

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

**Ashton Church of England Voluntary Aided Middle School**  
**High Street**  
**Dunstable**  
**LU6 1NH**

**Diocese: St Albans**

Local authority:	Central Bedfordshire
Dates of inspection:	23 <sup>rd</sup> / 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2011
Date of last inspection:	22 <sup>nd</sup> / 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2008
School's unique reference number:	109714
Headteacher:	Mr Nicholas Sharpe
Inspector's name and number:	Mrs Lilian Weatherley No 42

### **School context**

Ashton Voluntary Aided Middle School is a larger than average Middle school for girls and boys aged 9 to 13. There are currently 615 pupils on role. The majority are white and British although the school intake is changing. Although the numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals is low, Dunstable is increasingly becoming an area of deprivation. The numbers of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average. At the time of this inspection the school had been given 'Notice to Improve' by Ofsted February 2011.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ashton C of E Aided Middle School as a Church of England school are satisfactory.**

Ashton Middle school is a satisfactory church school with many good features. It is evident that at the heart of the school are the Christian values on which the school was founded by Frances Ashton in 1888. The school clearly offers the pupils a safe and secure environment based on these values which are still at its heart. Pupils are fully aware of the Christian character of the school and speak confidently and positively about being at a church school.

### **Established strengths**

- Its popularity as a church school within the local community
- Good relationships and pupils' feelings of safety and security
- The pastoral care of the pupils
- The Christian ethos and values taken seriously by all members of the school community

### **Focus for development**

- Repair and decorate the buildings to enhance the learning environment for all pupils
- Further develop the opportunities for class worship to focus on the needs of the pupils
- Ensure that teaching in all year groups is clearly matched to the pupils' needs
- Improve the use of assessment to provide pupils with clear feedback on how they can improve their own progress
- Ensure that all monitoring and evaluation is clearly focused and evidenced to the 'impact' on the pupils rather than on 'provision'

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

The pupils at Ashton Church of England VA Middle school are a credit to the school. They are articulate, generally well behaved, polite and considerate. Pupils are able to develop a positive sense of themselves as young people, take responsibility and respond with sensitivity to the beliefs and values of others. They are encouraged to be involved locally, as with their support for senior citizens and nationally and internationally for charitable organisations. For example the year 7LR pupils who recently raised £63.09 with a cake sale for the 'Lilly Appeal'.

Attendance is outstanding and pupils enjoy and value their time in school. They pupils speak of their school and its traditions with great affection, eager to talk about the many experiences and extra curricular activities that the school offers including music, drama and sport. The recently instated breakfast club is also proving popular with the pupils as is the counsellor and mentor system which is available to all.

Spiritual development is generally good as was recognised in the recent Ofsted report. The opportunities for prayer and reflection add to the children's spiritual development and to growth in their awareness of a spiritual dimension in their lives. The pupils clearly appreciate the memorial garden and the wall of crosses designed and created by the pupils, staff and governors in memory of a past student. It is now a place used for contemplation and remembering.

Although the school is working to drive improvement assessment remains inconsistent. As a result not all pupils make sufficient progress commensurate with their ability.

Much of the school is old and has lacked investment. Although the school community has worked hard at improving some areas including the dining area, they need to speak with urgency to the Diocese, LA and the local community to seek help in improving the environment and creating an inspirational teaching and learning environment for the pupils. Displays of pupils' work, the classrooms and corridors around the school are not enhanced by the plaster and paint peeling from the walls and doors. Display boards on the stairs have been removed for health and safety reasons, leaving tired and discoloured paint. Consideration could be given as to how to improve these areas. The pupils speak with affection about these 'old buildings' but they also commented on how much they love and enjoy being in the small school chapel, a bright, light and carpeted area. Asked what they might change the pupils remarked 'make the school brighter and the hall and library bigger'

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

Collective Worship plays an important role in the school and the provision for worship offered is generally good. Worship is planned and records are kept indicating the rich variety of Christian worship and visitors that pupils will experience during their time at Ashton. The worship observed showed good use of music and projected images but there was no evidence of the candle on the hall altar being used to create an atmosphere for prayer and reflection. Consideration should be given as to how it might be possible to improve the 'atmosphere' in which all forms of worship take place.

Pupils have positive attitudes to worship and all spoke highly of the opportunities provided especially the worship held in the chapel, a popular space with pupils. It is regarded as a special place and seen as light, bright and colourful, offering opportunities for prayer and reflection. As the pupils said, 'The chapel is nice. It's quiet and it lets you pray and reflect'; 'It's always quiet and peaceful somewhere you can get away from people when you are sad'.

Pupils also appreciated the recent changes made to the worship in the hall as they previously felt squashed when attending whole school worship. The additional screen and the removal of alternate classes and groups have helped pupils to see more and feel more involved.

