



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Ickleford CofE VC Primary School
The Green, Ickleford, Hitchin SG5 3YG

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: Monday 13 October 2008
Previous S23 Inspection: 24 September, 18, 19 and 21 October 2004
URN: 117401
Headteacher: Mrs Pat Salmon
SIAS Inspector Name: Bob Hopcraft
SIAS Inspector No: 484

School Context

Ickleford CofE VC School is an average sized primary school, set in extensive grounds in the village of Ickleford, which is close to the large market town of Hitchin. Pupils come from mainly White British backgrounds and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. While many pupils and their families live in the village, the school attracts pupils from the town and small villages beyond. The school is situated close to the Church and lies at the heart of the village.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ickleford CofE VC Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

This is because the Christian ethos of the school is implicit in all that it does. As one parent put it "*Christian values are intrinsic. Everyone behaves well because it is expected*". The strong partnership between the Church and school underpins this effectively and the incumbent and the head have both played a significant role in promoting and maintaining the school's ethos. Pupils are encouraged to play a leading role within the school and have many opportunities to share in responsibility and to develop as sensitive, caring people. As a result, relationships are outstanding at all levels.

Established strengths

- The vision of the headteacher and incumbent for the development of the school as a Church school;
- The outstanding relationships and teamwork at all levels;
- The excellent opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally;
- The outstanding relationships with the local Church and community.

Focus for development

- Ensure that acts of collective worship are monitored and evaluated so that the school is secure in its understanding of how these impact on pupils;
- Ensure that areas for development as a Church school are included in School Development Plans.

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

This is because all learners feel valued and special. Pupils enjoy their work and there is a strong commitment to all achieving their best, whatever their gifts and talents. A strong sense of justice and equality pervades the school and as a result both pupils and staff feel secure and confident. The promotion of Christian values plays a key part in this and encourages the development of high levels of self-esteem and confidence. Pupils have many opportunities to develop into caring and responsible people, a good example being service on the School Council, which is considered both a privilege and an honour. Relationships are outstanding at all levels and pupils recognise that staff model behaviour well, encouraging one pupil to remark that "... *teachers deal with bad things really well!*" Pupils demonstrate a clear ability to apply moral values to their actions and decisions: year 6 pupils are encouraged to meet and greet younger pupils at lunchtime and to support the school's work as playground buddies. There is a very strong emphasis on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which supports pupils' learning and encourages them to relate sensitively to the beliefs, feelings and needs of others outstandingly well. This emphasis is reflected particularly well in the setting up of the Foundation Stage role play area as a Church, which was observed during the inspection, and in the trips to a Mosque and a Gurdwara which pupils spoke about with enthusiasm. Staff feel fully engaged in the school's vision and development: as one Teaching Assistant put it "*All staff are given a huge amount of credence and respect.*" Everyone expresses great pride in their school and the accommodation and displays are used outstandingly well to promote general learning and reflection. A significant proportion of the high-quality displays reflect cultural and spiritual themes. The school's Christian character is overtly displayed in the cross, which provides a focal point on entry to the school. However, it is the implicit Christian ethos, reflected so strongly in relationships and mutual respect, which lies at the heart of the school's promotion of its Christian character.

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

Worship is central to the life of the school. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is greatly enhanced by the high quality acts of worship to which they are exposed. Key Christian values, which underpin worship, are discussed openly and lucidly by pupils as a matter of course. Acts of worship are well planned and involve all teaching staff. While some evaluation of their impact and quality takes place, this is not yet undertaken in any consistent way. Pupils respond very positively to worship and they say that it is an important time for them. They are enthusiastic about the range of experiences on offer and the good variety of visitors that enhance and nourish the experience: as one pupil said, "*I like assembly, because we have visitors who help us to learn*". There is a high level of respect for other belief systems and pupils are encouraged to relate these to their own experience and beliefs. Very good use is made of reflection and prayer to enhance worship and the singing is excellent. Many aspects of the curriculum are used to stimulate worship as illustrated by the very popular class assemblies and worship is tailored well to the needs and ages of pupils. Pupils speak with confidence in an informed way about the Church year and refer to a range of Bible stories and stories from other faiths. There are outstanding links with the local Church and clergy, with the incumbent playing a strong role in leading worship in school on a regular basis.

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

This is because the school's Christian character is implicit in its ethos and staff, governors and parents feel positive about the school and their genuine involvement in its future development. This is largely due to the efforts of the headteacher and incumbent, who together constitute a formidable team and have worked hard to promote the school's Christian vision to the point where it is intrinsic to all that the school does. There are highly effective pastoral links between the parish and the school. A thoughtful and accurate evaluation of the school as a Church school has been completed and school leaders, staff and governors have been actively involved in this process. However, areas identified for development have not yet been translated into action plans and do not appear in the school's Development Plan. Its inclusive nature is one of the great strengths of the school there is an outstanding commitment to meeting the needs of all who work and learn here. Parents are very supportive of the school and speak of the genuine co-operation between school and Church, which both lie at the centre of the community. Links with the Church and community are outstanding. The dizzying collection of charities to which the school has donated over the years is testament to the very real focus in encouraging pupils to put others first.