

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Leonard's Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School

Thrift Road
Heath and Reach
Leighton Buzzard
Bedfordshire LU7 0AX

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority:	Central Bedfordshire
Dates of inspection:	6 th December 2011
Date of last inspection:	13 th December 2006
School's unique reference number:	109618
Headteacher:	Sarah Vincent
Inspector's name and number:	Catherine Large 482

School context

St Leonard's is a smaller than average Lower school having 102 pupils on role. There are four classes, two of which are mixed age. The vast majority of pupils are from white British backgrounds. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The headteacher was appointed two terms before the inspection after a period in an acting capacity.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Leonard's as a Church of England school are good.

The school has many outstanding features and Christian values clearly underpin its ethos. It makes an excellent contribution to the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils. The new headteacher has a clear vision and strategy for future developments and is supported by the governing body and staff. The school has the potential and drive to be outstanding.

Established strengths

- The leadership of the headteacher and the overall commitment and support of the governing body and staff for the Christian ethos of the school.
- The outstanding quality of relationships between the pupils themselves and the strong sense of community rooted in Christian values of care and trust.
- The strong links with the local church which ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of Christian faith and practice
- The very effective whole school approach to developing the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils.

Focus for development

- Embed a more rigorous and systematic review process by the governing body.
- Strengthen the assessment procedures in religious education, building on the progress already made since the last inspection
- Increase opportunities for pupils to take leadership roles in collective worship and widen opportunities for the participation of others.
- Extend pupils' awareness of cultures and needs in the wider British community.

The school through its distinctive Christian character is outstanding at meeting the needs of its pupils.

Pupils feel safe and valued and speak of the caring ethos of the school, describing it as 'like belonging to a family'. They are very aware that they belong to a church school and this is reinforced by displays, regular opportunities to pray during the day and the school's link with the church and the vicar. As they move through the school, they grow in confidence and their overall spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. They are clear about the difference between right and wrong, behaving extremely well inside and outside the classroom. The school supports the range of pupils' needs very well, for example, Early Years children having a box of treasures from home and each classroom having a 'Reflection Area'. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. There is an effective School Council. Older pupils, particularly, benefit from taking on significant responsibilities for aspects of school life, including caring for younger pupils and being part of the 'Buddy' scheme. There is a powerful sense of community in the school and relationships between the different year groups, and between teachers and pupils, are excellent. The programme of Values education supports the Christian ethos exceptionally well and the pupils appreciate the Values Tree displayed as a focal point in the hall. The school environment is stimulating. Displays are superb, reinforcing explicit Christian aspects and the creative elements of the curriculum. The grounds are excellent and are put to effective use for spiritual development (the Peace Pod and walks in the adjacent parkland) as well environmental awareness (the school has chickens and grows vegetables as well as sourcing energy through its solar panels). Pupils benefit from the school's involvement with the Global Learning Community and the links with Ghana and South Africa. The school is also exploring links with schools in the wider British community, recognising that at present, pupils have insufficient opportunities to understand cultures and needs beyond their own experience.

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

Pupils are very positive about collective worship. They enjoy the sense of community and engage well with every opportunity to participate in singing, quiet reflection and prayer. Worship promotes the Christian ethos of the school very well because it reinforces key Christian values and knowledge of special times and people. As one pupil expressed it in a recent survey, 'It tells adults and children we are not alone and God and Jesus are there for us'. Worship is led weekly by the vicar and this, together with the acts of worship in the church at key festival times, increases the pupils' awareness of Anglican faith and practice. Parents support these occasions well. There are other opportunities for worship in school, including before lunch and at the end of the day, so worship becomes an integral part of the school experience. Recent additions to the resourcing of worship are beginning to have positive impact. Planning for worship is good, although acts of worship are mainly led by the headteacher and the vicar with support, when needed by other staff. There are limited opportunities for pupils and other contributors to be part of the planning cycle. Pupils are very enthusiastic about having more opportunities for their classes to take a leadership role. Overall, worship makes a good contribution to the spiritual development of pupils. The school has recently surveyed pupils on aspects of the Christian ethos but recognises the need to have in place a strategy for systematically reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of worship.

The effectiveness of religious education is good.

There have been some improvements in religious education since the last inspection. The progress of higher ability pupils, as well as that of all pupils, is now good. As they move through the school, pupils become more confident in expressing their ideas and are helped to see the relevance of faith to everyday life. Their knowledge and understanding of Christian faith and practice is above average as indicated by the response of different year groups to work on Advent. They make good gains in their knowledge and understanding of other faiths. This is strengthened by the bi-annual visit to Bedford's Faith Tour. The school is strengthening resources for religious education as exemplified by the recent purchase of Persona dolls, a resource for providing insights into the lives of other world faiths. Teaching is good with some outstanding features. Teachers engage pupils well and are very good at encouraging them to reflect on their learning and to respond with their own ideas and beliefs. The school does have some good resources which are not used consistently by all teachers. Since the last inspection, the school has made progress in identifying standards and assessing pupils' work. Marking is generally good and consistent. 'I can' statements have been introduced to help teachers identify progress and to help pupils know what they need to do to improve. At present, this varies in its effectiveness and is not linked directly to the work pupils are undertaking so that they find it hard to make judgements. The launch of the new Local Agreed Syllabus for religious education, and its associated training, is recognised by the school as a good opportunity to strengthen the effectiveness of the subject.

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

The headteacher is highly aspirational in developing the effectiveness of the school's Christian character. Additional training by the diocese has given clear guidance and the School Development Plan identifies the way forward, indicating accurate self-evaluation. The headteacher is well supported by the governing body and the staff in seeking to raise the overall standards to outstanding. They have the capacity to achieve this but in order to do so, the process of monitoring and evaluating needs to be more systematic and rigorous. Parents are very positive about the school and the impact of Christian values on their children. This view is overwhelmingly endorsed by the findings of a recent survey. For example, this comment typified many: 'The children are constantly reminded of Christian values and there is a strong code of morals'. The school's Values education programme extends to the parents who receive high quality display information each month about the relevant value. There are very good links with community groups, the school supporting local village events and groups, and parents and grandparents regularly visiting for lunch. Links with local schools are also excellent. Relationships with the church are a very significant factor in developing the Christian character and there is mutual support, church and school sharing information through parish magazines and publicity. Links with the wider Christian community are underdeveloped although there have been good links with the Diocese.