



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report
Countess Anne Church of England (VA) Primary School
School Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 8AX



Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: Friday 23 October 2009
Previous S48 Inspection: 08 March 2007
URN: 117482
Headteacher: Mr David Lodge
SIAS Inspector Name: Bob Hopcraft
SIAS Inspector No: 484

School Context

Countess Anne is a smaller than average primary school set in urban surroundings in the large town of Hatfield. It benefits from pleasant grounds and buildings which provide an exciting and vibrant environment in which to learn and grow. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with a substantial minority from other minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, while that of pupils with English as an additional language is above average. Pupil mobility is relatively high, meaning that a higher than average proportion of pupils joins or leaves the school at other than the usual times. Staffing and leadership has been stable for some years. The school's Well Being Centre provides an excellent resource for both the school itself and those in the local neighbourhood.

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

Countess Anne offers its pupils an outstanding Church School education, based on the development of mutual care and respect. Staff have the highest regard for one another and for the pupils in their care and this has a significant impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Christian values lie at the heart of this school, where every child really does matter. Significant progress has been made towards the areas for development identified in the previous Section 48 inspection.

Established strengths

- The vision of the headteacher, vicar, staff and governors for the development of the school as a Church School;
- The core Christian values which are modelled consistently by staff and which impact strongly on the development of pupils;
- The excellent community links which promote effective community cohesion;
- Outstanding acts of worship, which inspire and engage all pupils and staff.

Focus for development

- Involve the views of parents and pupils more fully in evaluating the impact of collective worship and the school's ongoing development as a church school;
- Extend the use of assessment in Religious Education to enable pupils to understand their next steps in learning more clearly, in order to ensure that all pupils make the best possible progress.

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

This is because clear and explicit Christian values lie at the heart of the school's daily life and are understood by pupils, staff, governors and parents. Countess Anne is a strongly inclusive school, enabling all to feel valued and special. There is a very strong focus on the needs of each individual child and on their families within the wider community. The many opportunities for pupils to develop independence and to take responsibility, for example as *Playground Leaders*, help to develop an understanding of the values which underlie good citizenship. As a result, relationships are outstanding at all levels and there is a strong emphasis on teamwork and mutual support. As one pupil in year 5 put it: "*We are like fingers on a hand: together everyone achieves more*". The drive to raise expectations for all has led to an understanding that everyone can and should "reach for the stars" and the learning environment reinforces this message at every opportunity. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the outstanding impact that its values have on their children and wider family life, encouraging one parent to write: "*I love the values the school holds as a whole, as we hold the same values as a family*". The school environment makes a significant contribution to pupils' development and there are many opportunities for spiritual reflection and thought throughout the school day. This aspect of the school's work is particularly well supported by prayer tables and *Wonder Walls*. Communal areas of the school reflect its Christian character at every turn, for example the art gallery area which has banners created by pupils in teams on the themes of *life and death* and *forgiveness*. The external environment is used effectively to engage pupils and to promote further opportunities for quiet reflection.

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

Significant developments in the content and delivery of collective worship since the last inspection mean that it is now an outstanding part of the school's provision. A wide range of media are now used effectively to promote pupils' enjoyment of worship and their understanding of the messages that are shared. Excellent use is made of music, dance, drama and ICT to enhance the experience. Many creative opportunities are taken to enable pupils to engage directly with planned themes, which are firmly rooted in the Christian values promoted by the school. One such example is the "*Trip to Malawi*" experience, which was used at the start of *Discovery Week* to help pupils feel that they actually were flying to Africa to experience at first hand the sights and sounds of this area of their studies. As a result, pupils' experience of worship is fully integrated into their daily learning and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils enjoy worship enormously and are very enthusiastic about the opportunities they have to lead and to take part in it. The act of worship observed during the inspection contained some genuinely spiritual moments and pupils' singing was of the highest standard. Prayer plays an important part in worship and throughout the school day, with opportunities for pupils to write their own prayers and to use these in worship. Pupils' experience is further enhanced by opportunities to worship in local churches and the vicar leads worship in school on a regular basis. Worship is well planned and the headteacher evaluates the quality of worship on a regular basis. However, at present there is no formal evaluation of its impact on pupils.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

This is because, through good teaching, pupils are challenged to link the school's values to stories from the Bible and other world religions and then to relate these to their everyday lives. As a result, they develop a strong value base and are not afraid to express their own faith within the context of their learning. As one pupil in year 2 said, during a lesson on the theme of trust: *"I trust Jesus; it gives me strength when I pray to Him"*. Through the use of challenging questions and interesting well-structured lessons, pupils make good progress in RE, enabling them to reach standards that are above average for their age. Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress in widening the range of media and learning opportunities in RE and very good use is now made of discussion, drama and ICT to support learning. As a result, pupils say they enjoy RE and the opportunities it gives them to think about their lives and the world around them. One excellent example of this is the wonderful film made by the pupils about the life of Martin Luther King on the theme of *discrimination and tolerance*, which was shown recently at a local cinema. RE contributes well to pupils' personal development and is a key component in the school's drive to promote an understanding of other cultures. RE is effectively led by a creative, enthusiastic and knowledgeable subject leader, who has a clear view of its strengths and areas for development. Assessment has developed well and staff have a clear understanding of the standards pupils reach and the progress they make. The school has rightly identified that, in order to make this area of its provision outstanding, it should now extend its use of assessment to ensure that pupils are aware of their next steps in learning so as to accelerate progress still further.

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

This is because school leaders, governors, staff and parents share a common vision for the development of the school as a church school and the way in which its distinctive Christian character lies at the heart of its day to day development. All stakeholder groups have been involved in developing this vision and revisit it regularly. As a result, they are able to talk about the school's values confidently and to demonstrate their effect on their everyday lives. No one is in any doubt that Countess Anne is a Church school and what this means in practice. The headteacher and vicar have played key roles in the promotion of this ethos and their vision has been central to the school's rapid development in recent years. The recent continuity in staffing and leadership has enabled the school to grow into the vibrant and outstanding Christian community that it is today. The school evaluates itself accurately and school leaders translate this effectively into strategic plans for its future development as a Church school, which are firmly integrated into its overall plans for development. As a result, its development as a Church school is integral to its overall development. Countess Anne is a school that lies at the heart of the community, with the community at its heart. It reaches out into the community at every opportunity and takes every opportunity to invite the community in. As a result the school is very effective in promoting an understanding of community cohesion on both a local, national and global stage. The developing links with Malawi and the establishment of the Well Being Centre provide two excellent examples of this key aspect of the school's work.