

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Barkway Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

High Street, Barkway, Royston SG8 8EF

Diocese: St Albans

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Local Authority: | Hertfordshire |
| Dates of inspection: | 13 th June 2012 |
| Date of last inspection: | 14 th May 2009 |
| School's unique reference number: | 117422 |
| Headteacher: | Margaret Davies-McKeon |
| Inspector's name and number: | Alan Thornsby NSIN 137 |

School context

Barkway is a small school where the majority of pupils are from White-British backgrounds. The proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are much smaller than average. The headteacher has been acting headteacher since January 2011 and appointed acting executive headteacher of a collaborative arrangement with Barley First School in January 2012.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Barkway First as a Church of England school are good.

The collaboration with Barley school has enabled Barkway to review and restate its Christian foundation. The 'family feel' and impact of its values result in good relationships and a learning environment where children understand the importance of love, care and respect for everyone.

Established strengths

- The determination and commitment of the headteacher, staff and governors to fully explore and express the distinctive Christian character of the school through the collaborative links with Barley school
- The quality of the pastoral care of every individual in school
- The love, care and respect shown by pupils to other people

Focus for development

- Improve standards in religious education through effective assessment and monitoring procedures
- Further express the distinctive character of the school through explicit Christian values in the routines and policies of the school.
- Ensure foundation governors have a more formal role in the monitoring and evaluation of worship and the school ethos and in their feedback to the governing body.

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

The school has a welcoming, caring ethos that is shared with everyone and reflects the implicit Christian values that underpin the routines of the school. The size of the school means that relationships between the whole community are good. Adults know each of the children as individuals, understand their needs and ensure that they are safe and ready to learn. Stable staffing and leadership have resulted in increasingly high expectations for the behaviour and achievements of all pupils. Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong because of effective rewards and sanction procedures. They are confident, have very positive attitudes to learning and a good understanding of the features that make their school a church school. The pupil council identified many features of a church school, including 'our secretary because she is always welcoming, kind and friendly', during a learning walk. Other children comment 'Here we believe in God. We are all the same inside and respect each other.' They also understand the importance of forgiveness in maintaining relationships, relating their actions to the teaching of Jesus. For example 'the story of the Good Samaritan means that we should care for everyone.' Pupils share a range of responsibilities for school routines, including taking and counting money at the tuck shop, organised by the Parents' Association. Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development is good because of the range of activities that include learning French and a visit to France. The input of the local authority Multi-cultural team and kitchen staff were part of an international day that broadened the cultural awareness of pupils. The school is currently working to create both indoor and outdoor reflective areas. Displays of religious education work and the stained glass windows in the hall reinforce the distinctive character of the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Worship is an integral part of school life. Themes are well planned using a range of resources such as themes from the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and 'A Teachers' Dozen'. Pupils describe worship as 'time together to learn more about God and Jesus'. They also explain that 'it helps us to understand the same beliefs as other Christians.' Pupils experience a range of leaders, including members of the clergy and the local community. Although a new vicar has been recently licenced, during the period of interregnum, a member of the clergy maintained the links with the local church for end of term services. She has ensured that pupils have a good understanding of the significance of Christian festivals, often using powerpoint presentations depicting religious paintings to further the experience of pupils and bring the Bible to life. Active participation by pupils, for example in 'Bin the sin' develops pupils understanding of faith. Children create a reverent atmosphere for worship, enhanced by stained glass windows depicting Christian symbols and bible stories. Children are developing an awareness of Anglican ritual by the sharing of the peace and the use of a candle to mark the beginning and end of worship. In an act of worship jointly planned by the children and clergy, children processed around the hall representing aspects of the Olympic games, before sharing references to sport in the letters of St Paul. The use of Bible passages and translation into 'child-friendly' versions enabled them to understand the link between 'the light of the sun' and Olympic flame and 'the light of the Son'. Children understand prayer as 'a time to talk with God to say thank you or sorry'. They recite 'The Lord's Prayer' and school prayer with confidence. They enjoy singing songs and the active Superman and rock and roll graces. A weekly opportunity for children to reflect on worship themes and informal discussion between pupils, staff and foundation governors informs the evaluation of the impact of worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory.

The school is currently re-establishing the profile of religious education (RE) through the newly introduced subject leadership team. They have reviewed provision and identified areas for development, including the need for effective and manageable assessment procedures to measure progress and achievement. These are currently not as high as in other subject areas. Teachers annotate their planning, based on the locally agreed syllabus, to ensure it meets the needs of their pupils. Lessons observed during the inspection were good because of a creative approach to learning. For example, in Foundation/reception class pupils were totally enthralled by a visit from 'Mr Noah', who skilfully answered their questions about the flood using a number of artefacts. Children then shared promises they would keep, mirroring God's promise of the rainbow to Noah. Older pupils showed a developing knowledge of Judaism as they confidently retold the story of the Flood. They identified symbols that they could use as part of their design for a mantle for their Torah scrolls. Adults make notes of the comments, questions and actions of younger pupils to record development. In the written work of older pupils, teachers often comment on the quality of learning in their marking. Although since the previous inspection the school has trialled several approaches to assessment, staffing changes have prevented a definitive procedure.

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

After a period of unsettled leadership, the school is now at a pivotal and exciting time of development with a stable staff and committed governors, several of whom are new. The collaboration with Barley First School have given the head, governors and staff the opportunities to re-explore implications of being a church school and recognise the need to fully express these in its Christian character. The school development plan shows that many initiatives are already in place, such as the developments in worship. Others, such as a review of policies that reflect their foundations in Christian values are at early stage. However, accurate self-evaluation, with input from staff and governors, shows that the school has a good capacity for future development. Foundation governors have successfully maintained and strengthened the links with the church despite a period of interregnum. Although they have a good understanding of their role in overseeing the Christian ethos and the impact of worship that informs development, feedback procedures to governors are informal. Parents are very supportive of the school and the impact of its values on the attitudes and behaviour of their children. Typical of the many positive comments is 'here our children are nurtured and given skills for life.' They also value the opportunities to speak to staff at the start or end of each day. The 'Friends of Barkway' support the school with a range of activities. The links with the local community include the recent joint Jubilee celebration with Barley school.