



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Diocese of St Albans



Thomas Whitehead Church of England (VA) Lower School Angels Lane, Houghton Regis, Dunstable LU5 5HH

LEA:	Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection:	18 th November 2008
Previous S23 Inspection:	20-23 rd June 2005
URN:	109701
Headteacher:	Mr R Garrard
SIAS Inspector:	David Morton
Inspector No:	515

School context

Thomas Whitehead Church of England (VA) Lower School is a larger than average school serving the town of Houghton Regis, near to Luton. Serving an area of significant social deprivation the percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal is well above that seen nationally and the proportion from minority ethnic groups is average with very few speaking English as an additional language. The school holds an Activemark award. It has close links to the local parish church which it is adjacent to.

Summary Judgement

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Thomas Whitehead Church of England (VA) Lower School as a Church of England School is good.

Through its Christian distinctiveness Thomas Whitehead C of E Lower School serves the whole community, welcoming all and instilling in pupils the Christian values of love, care and respect for each other.

Established strengths

- The role of Collective Worship in promoting shared Christian values
- The impact of the spiritual and moral leadership of the head teacher
- Pupil behaviour and their attitude towards each other
- Links between the school and parish church that support the school's Christian foundation.

Focus for development

- Include within the school development plan a strand focussing on the development of the school as a church school
- Develop an action plan to systematically develop RE across the school
- Develop effective and consistent methods of assessing pupils work and measuring their progress in RE
- Construct a SMSC policy that will support and encourage pupils' spiritual and moral development across the whole curriculum

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

This is a distinctively Christian school with a warm, welcoming environment clearly rooted in Christian Values. Pupils enjoy coming to school and when asked find it hard to think of anything they would like to improve. They feel safe and secure and show care to each other through participation in activities such as the lunch time 'play pals' scheme. Relationships throughout the school are good and reflect Christian values. Behaviour is also good throughout the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good but is mainly developed through Collective Worship and an associated values programme. Parents chose to send their children to this school and support its Christian ethos. They comment on how their children develop the Christian values of love, care, and respect for others and how this impacts positively on their behaviour. Parents view the school as being in existence to serve the whole community and describe it as an inclusive school which welcomes those of faith or no faith, treating all with equal respect. Accommodation is satisfactory but is improving. Plans are in place for the creation of a parent's room and new refurbished classrooms and build on a range of improvements that have been made in recent years. The school entrance area is used effectively to communicate the shared Christian values of the school.

The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is good.

Collective Worship has a central place in the school community and makes a significant contribution to the overall Christian ethos of the school. The observed act of Collective Worship was good. The head teacher used ICT effectively to share the story of Douglas Doss, an American peace campaigner during World War Two, and linked the story to the schools values programme. The act of worship was sensitively led and matched the needs of all learners well. Pupil behaviour and their response to worship is good. Pupils participate in worship by leading a short prayer and they listen attentively. They enter the hall quietly and music is used appropriately to create an atmosphere of reverence. Pupil attitudes to worship are good and they enjoy worship times. One child commented '*Worship makes me happy*', whilst another said '*I feel peaceful, calm, there are no big things. . . no conversations going on*'. Pupils visit church for major festivals and at other times of the year. They enjoy worshipping in church. Foundation governors strongly support the worshipping life of the school and attend Collective Worship regularly. Parents comment positively on the strong links between the school and the parish church and the way they enhance Collective Worship. They welcome the fact there is time within the school day for their children to be quiet, reflect and to pray and see this as an important part of developing their children's character. Coordination of Collective Worship is good and enhances provision. Planning for Collective Worship is also good and benefits from the partnership between the Collective Worship coordinator and the head teacher. The school now need to develop pupil evaluation of worship to further enhance provision.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is satisfactory.

Provision for Religious Education varies significantly across different aspects of the subject. The RE coordinator, who has been in post for two years, works hard to support the development of the subject undertaking monitoring visits on an occasional basis. Standards of observed teaching are good although standards of pupils' work across the school are satisfactory and in line with standards in other subjects. Teachers display good subject knowledge of Christianity and other world faiths. Pupils are given opportunity to ask

questions and to reflect on what they are learning about. In an observed lesson on Rosh Hashanah pupils reflected on what it meant to say sorry and were given personal space to think about their own lives. This was followed by practical opportunities to taste apples dipped in honey to explore the sweetness of a 'new start'. This level of reflection and practical engagement was good practice and enhanced pupils' understanding. A thorough scheme of work, that reflects the school's historic trust deed, is used to plan teaching and follows aspects of the old and new Bedfordshire agreed syllabus. Lesson planning is satisfactory. Current plans do not identify opportunities for spiritual and moral development of learners and there is a lack of understanding over how spiritual and moral development can be promoted through the teaching of RE. This should be addressed. Assessment is also satisfactory. End of unit assessments are in place but are completed inconsistently. Scrutiny of work is not undertaken systematically. There are no means in place for levelling or moderating pupils' work and as a result assessment outcomes are often subjective. The school should now develop effective and consistent methods of assessing pupils' work and measuring their progress. Despite the high profile that RE has within the school, self evaluation of RE is only satisfactory. There is no strategic development plan for RE and as a result no clearly identified priorities for improvement of the subject. The creation of an improvement plan and its circulation to all staff should be a priority for the school.

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

This is clearly a distinctive church school with a strong Christian ethos that is communicated through its website and associated documentation. Links between the school and the parish church are good and are valued by pupils, parents and staff. Significant numbers of the school's foundation governors are active church members and this has a positive influence on relationships between church and school. As a result the church has seen an increase in the number of school pupils and families attending church. Despite a number of challenging years the head teacher and foundation governors have maintained the Christian distinctiveness of the school. Wider community links are satisfactory and the school reflects Christian values through word and action. The leadership of the head teacher is good. He clearly models a distinctive Christian vision for the school based on respect and care for others. This is evidenced in the quality of relationships he has with pupils and staff. Under his leadership the school seeks to serve the local community, reflecting Christian values, in a quiet, unassuming way. Governors provide satisfactory support to the head teacher. They are regular attendees at all school events and have had some recent success in attracting new governors to fill long standing vacancies. Foundation governors have a strong desire to see the school develop its vision as a church school and are taking steps to be more proactive in encouraging, challenging and supporting the school to improve as a church school. Self evaluation and monitoring procedures are currently in place within the school but are variable in quality. Stakeholders do not have a shared vision as to how the school should develop and grow as a church school. The school development plan makes no reference to the school's Christian ethos, distinctiveness or its wider Christian character. As a result monitoring and self evaluation lacks clarity and specific areas for improvement. Likewise the absence of a SMSC policy means that there is no whole school view on, or understanding of, how spiritual and moral development can be promoted throughout the curriculum. The school should include strands within the SDP that promote and develop the Christian distinctiveness of the school and the SMSC development of pupils. They should also consider implementing a SMSC policy across the school.