

Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



Countess Anne Church of England
Voluntary Aided Primary School
School Lane, Hatfield AL10 8AX



Diocese of St Albans

LA:	Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection:	8 th March 2007
Previous S23 Inspection:	February 2002
URN:	117482
Headteacher:	David Lodge
SIAS Inspector Name:	Lyn Field
SIAS Inspector No:	NS 151

School Context

This is a primary school of average size situated close to the town centre. It serves families from a range of backgrounds and those of minority ethnic origin is above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is broadly in line with other schools but there is significant mobility in the area and this number is rising.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Countess Anne as a Church of England school are good

The Christian faith inspires and challenges all aspects of life in this school so that it meets the real needs of its families and children learn how to be responsible and compassionate people. Christian values have shaped the way this school has emerged from a difficult period with confidence. In partnership with the Church, it has the capacity to bring positive change to the whole community.

Established strengths

- The rich curriculum addresses all aspects of children's development and enables them to be confident members of their community
- The partnership of the head and deputy gives clear direction to teaching and learning
- The collective vision for the school ensures all decisions are made in the light of its Christian ethos
- The team approach has a significant impact in encouraging and recognising achievement

Focus for development

- To achieve greater balance between different types of learning in RE and collective worship
- To encourage reflection on the overall impact of the school's Christian ethos to ensure this is recognised as a vital tool in school improvement

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

The headteacher's vision is to create a curriculum that equips children to care for themselves and their families. This is central to the school's Christian mission of serving the community and influences how the building is used and what is conveyed on the walls. The Well-being Centre reflects the school's distinctive approach to its work and is constantly in use developing the skills of groups and individuals through counselling and art therapy. The head and deputy are imaginative yet rigorous in the selection of initiatives to support teaching and learning. This has been effective because there is a strong aspirational element in their curriculum planning and the use of Shakespeare and museum projects challenge children well beyond their own experience. These motivate children because the school is willing to explore different patterns in learning. Whole school focus weeks are inspirational and artwork on a large scale is found throughout the school. Many pieces reinforce key Christian themes and some, such as the sculpture of a memorial cross, are now being used to make connections with the bigger issues of human experience. This enables children to make significant spiritual and moral development and teachers plan this dimension into lessons as in the discussion on DNA with Y6. Individual achievement makes a difference to more than just the child concerned because it is about how each child can contribute to the whole community. Children are taught what to do to recognise and value someone else's contribution. Rewards are for whole school teams and the head arranges a termly outing that is a special experience for everyone involved. This demonstrates how the distinctive ethos of engaging with the social and emotional needs of the community is consistently addressed at all levels.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

This is because patterns of worship are now firmly established and provide a framework in which children are now making significant spiritual growth. They enter worship with the expectation that it will be a valuable experience and this is because they are familiar and comfortable with the purpose of prayer, reflection and saying the Grace together. Children of all faith backgrounds talk openly about what they gain from worship because although it is distinctively Christian, it is led in a way that includes everyone. It is a setting in which they feel secure and because behaviour is good, they can focus on their own needs and make good use of the times of reflection. For some, it is a time to 'wake up inside', for others, it is the space in the day to ponder difficult issues in their own lives. The positive attitudes created in daily worship transfer to the service of Eucharist and children value the time to say sorry or thank you and to receive a blessing. Worship in the hall has recently been enhanced by projected images and by the contemporary cross that hangs centrally. This indicates that the awareness of visual learning is influencing the delivery of worship and is providing a greater level of spiritual challenge but it is too early to evaluate the impact on pupils' development. The school knows that the confidence children have gained in being part of worship now offers a strong basis for exploring a variety of ways in which they can participate more fully. The clergy team has a strong presence in the school in addition to leading worship. The relationships they have established make the transition to worship in church more meaningful because children understand that the church is a body of people independent of the building. This makes good links to the teaching of RE and to seeing how the church is active in the community.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils reach standards that are in line with other subjects and this represents good progress. The co-ordinator has made an accurate assessment of the levels of work and has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. Strategies that have been developed as part of a whole school initiative in accelerated learning are well established in lessons and pupils of all ages respond well to working with a thinking partner. They learn most when tasks focus clearly on ensuring they make progress in religious understanding. In an outstanding Y1 lesson the teacher consistently modelled the precise use of religious language. She led children through a series of activities that enabled them to define the term special in the context of different occasions for families in different cultures. Children's knowledge of key Christian beliefs is good. They can refer to a variety of parables to demonstrate Christian values and know the key beliefs underpinning familiar Old Testament stories. This is because they draw on the understanding they gain from worship and whole school projects that encompass RE. Children are less confident in making connections between their factual knowledge and how beliefs affect the way people live their lives. Lessons focus too much on a written activity and there are missed opportunities for pupils to explore religious ideas through other media and in the context of other subjects. The school has already recognised this as an area for development.

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

The vision for the school is a collective one because the leaders see their work as an expression of their faith in action. The key relationship between the headteacher, the vicar and the chair of governors is central to the success of the school. The level of debate within this group is evidence that Christian values challenge as well as support the direction of the school. This determines the nature of the programme of monitoring the governors now undertake. It is clearly focused on the needs of children in relation to their families and recognises spiritual, moral and emotional development as central to academic achievement. Monitoring in this area shapes the priorities of the finance committee and this clearly demonstrates that the Christian foundation provides cohesion across all areas of leadership and management. The school's own evaluation hasn't yet addressed the more global impact of Christian values on achievement in the school. The standards the school now achieves represent significant progress over the last few years. The team ethos that is strongly promoted with pupils is contributing to improvement at leadership level. The strong partnership of the headteacher and deputy, the growth of the ministerial team and the increasing involvement of the governing body mean the school has entered a new era in its development and has the capacity to achieve the next stage of the vision.