



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



**All Saints Church of England Lower School
Church Street, Clifton, Shefford SG17 5ES**

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 10th April 2008
Previous S23 Inspection: October 2003
URN: 109616
Headteacher: Maureen Gravell
SIAS Inspector Name: Lyn Field
SIAS Inspector No: NS 151

School Context

The majority of pupils come from the village. Their backgrounds are generally favourable although the social breadth is broader than it was five years ago. All pupils speak English as their first language. The proportion with learning difficulties or disabilities is in line with similar schools.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of All Saints Lower School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

Christian values are lived out at all levels of school life. They lead governors to make the 'right' decisions and characterise the professional work of all members of staff. The pupils flourish in this environment. They learn clear Christian principles that prompt them to question what is right and wrong and to sensitively support each other.

Established strengths

- The headteacher's leadership that ensures Christian values shape the daily life of the school
- The effective working relationship between staff and governors in sustaining the Christian ethos
- The maturity and spiritual awareness of pupils

Focus for development

- To develop the use of creativity in worship and RE activities

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

Christian values clearly influence the way the headteacher and her staff manage the daily life of the school. The expectations for how to treat another person are very clear and the pupils help each other to meet them. They listen carefully to each other, speaking openly and honestly. This gives them the confidence to tackle challenging tasks and ask for help when they need it. The introduction of the Values Education programme has built on this by helping pupils to describe their feelings more clearly. They talk confidently about the core values of the school and quote instances in Bible stories to show how these values are rooted in Christianity. They use them as guidelines to work out how to resolve any problems and come to decisions about what is right and wrong. For example, a Year 4 group suggest that there is a link between forgiveness and peace. One pupil explained this as 'until someone apologises, you cannot begin to lose the feelings of wrongness and being upset'. Parents like the specific information they receive about values because it helps them to understand the attitudes the school promotes. They say this is useful when they discuss behaviour at home.

Teachers alert pupils to issues of human concern in all the subjects they teach and pupils grow in spiritual awareness. By the time they leave the school, they can reflect on the big questions in life with a maturity that is exceptional for children of their age. Typical of this is a comment from a Year 3 pupil who explained 'it might feel wonderful to win a war but that gets spoilt when you remember how many people have died'. The pupils are very enthusiastic about raising money for charity. It is clear that although they enjoy the fun involved in this, they also know that all children are not cared for in the same way and they have a responsibility to do something practical about this.

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

The pupils understand the key teachings of the Christian faith because these are consistently taught in worship. Parents say the vicar and the headteacher are good storytellers who put over the messages so effectively that their children talk about them at home. For pupils, the most important thing about worship is that it brings all the classes together to learn about Christianity and to celebrate where they have done well. The sense of belonging is clearly important to them and is even stronger when they join with the church community. They are keen to take part in worship but there are few occasions when the pattern of worship varies greatly or when they are involved in making creative contributions of their own. They like the increasing number of symbols and simple rituals the school is using and understand how candles, for example, help them to focus on deeper feelings. The recent introduction of the All Saints Day festival into the school calendar represents a real step forward in the development of worship. It is part of the move for pupils to experience more worship in church, which they clearly enjoy, and for the school to have a greater presence in the worship of the church community. The service clearly made a lasting impression on children and their parents because the emphasis was on making this a spiritual experience rather than being any kind of performance.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

The standards that pupils achieve in RE are well above average for their age. Year 2 pupils, for example, know the sequence of events in the life of Jesus and can pick out significant details to explain the key Christian beliefs the stories convey. They are proud of their knowledge that is clearly strengthened by what they learn in worship year by year. Teachers know how well pupils are doing but the written activities set for older classes do not always take account of the levels achieved by younger pupils. The school has rightly identified that creative activities could be better used to help pupils think about what religious beliefs mean to them. Current work shows how well pupils can interpret colour and symbolism in paintings of Bible stories to work out what ideas the artist was trying to convey. Although they create striking images of the crucifixion themselves, opportunities are missed for them to paint in a way that expresses their own feelings. Time for quiet reflection is at an early stage but is clearly enjoyed by pupils and used well to help them focus on the theme of the lesson. The subject leader for RE is extremely well-organised and ensures that the planning for lessons matches the demands of the syllabus. She attends training to ensure that her colleagues are kept abreast of changes. This is clearly effective because the senior staff of the school know exactly where development is needed to improve standards even further.

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

The school constantly evaluates what it is doing to help pupils achieve their best and develop as people. It has an accurate picture of this because of the open and honest dialogue between staff and governors. They are well informed about what parents think of the school. The governors make regular visits and know how pupils respond to lessons and activities outside the classroom. They carry out their roles effectively because their commitment to the Christian faith means they see themselves as custodians of the Christian ethos. They know exactly where the school's strengths lie. For example, they identify the excellent relationships that exist and the ability of the headteacher to implement Christian values at all levels of school life. These values have been well established over a long period of time so there is a tendency for the school to take their impact for granted. There is no sense of complacency, however, and this often leads staff and governors to set their own benchmarks at a higher level. They meet together to share the outcomes of monitoring and agree their priorities for development. The school has established patterns of working that allow everyone a voice whilst keeping them focused on the same aims and this is a key factor in their success. There is common agreement that Christian values shape the big picture for the school. They are used to challenge selfish attitudes in any form and promote spiritual aspects of the school whilst maintaining high standards. The school makes the best use of training because the senior staff reflect on what is most appropriate at any point in time. For example, the Christian ethos is now more explicit in the school through activities such as the creation of a quilt with members of the church congregation.