



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



Edwinstree Church of England Voluntary Controlled Middle School
Norfolk Road, Buntingford SG9 9AW

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 2nd-3rd October 2008
Previous S23 Inspection: June 2004
URN: 117554
Headteacher: Mark Knowles
SIAS Inspector Name: Catherine Large
SIAS Inspector No: 482

School Context

Edwinstree Church of England Voluntary Controlled Middle School caters for pupils between the ages of 9 and 13. There are 439 pupils on roll most of whom are drawn from Buntingford and surrounding villages. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, or with English as an additional language, is significantly below national averages. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is also well below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is about average although only a very small proportion of these pupils have a statement of special education need. In partnership with another middle school and the local upper school, the school has specialist status in humanities.

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

Edwinstree has established a distinctive ethos rooted in core Christian values and a strong sense of community. This has a very positive impact on pupils' personal development and their sense of well being. Since the last inspection, the school has promoted its Christian status more explicitly. It is now well placed to build upon this by including within its existing systems, a regular review of its provision and effectiveness as a church school.

Established strengths

- The commitment of the senior managers, governing body and all staff to the basic Christian values promoted in the school;
- The ethos of the school created by the strong sense of community and the outstanding quality of relationships;
- The effectiveness of systems, exemplified in the Behaviour policy and the rewards structure;
- The quality of whole school collective worship which is well regarded by pupils;
- Links with the local church and wider Christian community which support the Christian ethos.

Focus for development

- Identify further opportunities for pupils to experience Christian worship in a church environment;
- Widen the programme of visits to enhance pupils' awareness of other faiths and cultures;
- Include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the school as a church school within existing monitoring and review processes.

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

Pupils express confidence in their teachers and enjoy coming to school. They recognise and value the care and support that they experience and respond very positively in their learning and behaviour. Standards and progress in the school are outstanding. There is a very strong sense of community in the school. The School Council has significant responsibilities and is well structured and effective, exemplified most recently in the promotion and planning of the Edwin's Tree garden in response to pupils' desire for a quieter area in the school grounds. There are good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility in school, for example, as team captains. The 'Star of the month' award promotes good citizenship in school and is well regarded. The welfare of pupils is paramount, promoted through a range of strategies and curriculum initiatives. Staff meet regularly to raise concerns. The school is working to achieve Healthy School status. There are very good strategies in place to support the learning needs of all pupils, including those pupils who are gifted and talented. There is a clear programme for monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and learning for the benefit of all learners. Basic Christian values underpin the Behaviour policy which has been formulated with pupils and they have confidence in it and its consistent application. Relationships at all levels are outstanding. Pupils respond well to an excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities, school productions, residential visits and charitable fund raising activities. The school supports the work of Action Aid and, through this charity, is in correspondence with two Indian boys. Overall social, moral and cultural development is outstanding. Excellent displays contribute to a positive learning environment and are evidence of pupils' creativity and the school's response to cross-curricular initiatives. The school is sympathetic to ensuring the provision of opportunities for spiritual development across the curriculum but this has not yet been fully explored. The general programme of educational visits is strong but at present it lacks provision for pupils to become more aware of cultural diversity.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship holds a central place in the life of the school. The strong sense of community in the school is an effective outcome of the whole school joining together three times a week for a variety of worship experiences. The school is very committed to this pattern of worship and has ensured that space and audio-visual facilities enhance the experience for pupils. Senior managers, teachers, the local clergy and individual class groups all participate in this programme. On other days, class groups reflect on the 'Thought for the week', a programme created by Year 8 pupils, distributed to all classes and then followed up in the Year group assemblies. This pattern appears effective. Themes for worship include all major Christian festivals and other themes of topical significance. Very special services are planned for Christmas and Easter. The religious education and music departments work closely with local clergy on these occasions and evidence from photographs suggests that these are occasions of high quality and impact. Worship during the inspection exemplified the variety that pupils experience in the effective use of singing, prayer, audio-visual

presentation and drama. Pupils responded well and were able to talk about the message of each assembly. A Year 5 class, very new to the school, presented a thoughtful and confident message, in drama, based on the parable of 'The Good Samaritan'. Pupils questioned during inspection were positive about Collective Worship. Members of the School Council expressed an interest in offering feedback and discussing worship with their peers. The school has carried out a survey with all pupils but recognises the potential of involving them further. It also plans to evaluate the impact of worship more systematically as it does for other aspects of school life. It is not possible to accommodate the whole school in the local church and so services are always held on school premises. This means that pupils never have an opportunity to experience Christian worship in church. The school is seeking strategies to improve this situation.

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

There is strong support for the church status at all levels of leadership and management and among the staff as a whole. The headteacher and senior team lead by example. Since the last church school inspection, the school has made its church status more explicit. There is good communication with parents through an excellent half-termly newsletter. Links with feeder schools are very good and have been strengthened through the specialist status that now links Edwinstree with its upper school. The church is very supportive and the clergy and other members of the Christian community have a strong presence in the school which is recognised by pupils. Involvement with some groups and agencies in the wider community is strong and pupils participate in local Youth forums and councils but the school acknowledges that the range of involvement could be increased so that more pupils are able to serve the community in different ways. This has been identified in the School Development Plan. Religious education is well supported and highly regarded by pupils. Teaching and learning are good. The curriculum leader is new in post but has already identified key areas for development, such as the need for pupils to experience beliefs and values of the Christian and other world faiths first hand, for example, through visits to places of worship. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have attended diocesan training on the distinctiveness of church schools and this has had good effect on some developments in school. However, other staff and foundation governors have not yet attended such training and are not as confident in identifying ways in which they could strengthen their leadership of a church school further. The school recognises the need to embed the monitoring and evaluation of its effectiveness as a church school into its existing procedures. It has outstanding capacity to improve even further.