen to articulate how they live out this value.' As one child said, 'We know God loves us so we show that love to others, like the new children who join our school.' Parents were unanimous in their praise of the high quality pastoral care given to all pupils and their families, particularly at times of ill health or bereavement. They saw this as a way in which Christian service was being lived out by staff. There is a very strong commitment to the spiritual development of pupils. This is demonstrated in the way it creates special time and space for prayer and personal reflection. This is particularly strong in the opportunities provided within the curriculum, including RE, and in the 'Ignite' after school club run by a member of staff. Recorded work shows that all pupils are given opportunities to reflect on

what they have learned and what it means for them personally. They are able to respond at a very mature level. After a visit to the church a pupil wrote, 'I thought it was a special place with sweet holy sounds and I could say a quiet thank you to God.' Creative approaches in Foundation Stage enable even the youngest pupils to express their feelings about their learning. After recent work on Remembrance Day a pupil said, 'I think a war horse would feel very scared.' Interactive classroom displays, such as 'friendship ladybirds' and a 'kindness tree' give pupils time to reflect on how the school values are lived out in the day to day life of the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is a rich and inspiring element of school life for all members of the community. Since the last inspection, developments have been made to put in place a well planned worship cycle with an emphasis on explicit Christian values, pupil participation and engagement. Themes planned are meaningful to the children and enable all to learn from what is experienced. Singing and music are of the highest quality. Two part singing, real attention to the words and instrumental playing add to the special atmosphere that is created and strongly supports children's spiritual development. Worship also makes a significant contribution to pupil's understanding of aspects of the Anglican tradition. Through her regular involvement in the worshipping life of the school, the Vicar says that pupils seek out opportunities to talk with her about aspects of worship that puzzle them. She said, 'Two girls asked me how I bless water. I did an assembly on baptism two months ago but clearly something more recent had triggered a deep question.' Prayer and reflection are elements that spill out into school life. Pupils are keen to share the importance of their class prayer books and how prayer helps them. One pupil said, 'I know there is always someone there who will listen to me'. Another said, 'It makes me confident to tackle difficult things.' The importance of prayer is also seen in the way that prayers from the pupil prayer box are regularly included in the church's cycle of prayer. Pupils are central to the evaluation of worship and led a recent review. Valuable feedback from this review has already led to changes. A child said, 'We now have more chance to say our own prayers not just read ones from a book.' Although there are times in the year when the Ignite club plan and lead acts of worship in church, such as the Christingle service, the school has accurately identified the need to provide more opportunities for pupils to plan and lead acts of daily collective worship in school.

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

This is still an outstanding school which has continued to move forward since the last inspection. The sharply focused leadership of the headteacher and her senior staff is at the core of the school's effectiveness and their work greatly enhances its Christian character along with the members of the governing body, they demonstrate a determination for the continued development of the school as a Church school. This means that the school never stands still and issues from the last inspection have been successfully addressed. A focus for development from the last inspection was the training of governors on church school issues. Training sessions, including those led by the Diocesan School's Advisor, have enabled governors to understand their role in sharing the school's vision and monitoring and evaluating its distinctiveness. The impact of this training is seen in the way they now undertake monitoring visits. The monitoring form used, now has a space for governors to share how the school's Christian character and values are embedded in any activity they are monitoring. The needs of the pupils sit at the heart of all the school's planning and decision making. A particularly strong example of this is the way in which pupils have been given the opportunity to take the lead in recent reviews of the school's values and collective worship and move practice on. The school has very effective performance management strategies in place to sustain quality leadership into the future. All staff now have specific targets linked to the development of the school as a church school and training is allocated in line with these. Leaders at all levels help to maintain and develop mutually supportive links between the school, the church and the wider community. These links enable the school's vision to be shared widely. A particularly strong example is the involvement of the school in village celebrations, such as Remembrance Day, where school and village worked together to enable the commemoration to be a very meaningful experience for pupils.