

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Barley Voluntary Controlled Church of England First School

Church End
Barley
Royston
SG8 8JW

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority:	Hertfordshire
Date of inspection:	28 th March 2011
Date of last inspection:	24 th September 2008
School's unique reference number:	312597
Headteacher:	Mrs Carol Arrowsmith
Inspector's name and number:	Mrs Judy Ruff 528

School context

Barley First school is a small school of 40 pupils aged from 3 – 9 years. It serves the village of Barley and the surrounding area. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are currently twelve pupils identified as having special educational needs. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Barley VC Church of England First School as a Church of England school are good.

Barley VC Church of England First School is a good school, where governors and staff work hard to develop and value the distinctiveness of the church school ethos. Strengths are in the Christian family framework which exists within the school, enabling children to feel safe and secure. They learn to appreciate the wonders of the world through a carefully constructed curriculum. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and its aims.

Established strengths

- The quality of care provided and the personal development of children within a strong Christian tradition and values set
- Commitment and dedication of the foundation and other governors to providing strategic leadership to the school, including valuing and developing the distinctiveness of the school's Christian foundation during a period of leadership instability
- Effective teamwork of loyal staff, who have continued to uphold the Christian values, traditions and education of the pupils during the absence of a substantive headteacher

Focus for development

- Develop planning, recording and evaluation systems for Collective Worship
- Strengthen governors' evaluation of the school's distinctive Christian ethos by recording visits and feedback given in writing
- Develop external area for quiet personal reflection by pupils

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

All members of the school community appreciate how well the Christian values impact upon the provision for the children. The highly effective partnership between the church and the school, through regular use of the church and its grounds and the frequent presence of the priest in charge within the school, leading collective worship or talking to staff is much valued. One parent wrote, 'I like the fact that my child is happy to go into church and doesn't find it a scary place. He is very comfortable around the clergy'. Since the previous inspection where a focus for development was to evaluate the church school distinctiveness and use the findings to inform the school development plan, the two foundation governors have worked together in a concerted way to raise the awareness of the governors as to the special nature of a church school, through a presentation followed by discussions. As an outcome, governing body meetings now commence with a prayer and there is a strand in the school development plan focused on actions to improve provision further. This has resulted in an increased use of prayer within the school, both traditional prayers and those written by the children. Spirituality has developed well throughout the school, with one parent interviewed saying that she was frequently asked questions by her children about God and Jesus. Children have many opportunities for reflection and experience of awe and wonder, both within the curriculum and during opportunities to be outside in the lovely grounds that the school enjoys. This provision would be still further improved by the provision of a space for quiet, personal reflection. The school has good links with the Diocese. The Bishop blessed the restored school bell in 2010 and the Bishop's Harvest Appeal, along with other charities are generously supported. Events such as 'Friendship Friday' supporting the 'Save the Children' charity successfully raise children's awareness of the global dimension, of very contrasting lifestyles of children across the world. The proposed re-development of the school web site and the screen saver with photographs of the school and church side by side emphasise the importance given to the church school links.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has worked hard to make more regular use of the church for worship. A good variety of services are held, including a 'Mothers' Day' service to be held later in the week of the inspection. It is clear that both clergy and congregation welcome the children's artistic efforts, which brighten up the interior of the building very well, both the angels hanging from between the pillars and the vibrant collages undertaken by the children with adult support. Services follow a set format, thus introducing children to the Anglican pattern of worship very well. Increasingly, opportunities are made to include the school's children in service preparations, such as the making of the Christingles, writing prayers, performing dramatic sketches and singing songs that they have learned in school. Within the school day, good efforts are made by all staff to make collective worship a special time of the day. Staff willingly lead the worship and good emphasis is put on finding time for reflection and personal prayer. The school benefits from a dedicated volunteer who has been leading a musical act of worship weekly. The priest in charge is a popular leader of worship for two out of every three weeks. Her stories, told in instalments, are greatly enjoyed by the children. A local Christian worship group also makes a termly visit, which enhances the provision. In order to make the provision even better, it would benefit from improved planning, recording and evaluation systems.

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

The school has been through a challenging time recently, with the substantive headteacher being absent from school on ill health grounds for some months, before resigning. The school has had interim leadership for a period of time, including the present interim headteacher, who has been in post since January 2011. However, despite these difficult circumstances, the staff and governors have held the school together and ensured that leadership is still effective in moving the school forward in improvements and in meeting the needs of the children. Their loyalty and dedication in this area is to be highly commended. The interim headteacher has taken up the leadership with great skill, inspiring staff confidence and working extremely hard to collect evidence together for an accurate self evaluation of the school and its work. In this, she has been very ably assisted by both the chair of governors and the priest in charge. The school has recently reached the finals of a new 'Church Schools' Award' for inspiring citizens and transforming communities. This bid has been put together under the leadership of the chair of governors. The evidence file shows how much work the school has done towards building and valuing the church school links.

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