The pupils did however feel that the hall might be improved by colourful religious art work and symbols similar to those in the chapel. "I would change the hall by putting more religious things there, making it colourful with more paintings like the chapel"

Although the pupils enjoy participating in worship and engage fully in what the school offers, they express a desire to be more involved in the planning and presentation. The work of the Friday club might be extended to involve more pupils. The optional Eucharist is also well attended by the pupils and consideration might be given as how to develop this further.

Worship takes place for all major Christian festivals and pupils commented on how much they enjoyed the Christingle service held before Christmas. Weekly worship opportunities are also made available for staff before school. Monitoring and evaluation of worship is developing but the focus should now be on the impact of the provision to ensure all pupils' needs are met.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory.**

Standards of attainment in RE are generally in line with those in the local area. The above average performance judged in teacher assessments was, however, unsubstantiated through a scrutiny of pupils' work, the over use of low level work sheets and lack of differentiated and challenging tasks. Teaching in RE ranged from satisfactory to good, however in three out of four lessons observed the teaching was supported by the deployment of the deputy Headteacher in the role of teaching assistant. Where teaching is good pupils enjoy RE, are engaged and motivated and make good progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding of religious beliefs, practices and concepts. Pupils in year 7 exploring Sikhism were not only able to list the key features of Sikhism but also make links between the Mool Mantra and the Lord's Prayer. Where teaching is satisfactory pupils become quickly distracted and off task. As a result progress for a significant majority of pupils is inadequate, work incomplete and there is some clear underachievement.

The subject leader is an RE specialist and teaches the majority of the RE lessons. Planning however lacks coherence. For example, the school overview gives no detail as to what should be taught and the medium term planning file is muddled and confusing for non-specialist or supply staff to follow. Year 5 Spring is identified as 'worship' without any reference to the faith or aspects to be covered. The school should revisit its scheme of work and its planning to ensure it is clear and enables optimum support for staff and progress for all pupils. The short term planning used for the inspection was however detailed and clearly identified different groups of pupils.

Assessment is inconsistent and is still an area for development. More needs to be done to moderate levels and check the reliability of marking. There is currently confusion over the use of level descriptors. Data should be used to set realistic targets and raise teacher expectations of what pupils can actually achieve. Target setting in the subject is not yet used effectively to raise expectations and improve pupil outcomes. Pupils are uncertain and do not have an accurate view of how they can make progress in RE.

Resources are generally good but there was little evidence of use of artefacts or RE displays and vocabulary around the school to enhance the learning. RE teaching rooms vary in their size and resources. Those with additional technology or space, enable more interaction from the pupils and greater creativity.

Pupils generally have positive attitudes to RE and those interviewed saw the relevance of RE to the world in which they live but stated that they like the 'more interactive and interesting lessons'.

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

Although the senior leadership and governors of the school have a distinctive Christian vision for the school and much is in place to support this, there has been very little progress on some of the key issues raised by the previous SIAS report of 2008. The same rigor that the governors have employed for the 'Every Child Matters Agenda' June 2010 which is clearly evidence based, now needs to be used by the recently formed 'Ethos Committee' to rigorously monitor and evaluate the impact on the pupils of the areas related to the school's distinctive Christian character. The post inspection action plan 2008-2011 clearly outlines the inconsistencies in RE namely pupils' standards, teaching, learning and assessment and the need to 'know' how both RE and collective worship impacts on pupils. The 'worship committee' suggested needs to be established with pupils to give them more responsibility and involvement in this area.

The staff and governing body need to be highly self-critical as a church school, developing a rigorous process of self- evaluation and a clear strategic view of how it can improve further. The placement of senior staff in lessons has clearly had a positive impact on the quality of teaching in RE however as the school has been given 'notice to improve' the role of the deputy headteacher needs to be more effective and one clearly focused on monitoring attainment.

Parents are generally supportive of the school and the new 'Parent Mail' is an opportunity for governors and staff to develop closer links with parents. Links with the Parish church are good and the Rector is a regular visitor to the school; known and respected by the pupils. Many of the pupils are involved in the church choir and give support at other church festivals. More thought might be given at this time as to how the school might use the church to promote itself. For example displays of pupil work in the church. The photographic record 2008-2010 is an excellent example of this and might also be sold in the local churches to raise funds for the school.

SIAS report March 2011 Ashton Church of England VA Middle School, Dunstable LU6 1NH



**Name of School:** Ashton  
**Date of Inspection:** 23<sup>rd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> march 2011  
**NS Inspector's Number:** 42  
**Type of Church School:** Church of England VA Middle School  
**Number of pupils:** 615  
**Phase of education:** 9-13

Rating 1-4

How well does the school, through its distinctive Christian character, meet the needs of all learners?	3
How effective is the worshipping experience provided by the school ?	2
How effective is the religious education?	3
How effective are the leadership and management of the school, as a church school?	3
The school meets the statutory requirement for collective acts of worship	Yes
The school meets the statutory requirement for religious education *	Yes