

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Raynsford Church of England Voluntary Controlled Lower School

Park Lane,
Henlow
SG16 6AT

Diocese: St Albans

Local Authority: Central Bedfordshire

Date of inspection: 5th July 2012

Date of last inspection: 7th March 2007

School's unique reference number: 109601

Headteacher: Mrs Heather Hills

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Lilian Weatherley 42

School context

Raynsford is a small and popular Voluntary Controlled lower school in Central Bedfordshire serving the village of Henlow with 149 pupils on role. The majority of pupils are of white, British origin and the numbers of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average. The school has close links with Henlow Voluntary Controlled middle school and the parish of St Mary's Henlow.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Raynsford Voluntary Controlled Lower School as a Church of England school is 'outstanding'

Raynsford Church of England Lower School is an outstanding church school based on a clear set of Christian values. Pupils are intensely proud of their school and its friendly welcoming atmosphere. The ambience of the school, from the entrance through the common areas and classrooms, reflects a school that has the pupils at its heart.

Established strengths

- The strong Christian ethos
- The ways in which the innovative and creative curriculum is underpinned by the school's distinctive Christian character and values.
- The impact of the values education programme which underpins the school's ethos
- The strong links with the parish church
- The quality of relationships across the whole school between staff and between pupils and staff;

Focus for development

- Ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the school's self-evaluation
- Continue to develop areas for reflection in each classroom

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

Raynsford can be proud of the progress it has made in recent years and the outstanding way it meets the needs of all learners. Pupils speak confidently and positively about being at a church school. Relationships at all levels are excellent and based on mutual respect, making Raynsford a very happy school. All pupils interviewed spoke with passion about their school, the staff and the way in which they feel cared for. The school's distinctive Christian character is evident in every aspect of school life and is clearly having an impact on pupils' learning and development.

The governing body, headteacher and staff all share a clear educational vision for developing this aspect of the school. This Christian vision lies at the heart of all planning, teaching and learning making an immense contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and to their understanding of key Christian values. The recent work on values education has given a clear focus for the school to build and develop. The pupils all see the values programme as totally relevant to their lives: 'I like our school values because they help us learn how to respect others'. Charitable giving is an important focus for these values. For example the annual shoe box appeal and the headteacher's close links with an orphanage and school in Bogotá enable the pupils to have personal links with their charitable giving.

Raynsford is a vibrant and exciting place to grow and work. It exudes an energy and vigorous enthusiasm, encouraging and motivating pupils and providing a clear sense of what a church school can and should offer the community which it serves. The Year R class assembly 'Pluto's Got Talent' was enjoyed by all; parents, staff and pupils. It was a clear example of the fun, family atmosphere and the way in which the older pupils care for and encourage those in younger years. All pupils thoroughly enjoyed performing the various song and dance acts from 'Singing in the rain' to 'So long farewell' from The Sound of Music. As one of the Year Four pupils said, 'Every year Pluto Class do Pluto's Got Talent assembly. It is always a great performance.'

All displays reflect the high expectations and respect shown to all pupils and their work. As one of the school council explained 'I don't want to change anything because I like Raynsford'.

The school is a welcoming, caring educational community. During the inspection the school had two pupils from South Africa visiting. They were meant to visit for one day but loved it so much that they stayed for their holiday. One even took to wearing the school uniform. As one pupil said, 'I found it was really interesting when these South African guys came in it was a great experience for them and the class'.

The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is 'outstanding'

Worship holds a central place in the life of Raynsford. Collective worship is a special time in the school day. The pupils have positive attitudes towards worship, particularly enjoying those times when they are actively involved. They sing well and recognise the importance of prayer and worship in their own lives. From Year R they know the Lord's

Prayer and other key Christian greetings and prayers. The pupils were eager to explain how they have a prayer before lunch and the 'going home prayer' which they were all able to recite. The school provides music and a focal point to aid reflection and create an atmosphere for prayer and worship. All staff attend worship and take an active part in the leading of worship which is carefully planned and monitored.

The school has been developing places for reflection around the school but this is not yet fully embedded in the classrooms. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about the prayer tree in the hall and other prayers around the school and how they know that they can 'pray to God to help them and others'. The close links with the Church enable the pupils to celebrate the main events of the Christian year and the variety of ways in which Christians, and Anglicans in particular, express their faith. The Church is used for worship at Christmas, Easter and the end of the year when parents are also invited. The school is also planning other events in the church in conjunction with the middle school.

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

The high aspirations, vision and drive for improvement of the headteacher has led the school to become an example of 'outstanding' practice. The headteacher has a clear vision of the values a Church of England school should promote and how these can be presented with a robust sense of purpose, energy and enthusiasm. This vision is underpinned by the recent work on values and principles which are understood and supported by all the adults and pupils involved in the school.

Questionnaires from parents speak very positively about the school and they feel vital partners in their children's learning. With the support of the governors, staff, parents, clergy and parishioners the school offers its pupils an inspirational, happy and safe environment.

There is an infectious atmosphere and love for learning and teaching throughout the school with Christian values at the heart. Planning for RE, Collective Worship and pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is detailed and embedded into all areas of the curriculum. Self-evaluation on the school's distinctive Christian character is robust. Although governors are made fully aware of the results of any self-evaluation they could be more involved in this process.

Links with the local church community are excellent. The parish priest from St Mary's is a regular visitor to the school as is the local Methodist minister. RE and collective worship have a high profile within the life of the school. The headteacher is the RE subject leader and ensures that RE is central to the curriculum.