



## Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

**John Donne CofE VA Lower School  
High Street, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NL**

**Diocese of St Albans**

<b>LA:</b>	<b>Bedfordshire</b>
<b>SIAS Inspection:</b>	<b>16 October 2008</b>
<b>Previous S23 Inspection:</b>	<b>21 and 24 September 2004</b>
<b>URN:</b>	<b>109615</b>
<b>Headteacher:</b>	<b>Miss Gill O'Hare</b>
<b>SIAS Inspector Name:</b>	<b>Bob Hopcraft</b>
<b>SIAS Inspector No:</b>	<b>484</b>

### **School Context**

John Donne is a much smaller than average lower school, set in attractive grounds in the village of Blunham. Pupils come from both the village and surrounding areas. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin and the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. The incumbent recently retired and the parish is currently in a period of interregnum. The headteacher is due to retire at the end of the current term.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of John Donne CofE VA Lower School as a Church of England school are good.**

John Donne is a good Church school which takes every opportunity to affirm and celebrate its Christian foundation. Pupils are encouraged to grow and develop as rounded individuals, with a solid basis of Christian values upon which to draw. Behaviour and relationships are good and pupils respond positively to all that the school has to offer. Good quality acts of worship and good provision for RE support pupils' development well and strong relationships with the local Church and parish are being proactively maintained during the current interregnum.

### **Established strengths**

- The good relationships within the school, based on clear Christian values, which impact well on pupils' development;
- The good quality acts of worship;
- The good standards in RE and the good quality leadership of the subject;
- The strong links with the local parish and community.

### **Focus for development**

- Continue to promote the cultural development of pupils by widening and extending opportunities to study and experience other cultures and belief systems;
- Develop systems for the regular and systematic monitoring and evaluation of collective worship;
- Extend self-evaluation, so that areas for development form the basis of a strategic plan for the future development of the school as a Church school.

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

This is because pupils feel valued and enjoy their work and play, throwing themselves enthusiastically into all opportunities on offer. They say that they are treated considerately and that school is a place where they feel secure and happy. Christian values are at the core of the school's work, ensuring that staff model appropriate behaviour for pupils, who respond by getting on well together. Pupils are encouraged to develop their independence and citizenship by taking part in a range of activities, such as the School Council and the Eco-Council. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good and pupils are actively encouraged to develop an understanding of other faiths and cultures through, for example, working towards the International School Award and in the promotion of links with developing countries. However, the school is aware that there is a need to develop this aspect of its work still further. There have been significant steps forward in the promotion of spiritual development since the previous Section 23 inspection. Relationships are good throughout the school and there is a strong family feel, encouraging one parent to write of the school as "A caring 'family', somewhere the children can express themselves freely and are valued as a person, not a number". Pupils work collaboratively and support one another very well, whatever their ability. The accommodation is used well to promote the school's Christian character and signs and symbols of the Christian religion are evident throughout. There are many displays which offer opportunity for reflection: displays on the subject of the sower, harvest and "big questions" were seen during the inspection.

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

Worship plays a key part in the life of the school and this impacts positively on the everyday lives of pupils, who speak warmly about their experiences and their enjoyment of collective worship. Acts of worship are varied and stimulating and reflect key Christian values which are used as central themes for the week. Acts of worship are well planned, but are not currently evaluated for quality and impact in any systematic way. Pupils have many opportunities to participate actively in worship and do so with gusto, particularly through singing. Good use is made of prayer during worship and pupils are encouraged to participate in prayer at other times during the school day. They know the Lord's Prayer and say the school prayer, which they developed with the help of the vicar. Opportunities for spiritual reflection have been extended significantly since the last inspection and pupils reflect thoughtfully on themes and messages under discussion. Pupils have a good knowledge of the key Christian festivals and some of the less well known celebrations, such as Rogationtide. There are very close links with the parish and the school has been proactive in seeking support from lay members and other clergy during the current interregnum. Regular Church worship remains an important part of the school's programme.

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

Standards in religious education are good and pupils make good progress in their understanding, as a result of high expectations and the many opportunities to reflect and apply what they have learned to their everyday lives. Teaching observed during the inspection was good overall and demonstrated a developing use of ICT to support learning. There are good assessment procedures in place, including a portfolio of pupils' levelled work and detailed records of pupils' attainment and progress. Pupils enjoy RE and respond well to the range of opportunities on offer. This was illustrated on a number of occasions during the inspection, such as the Key Stage 1 lesson on *weddings* and the Key Stage 2 focus on *Jesus as an inspirational leader*. As a result of the good teaching, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Pupils have a sound understanding of other major world religions and particularly enjoy visits, such as their recent participation in the *Queen's Park Faith Tour*. Pupils have a good knowledge of the Christian faith and tradition: they can talk with confidence about signs and symbols and have a good working knowledge of the progress of the Church year. The importance of RE is reflected in its inclusion in the School Development Plan and it is well led by an informed and able co-ordinator, who monitors development closely. It is well resourced and staff have taken advantage of a range of professional development courses to support and extend their understanding, which has impacted positively on the development of RE within the school.

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

This is because the school's Christian vision is clear in its documentation and in the attitudes of school leaders, staff and pupils. Good pastoral links exist between the school and the parish and these are being effectively maintained during the current interregnum. The school has completed a detailed and accurate evaluation of its progress as a Church school, which has involved a range of staff and governors. However, areas identified for development have not yet been translated effectively into action plans and as a result, the school does not at present have a strategic view for its future development in this area. Stakeholders speak positively about the school and share a common vision for its future development as a Church school. Parents say that the school values their views and governors provide support and challenge and often visit the school with a focus on RE. There are many strong links with the parish and the local community, which nourish and affirm the school's status as a Church school.