



**Aston St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
School Lane, Aston, Stevenage SG2 7HA**

LEA:	Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection:	15 th December 2006
Previous S23 Inspection:	18-21 st June 2001
URN:	117421
Headteacher:	Philip Gray
SIAS Inspector:	Alan Thornsby NSIN 137

School context

Aston St Mary's Church of England School is a small school serving the village of Aston and the local rural area and admits a number of children from Stevenage. The vast majority of children are white British and come from a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. The current headteacher was appointed temporarily to the post in June 2006 and permanently in September 2006.

Overall distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a Church of England school

Aston St Mary's School is a satisfactory school, with many distinctive elements, that has the drive and dedication to continue to rapidly and securely improve. This is because of the impact of the infectious commitment of the newly appointed headteacher on the school.

Established strengths

- Shared passion of headteacher and staff to rejuvenate the Christian foundation of the school.
- Support of staff and Governing Body to provide the best quality learning environment for children.
- Quality of behaviour and personal development of the pupils.

Focus for development

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to be involved in leading worship
- Improve standards in RE through consistency and continuity across year groups and establishing agreed assessment procedures.
- Ensure pupils understand Christian basis of the school ethos and its contribution to their lives.

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

This is because of the commitment of the leadership team who are successfully reasserting the school's identity as a church school. The recently appointed headteacher has an infectious passion for the improvement of the school that has permeated the whole school body. Transformation meetings between the governing body and staff have created a unity of vision as well as raising morale and have enabled the school to be secure in its improvement at a brisk pace. Recently reviewed policies thus reflect Christian values. Pupils have explored what is good about their school, as well as new ideas about their school, but as yet can only make tentative links between these and Christian values. Pupils are however very aware of the strength and quality of the relationships in school that is encompassed by the motto 'Small in size, big in love.' There is a well established family ethos in the school that is reflected in the excellent behaviour of pupils who are confident and articulate in explaining aspects of their school; for example the friendship stop and the time out bench which is regarded as a place to calm down when pupils are over excited, rather than badly behaved. Pupils' academic and personal achievement is recognised and celebrated by the use of stickers, certificated and letters home, as well as in Friday Assembly. There are good cross-curricular opportunities for social, moral, spiritual and cultural development that give pupils a good awareness of other religions. There is a distinctive spiritual environment created by the use of affirmation posters and achievement displays. There is a creative approach to the use of crosses throughout school. Displays throughout school such as the St Mary's acrostic make the best use of existing space to reflect a caring environment.

The impact of the worshipping experience provided by the school is satisfactory.

Collective worship has a high profile in school, celebrating the coming together of the whole school to share a special time. Themes are planned to be appropriate to pupils and follow the diocesan guidelines. The weekly theme is introduced by the vicar to reinforce links between school and church. The vicar has a high profile in school and provides an important link between church and school, using some common hymns and Christian greetings. Pupils show they enjoy worship by the way they enter the hall and wait quietly. They sing enthusiastically. Pupils are responsible for the organisation of the hall for worship. They occasionally write and share prayers and the recorder group is enjoyed by all. They can empathise with stories and teaching in worship, especially when links are obvious such as 'Mercy Ships' after which they respond with committed fund raising. They are not yet able, however, to make immediate links between the teaching of Jesus and its impact on making moral decisions in their own lives.

The effectiveness of religious education is satisfactory.

The new leadership and staff raised the profile of Religious Education in September 2006 to reflect its role as a vehicle for moral and spiritual development of the whole school. The coordinator is enthusiastic in her role and has carried out monitoring and evaluation of planning. There has also been a trial of material to assess the levels of pupil knowledge. There is underachievement because pupils are not consistently attaining standards of which they are capable. The standard of written work does not yet reflect the standards of oral work because there is no clear progression of work across age groups, similar tasks being seen in Y2 and Y6. Pupils already enjoy learning about and learning from religion because it is made relevant to their lives by good innovative teaching such as role play, hot seating and talk buddies, and the knowledge and commitment of the staff. The whole school RE day 'Follow the Star' shows the commitment of the whole staff to the development of pupil

knowledge and spiritual awareness. Groups of mixed age children visited scenes from the Nativity story where staff in costume recounted their role and answered questions. Lessons are equally well planned and organised. In Key stage One a class explored what makes a precious gift after listening to a child's version of the Nativity story. The children showed great empathy in their responses that were followed by a spontaneous prayer. In Key Stage two pupils posed relevant and pertinent questions to a homeless person, who although well known to all, was fully realistic and accepted in her role. This is an example of the effective use of teaching assistants in school. Although some pupils need prompts to accurately recount Bible stories, this is improving; a child in the role-play Nativity scene in reception recording 'He is a good King. He will be a good King for all of us.'

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

The newly appointed headteacher and assistant head have a deep commitment to redevelop the school and are fully aware of where the school should be and the steps needed to achieve their goal. Communication throughout the school has improved and has given a common understanding of and commitment to school improvement by the whole community. Religious education, Collective worship and prayer are seen as pivotal to the school and underpin the focus for development. The governing body is active in its support and transformation meetings have ensured a common vision and commitment of staff and governors. Self-assessment is accurate and has already resulted in action. Adults in school provide role models for pupils to mirror in their relationships. The friendly, caring atmosphere is a result of this strength of relationships. The pupils have a voice in school through the school council, and the parents council provides new parents with an opportunity to find information about the school from other parents.. The school is used by the church for social events such as the Harvest Supper. The vicar and church are used as teaching resources for RE, art and history as well as the church being used for festival services. The school makes a contribution to Education Sunday celebrations in church. The school enjoys a good local reputation and has the support of an active PTA.