School context

This is a smaller than average primary school with almost all children of White British heritage. The proportion entitled to free school meals is low compared to national norms. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also below average. The school has gained a number of accreditations including the Inclusion Quality Mark and Artsmark gold awards. Since the previous inspection there have been significant staff changes in Key Stage 1 and a new deputy headteacher was appointed in May 2011.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Willaston School as a Church of England school are good

The school's Christian foundation is very clear in the way children and staff interact very well with each other. Children develop as individuals in a safe, welcoming and caring environment. Links with the church and local community are exceptionally strong. As a result of high quality provision and some elements of outstanding practice pupils make very good progress in their personal lives and in their spiritual development.

Established strengths

- The Christian vision and inspiring leadership of the headteacher and senior management team supported well by staff and governors
- The school's strong links with the church and local community
- The high quality of care, guidance and support for all children and their families
- High standards of provision and outcome for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Focus for development

- Include all partners in enhancing the quality and evaluation of collective worship
- Embrace a wider mix of denominations and cultures within worship

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

The Christian ethos of the school has a positive impact on children's personal development. Parents speak openly about the school being 'a very happy family school'. All children know they are valued and special; they are confident, caring and respectful and their behaviour is exemplary. A member of the school council commented, 'we are safe because teachers take good care of us'. The atmosphere created in school is warm and secure. Many opportunities provided in and beyond the curriculum enable individuals to successfully assume responsibility and develop their potential. The school council plays an important part in evaluating various options. They display a growing maturity and initiate numerous fund raising ventures supporting local, national and international organisations. Community cohesion within the local area is very firmly embedded within the life of the school; however
links with communities which include a wider multicultural dimension are at an early stage of development. The successful efforts to encourage and develop openness, honesty and a constant willingness to listen to each other promote firm and lasting personal relationships. Pastoral care is outstanding and reflects the aspirations of staff to provide children with the confidence and capacity to become happy and well rounded members of society. The outdoor environment is used well to encourage spiritual development and the introduction of Forest School sessions is innovative. This initiative allows children regular opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem through ‘hands on’ learning experiences in a natural environment. As a result children appreciate the diversity of God’s world within an integrated and exciting curriculum. Children’s spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is very strong and supported by the provision of an exceptionally wide range of extra curricular activities. Many areas of the school encourage spiritual development with interactive displays and attractive banners some of which feature Biblical themes.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Children are very positive and value the experience worship offers. ‘It’s important,’ and ‘we really like the singing’, are typical comments. Pupils clearly enjoy coming together as one large family and share a variety of well-planned activities. There is an atmosphere of reverence with children making appropriate responses in their prayers. Music is clearly enjoyed throughout the school and children are particularly enthusiastic in their singing. Good links are made to the Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) themes. The pattern of worship provides a good balance of approaches developing pupils’ awareness of the different ways they can come to God. The vicar is pivotal in his role within the school, ‘he teaches us about God’. He executes his duties with sincerity and honesty, and as a result there are warm and cordial relationships with the church. A member of a local Christian organisation occasionally leads worship, but visitors representing the wider denominational communities are not yet firmly established. Children listen exceptionally well and demonstrated empathy for others when prayers were offered for those less fortunate than themselves. The sincerity and relevance of worship times ensure that both pupils and staff gain inspiration, are encouraged to grow spiritually and are personally affirmed. Celebrations at major festivals are held in church for the whole school community. These services have a strong impact on the children, giving them a growing understanding of Anglican tradition and practice. Worship is clearly central to the life of the school and underpins its Christian ethos. The previous denominational inspection made recommendation that strategies should be developed to plan, monitor and evaluate the impact of collective worship. Whilst some effective planning is now in place the monitoring and evaluation of worship is at an initial stage of development.

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

The headteacher and foundation governors promote a distinctive Christian vision for the school with enthusiasm and understanding. Governors are proactive and supportive, yet challenging. The magnitude and achievement of the whole staff team, teaching and non-teaching in creating a unified Christian family cannot be overstated. Staff and governors are now in a very strong position to enrich the school even further. Parents are encouraged to be partners in their child’s education and the monthly surgeries promoted jointly by governors and the headteacher gives parents opportunity to discuss any areas of concern. The worship and Religious Education (RE) co-ordinators are keen and enthusiastic and have attended some relevant in-service training which, alongside delegation of responsibilities and empowerment helps to encourage potential church school leaders. As a result of careful planning and accurate self-evaluation the school has a good understanding of its future needs as a church school community. Governors and members of the senior leadership team talk openly about the school’s many strengths and areas identified for development are rigorously addressed. Parents speak highly of the school, with many families making a conscious decision to send their children to Willaston because they wish them to experience the Christian values it promotes. Typical comments from parents included, ‘This school is a warm, welcoming village school with happy and contented children who are keen to learn’ and ‘The school recognises children’s needs and encourages learning within a stimulating environment’.

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