



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### South Molton United CofE VA Junior School

North Road, South Molton, EX36 3GN

**Diocese:** Exeter

Local authority: Devon

Dates of inspection: 11 February 2015

Date of last inspection: 11 February 2010

School's unique reference number: 113454

Headteacher (acting): Kevin O'Donnell

Inspector's name and number: Linda Rudge, 791

#### School context

South Molton United is a smaller than average junior school with 148 pupils who mostly come from the town. The majority of pupils are from a white British heritage. The number of children with learning difficulties is above the national average. Pupil premium funding is higher than average. A high proportion of the school's population is mobile, with pupils frequently joining the school at all ages. The school is in a period of transition with seven new teaching and support staff since September 2014, and a proposed new move to a new building. The acting headteacher was previously the senior teacher.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of South Molton Junior school are good

- The commitment of all staff to all pupils' well-being and academic development improves pupils' learning capacity.
- The school's distinctive Christian values, demonstrated in the inclusive and caring relationships across the school community, enhance pupils' personal development.
- Renewed historic links with the local church create positive and mutually beneficial partnerships for all stakeholders.

#### Areas to improve

- The depth of shared understanding of core Christian values across the whole community
- The key elements of worship to improve pupils understanding of Anglican doctrine and liturgy
- Opportunities for prayer and reflection
- Planned opportunities for spiritual development in religious education (RE) and in other areas of the curriculum

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

South Molton United Junior School emphasises key Christian values such as love, forgiveness and responsibility. These values are encapsulated in its published mission statement and in school policies such as those on admissions, curriculum and behaviour. The values are known and understood by most

members of the school community. However, leaders and teachers recognise that the school needs to review the number of values, and their meaning to all members of the school. The impact of the school's values is visible through the excellent behaviour of pupils and the welcoming ethos of the community as a whole. The school's Christian character has a high profile in a way that is appropriate for the local community. Issues of attendance and exclusion, which are currently low in frequency, are shaped by strong values of inclusion and forgiveness. The proportion of pupils who enter or leave the school at other than normal transition times is significantly above average, and the proportion of pupils attracting pupil premium or with special educational needs is also above average. The school ensures that these pupils and their families are welcomed and nurtured through the effective use of specific funding, including extra tuition for literacy before school hours. The school's Christian ethos underpins the academic and personal development of all pupils. For example, some pupils know that by applying the Christian value of 'love' in the spirit of co-operation and teamwork they can all improve rapidly in terms of their own achievements. Standards of attainment are in line with expectations, especially in terms of the rapid progress many pupils make from entry at year 3. Pupils say that they feel *'safe and happy'* in the school family and that the atmosphere *'helps us to learn well'*. Charities such as the Amigos scheme are supported wholeheartedly by pupils and staff, for example through the sponsoring of a Ugandan schoolgirl. Local Harvest and other festivals bring parents, pupils, the staff, the local church and the wider community together in acts of service to others. RE makes a significant contribution to the distinctive curriculum of the school. Many pupils of all ages recognise the importance of religious education and belief in their lives. Some pupils can explain why, saying that RE helps their learning because it enables them to think.

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

Collective worship is a central part of school life. Many people in the school can talk about how important the acts of worship are important to them in their lives. These opportunities provided by the school are, for the majority, the only time they experience any worship. Some pupils are clear about the value of these worship times in *'helping us to think about how to live.'* The school meets for worship in the hall, and prayers are also said before lunch. Worship is ecumenical, bringing many different Christian traditions and leaders together, and it is always inclusive. The majority of acts of worship have a strong Christian focus, especially on the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ. Biblical references are displayed around the school to help pupils learn and understand the links between Bible stories and the school's values. This is effective as pupils of all ages can explain these links. Parents and teachers comment on the positive relationship with the parish church and with other churches in the town, and on the work of the church team members who often lead school worship. Worship plans, evaluations by members of the community including the Pupil Ethos Group, and the worship observed during the inspection, show that pupils of all faiths and none all feel able to participate and to respond in different ways. Pupils participate willingly and they take lead roles by invitation of the worship leaders and teachers, often contributing to lively and engaging storytelling. In a worship session observed during the inspection, pupils responded well to the re-enactment of the story in a parable, and one pupil took a leading role with the church team. There is a focus on the cycle and festivals of the Church's year, and pupils can talk accurately and confidently about different colours and events associated with each festival. Some elements of Anglican tradition and practice are part of worship in school, and in visits to the local church. However, pupils' understanding of these key elements of Anglican practice is under-developed for their ages and abilities. Prayer and reflection in other areas of the school, such as classrooms, is gradually becoming a feature of daily school life as a way of promoting spiritual development.

