



## Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

**Meppershall Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School  
High Street, Meppershall, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5LZ**

**Diocese of St Albans**

**LA:** Bedfordshire  
**SIAS Inspection:** 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2008  
**Previous S23 Inspection:** 5<sup>th</sup> May 2005  
**URN:** 310042  
**Headteacher:** Mrs Moira Coomes  
**SIAS Inspector Name:** Mrs Mel Adams  
**SIAS Inspector No:** 58

### **School Context**

The school is a lower school within walking distance of the parish church of St Mary the Virgin with whom they work closely. There are five classes covering Reception Foundation stage through to Year 4. Standards throughout the school are good. Pupils are admitted largely on residency in the village along with church criteria which includes both Anglican and other denominations in the local area. The percentage of children from minority ethnic groups is below average and the majority have English as a first language.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Meppershall Lower school as a Church of England school are outstanding**

Meppershall is an outstanding Church of England school, with an excellent working partnership with the church. The extent to which Christian values permeate the experience of the day by day experiences of both adults and children creates a Christian ethos in which children of all ages develop academically, spiritually, socially and morally in a safe and happy environment.

### **Established strengths**

- The excellent partnership between the school and the church, which adds not only to the quality of the day by day experiences of the children, but also contributes to the local community.
- The extent to which the children recognise Christian values and use them to determine their decisions and actions.
- The leadership of the Headteacher, Rector and Governing Body in ensuring that the children achieve the best possible education within a caring, Christian community.

### **Focus for development**

- To further develop the impact of church school improvement by including all stakeholders in systematic self evaluation as part of the regular evaluation and development cycle.
- To further raise standards in RE by developing opportunities to record progress in learning from religion.

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

The Christian ethos provides a setting in which children enjoy school, say they are happy, and enjoy excellent relationships with staff who provide positive role models. Self esteem is high, and in a Year 1 RE lesson children received affirmation as the teacher told them , 'you are all good at all sorts of things'. Through the values expressed in collective worship, taught in RE and across the curriculum, children have an impressive understanding of their importance, and are able to name many, such as peace, trust and respect. By the time children reach their final year, they know that these values are inspired by the teaching of Jesus, and they are motivated to follow His example. The staff work well together and their relationships as a team and between them and the children are very good. Along with excellent Social, Moral and Spiritual development opportunities which are planned for in lessons, children are inspired to behave maturely towards each other, enabling them to resolve problems through discussion which can sometimes be with school council members or playground buddies. Children love their school, and are proud to belong to it. The Christian character is evident throughout the school, from the cross and the mission statement displayed in the entrance to high quality displays of children's learning which are used to support spiritual development in lessons, such as values trees in classrooms.

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

The decision to change the name of the daily assembly to worship was taken to emphasise the special nature of this part of the day. Described by the Headteacher as 'our church within the school', and by the Rector as 'an experience different from a lesson, a place to honour God and experience Him' the school community enjoys meaningful acts of worship. The values tree forms a focal point, the value for the week providing the theme. The children are able to describe how values affect the decisions they take, such as the Rector's theme of forgiveness and thankfulness which children in year 4 later described being aware of during the day. Entering the hall to music, behaviour, concentration and singing are excellent. The ethos of worship creates a special atmosphere in which all ages can participate at their own level of understanding, exemplified by the youngest children, having only been in school 3 weeks, quietly enjoying the experience. The older children participate regularly, through Bible readings, prayers and organising the overhead projector for singing. They bring to worship the knowledge they have gained in RE, showing understanding of terminology such as gospel and old testament. All staff attend and are involved in leading at different times. The Rector and Curate lead worship in school regularly and important Christian festivals and events in the life of the school such as the leavers' service are held in the church. During the inspection the year 4 children were given opportunities to further develop their understanding of prayer by participating in a workshop held in the church, learning that prayer is like being able to e-mail God. Their participation showed a deep level of understanding, and one child was able to talk about how it broke God's heart when Jesus died. Worship led by the Rector has also provided support for the school, families and the community at a time of crisis. Anglican greetings and responses are known and used in worship, as are prayers such as the Lord's prayer. The partnership between the school and clergy are excellent, and the Rector is passionate in his support of the school's Christian character. Children from different faith backgrounds participate willingly and their parents speak with gratitude for the values provided by the school.

**The effectiveness of the religious education is good.**

Children's learning is at or above the standard expected for their ages in accordance with the Bedfordshire agreed syllabus. Their knowledge and understanding in discussions can be higher than represented in their recorded learning, and the school has yet to devise opportunities to include these in assessments. Recorded learning can show elements of learning from religion, such as a task about the temptations in the wilderness which asked, 'If you had time in the desert, what would you feel sorry for and what would you feel happy about?' Where tasks are less challenging, children are unable to record personal responses. Lessons provide children with good learning opportunities, enriched by creative planning by teachers, enabling children to identify with and learn from characters, such as the children in year 1 enacting the parable of the talents. Where learning is appropriately challenging, children confidently respond and work well together, as in year 4 discussing the meaning of the Beatitudes, showing their ability to relate their own understanding to religious ideas. Children participate well in lessons and behaviour is excellent. They value their learning which contributes significantly to social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, summed up by one child who said that without RE, 'We wouldn't know how to live and how the world was meant to be'. Children learn about Christianity and other faiths in their weekly lessons. The Headteacher as subject leader encourages staff to attend training sessions and through her leadership ensures that the subject maintains a high profile within the school.

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

Described by the Rector as servant leadership and evident in practice, leadership and management are outstanding. The school mission statement summarises the vision for the school, to provide the best possible education for each child within the context of a caring Christian community. This is affirmed by parents who recognise that faith is integrated into everything the school does. The opening pages of the staff handbook set out the expectations of working in the school as a church school. The Headteacher, fully supported by a highly committed governing body, ensures that the vision remains at the forefront of school life, evident from the way staff and children subscribe to Christian values. Church school development features in both 3 year and 1 year development plans. Church school self evaluation is thorough and governors have discussed this document but have yet to be involved in the process. Parental views are sought, but this does not yet include the school as a church school. The Rector monitors RE and Collective Worship, feeding back to the Headteacher and Governors. All staff are valued and are highly motivated, willingly undertaking additional responsibilities such as teaching assistants looking after the library or displays. Diocesan training has been attended by some staff and governors supporting church school developments. Recruitment procedures are very clear about the expectations of staff working in a church school. There is an excellent partnership between the school, church and local community. School events held in the church are popular and well supported, and holiday clubs held in the church are attended by a large number of children from the school. Parents recognise that the values represented in the school can affect the day by day decisions the children make, such as looking after an insect, 'because God created it'. A number of charities are supported each year and children are actively involved in both organisation and fund raising.