



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Diocese of St Albans



Essendon Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, School Lane, Essendon, Hertfordshire AL9 6HD

LA:	Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection:	23 November 2009
Previous SIAS Inspection:	12 June 2007
URN:	117393
Headteacher:	Rod Woodhouse
SIAS Inspector:	Martyn Skinner

School context

Essendon is a smaller than average sized primary school in rural Hertfordshire. Less than half of all pupils come from the parish of Essendon, with the remainder drawn from surrounding villages and towns. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The school has the Healthy Schools and Activemark awards and Green Eco status.

Summary Judgement

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

This is a good church school where Christian values are clearly demonstrated in caring relationships and a strong commitment to the personal and spiritual development of every child. As one parent commented, 'The children love the sense of being part of a close family.'

Established strengths

- Strong relationships within the school community and between school and church.
- A commitment to high level pastoral care.
- Regular involvement of a variety of Christian visitors to enhance the children's experience of collective worship.

Focus for development

- Develop the role of school leaders and governors in evaluating the effectiveness of Essendon as a church school.
- Ensure that the impact of collective worship is regularly evaluated.
- Provide frequent opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of prayer, including by the leading of significant aspects of collective worship.

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

This is a very caring school where pupils make good progress in their spiritual awareness and personal development. Pupils express a strong sense of being valued and a confidence in the pastoral care they receive from school staff and the Rev Pauline. Older pupils make the connection between the good level of support they receive and the Christian character of the school. Relationships are positive at every level, with children helping each other through, for example, the mixed-age groupings at the lunch tables. Christian values are also clearly evident in the attention given to staff welfare, so that all feel genuinely cared for. Staff and parents refer to the Christian ethos of the school as benefiting them in their own lives. Pupils talk of Christian activities providing help and guidance in the difficulties they sometimes face. An example was given of finding comfort in prayer at a time of great anxiety. Whilst some pupils remain uncertain as to the role of prayer, recent enhancements to the school environment are beginning to deepen their appreciation of both stillness and prayer. 'Contemplation' areas have been warmly welcomed. Christian values are promoted across the school in a rich variety of ways. For example, the quality of compassion is developed through the meaningful link with Bowood Community School in Zambia and pupils are inspired to make a positive difference to other peoples' lives.

The impact of Collective Worship on learners is good.

Children, staff and parents speak with enthusiasm about the impact of collective worship, which is well-planned although not regularly evaluated. Children enjoy the biblical content of collective worship, with one child commenting that assemblies 'teach you lessons to help you in your life.' Another child explained that 'this school helps you to pray – it's easier when you learn together.' Parents appreciate not only the impact of good quality collective worship on their children, but some also point to the impact on their own spiritual development. Pupils enjoy a wide variety of collective worship experiences – including performances by the ACT4 drama group – and have many opportunities to make a personal response. However, opportunities for pupils to lead collective worship in school are limited and this has been rightly identified as a priority for improvement. Regular school visits to the parish church are eagerly anticipated and greatly enjoyed, with many pupils choosing to extend their involvement by participating in the church choir, attending the church-led holiday club or joining the Sunday school.

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

School leaders, working in effective partnership with the Rev Pauline, communicate a clear Christian vision for the school. Leaders have an accurate view of present strengths and areas requiring further development. Parental confidence in the school's sense of purpose and direction is striking. Leaders and governors work together to develop and articulate the school's Christian identity, with significant progress being made in this area. However, there is no systematic approach to collecting and responding to the views of all stakeholders – including pupils – to add further layers of insight to the evaluation process.