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

Teaching and learning in RE is successfully modelled and monitored by the subject leader. The subject is also supported through links with the Diocesan advisory team and other teaching resources available on line. The majority of teaching and learning in RE is good, and some of it is outstanding. The curriculum has been developed recently to include an enquiry-based approach, and assessment procedures (a Rainbow chart) have been successfully developed since the last inspection. This means that pupils have an increasing awareness of how to make progress in RE. This awareness has yet to be embedded across the school in all classes and for all pupils. Pupils make good progress in RE given their starting points, and standards for the majority are at least in line with national expectations, and for some pupils they are often

higher. There are some outstanding examples of affective and accurate extended writing in RE books, for example on the meaning of Easter, and on the meaning of everlasting life. Pupils demonstrate secure subject knowledge, often through innovative learning styles. An exercise during the inspection in which year 3 and 4 pupils demonstrated their knowledge of the contents of the books of the Bible through physical activity, was particularly good. The same pupils then showed how they could look up Jesus' teaching on how to pray in the Gospels. A lesson on the parable of the servants in the vineyard showed that older pupils were able to transfer their skills of discussion, debate and role play into a context of belief. All staff teach RE, with the subject leader taking classes for extended periods over the time that pupils are in this junior school. This means that pupils' progress in RE is increasingly understood by all staff which is why progress is now good. Pupils also see that the subject is valued by all and that it is a core subject. The teaching also creates enthusiastic and accurate engagement with other faiths such as Judaism, Islam and Hinduism. The subject leader has a high level of subject expertise, and shares this with school leaders and governors. The subject leader also co-ordinates worship, and the school's self-evaluation of its distinctiveness as a Church school. This helps the school to understand RE's particular contribution to its ethos and character.

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

Staffing levels in the school and in the local parish church have been through a period of significant change since the last inspection in 2010. The school's leaders demonstrate and describe their shared understanding of the school's Christian ethos through highly effective role modelling, and through their care for the personal and academic progress of every pupil. The arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. The staff and governors have a good understanding of the school's performance and distinctiveness. This has been based on improving self-evaluation processes, and the development of pupil and adult Ethos Groups. All the staff members, through the leading example of the new acting headteacher and well-established governors, are committed to the school's foundation and to the retention of its character. The school's self-evaluation of Christian distinctiveness has led to some effective strategies for improvement. For example, there are now more frequent curriculum opportunities to improve the pupils' awareness of diversity within and across faiths. However, not all staff in the school are appropriately involved in development as leaders and teachers in church school settings. For example, RE training for all teaching and support staff is not yet fully established. Other subject leaders have not yet highlighted all their subjects' contributions to the overall ethos of the school. However, the introduction of the 'Windows, Mirrors and Doors' approach to learning has stimulated pupils' capacity to raise and consider answers to questions of meaning and purpose. Most parents have sent all of their children to the school and some have connections with the school through several generations of attendance. All, including very new families, feel welcomed and secure even if they do not all share the school's religious character. Church links and the town's appreciation for the pupils' service and presence in civic events and festivals, such as local coffee mornings and the flower festival, are well-documented. Leaders of the school work hard to keep these links relevant and effective.

SIAMS report February 2015 South Molton United CEVA Junior School