



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

**Alban Church of England Voluntary Aided Middle School
Silver Street, Great Barford, Bedford MK44 3HZ**

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 16th-17th January 2008
Previous S23 Inspection: November 2003
URN: 109697
Headteacher: Lorraine Dougall
SIAS Inspector Name: Catherine Large
SIAS Inspector No: 482

School Context

Alban Church of England Middle School caters for pupils between the ages of 9 and 13. The school is situated to the east of Bedford and draws its 450 pupils from a wide and predominantly rural area. Built in 1976, it has recently undergone major refurbishment and extension to facilities. It is an oversubscribed school. 90% of its pupils come from white British backgrounds. It has lower than the national average number of pupils with special educational needs.

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

Alban has a well established and distinctive Christian character and, as a church school, has a good impact on the personal development of its pupils. In recent years, developments in the school have successfully focussed on bringing about improvements in standards and achievement for all its pupils. The school recognises the need, now, to further clarify and promote the Christian vision for the school. The potential for improvement in this respect is good.

Established strengths

- The social and moral development of pupils and their response to opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to school life is outstanding.
- Links with the local church and wider Christian community support the Christian ethos.
- Basic Christian values are very evident in the quality of relationships.
- The general ambience of the building and the high quality displays create an outstanding learning environment.

Focus for development

- Governors and senior leaders to undertake, with other stakeholders, a review to further strengthen the Christian identity of the school and then to monitor its effectiveness.
- Increase opportunities for spiritual development and pupil participation in collective worship.
- Improve assessment of pupils' work in religious education so that they are clear about what they need to do to improve.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is good 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 positively in their learning and behaviour. There is a strong sense of community in the school. The School Council (Alban Pupil Forum) is well structured and effective. The personal, health, social and citizenship (PHSCE) programme contributes well to pupils' development. The school has achieved Healthy School status. There are some effective 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 enables pupils to 'redress the balance and put things right'. Relationships at all levels are outstanding. Pupils respond well to an excellent range of charitable fund raising activities and to opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and others, for example, as trained playground leaders. Their overall social and moral development is outstanding. Excellent display contributes to a positive learning environment. Some displays promote spiritual development, for example, the one which highlights spiritual themes in 'The lion, the witch and the wardrobe'. There has been little training to ensure the school maximises opportunities to enhance the spiritual development of pupils. Overall, there are many factors to indicate that basic Christian values underpin the ethos and the good learning that is taking place but the school does not fully promote this link.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Pupils enjoy the community aspect of assembling which they do in a number of different contexts, including whole school, year, key stage and form groups. This has the potential to offer a good balance of experiences and to make best use of the accommodation. There is a commitment to the importance of collective worship by the management team and the local clergy, all of whom contribute to the programme. An overall plan identifies appropriate themes which focus on a range of broadly Christian values and makes links with the church calendar. Worship opportunities are well supported by the clergy. Pupils value their visits to the church for services at festival times and speak positively about the input of local clergy and Christian youth workers. In response to the last inspection report which identified the lack of an act of worship every day, the school has introduced a 'Thought for the day' programme. This is well linked to the whole school planned themes and some effective resources are provided to support class teachers. However, these resources are not well suited to all pupils. Pupils' experiences vary and there appears to be little opportunity for spiritual development such as reflection or prayer in these and some other assemblies. Whilst pupils do recognise the importance of worship in the life of this church school, they feel they do not have many opportunities to participate in worship. For example, there is no singing or effective use of music. The school has not considered ways in which they could enrich pupils' experiences of worship and little use is made of the school prayer. Monitoring of worship is at an early stage and has not identified the impact on pupils or involved them in the process. There is good potential for improvement as pupils and staff display positive attitudes and have the skills to benefit from support and guidance in this area.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

The school gives value to the subject, supporting the co-ordinator with appropriate time and staffing. The curriculum is well balanced, taking good account of the school's church status and the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus. Standards in Year 6 are in line with national averages overall and above average in relation to their knowledge and understanding of Christianity. As pupils move through to Year 8, standards improve further as they begin to develop their skills of enquiry and evaluation. Evidence from books and observations shows that achievement could be improved for lower attaining pupils and for the gifted and talented with more appropriate and challenging tasks in class. Overall, pupils are confident learners and enjoy their lessons. Teaching ranges from satisfactory to good. In the best lessons it is well paced and subject knowledge is secure. The department is building up a good range of activities that motivate and challenge the pupils to engage with their work. Schemes of work are satisfactory. Some lack the detail and identification of clear outcomes to support non-specialists. The subject benefits from strong links with the local church and clergy are involved in some aspects of teaching. Visits to church and to St Albans Cathedral are of clear benefit to pupils in their understanding of Anglican life and practice. Recent visits to the places of worship of other faiths are a welcome development as pupils gain deeper insights into the beliefs and practices of the other world faiths in the Agreed Syllabus. Recent improvements in assessment procedures are helping pupils understand more of the standards expected and what they need to do to improve their work. This has not yet fully embedded itself in the teaching and learning of the subject.

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

There is strong support for the church status at all levels of leadership and management. The school's status is evident in documentation and in the many signs and symbols around the school. Pupils are clear about the Christian ethos and a significant number gave this as the reason for parental choice of the school. Since the last church school inspection, the school has addressed the issue of non-compliance in collective worship. There is good communication with parents, pupils and the church. Links with feeder schools are good. Involvement with groups in the wider community is not as strong. There are some statutory omissions in the prospectus relating to the rights of withdrawal from religious education and collective worship. The headteacher is the only member of the governors and senior staff to have attended training on the distinctiveness of church schools. Development plans in recent years have not identified the need to monitor and evaluate the impact of the Christian vision on the school. The school's justifiable priorities have not been linked explicitly to the Christian ethos. However, the school has preserved its basic and well established Christian ethos and this is evident in the quality of relationships and care and in its support for religious education and collective worship. Its capacity for improvement is good.