



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Milton Ernest CofE VC Lower School
Thurleigh Road, Milton Ernest, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK44 1RF

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection: Wednesday 14 May 2008
Previous S23 Inspection: 20, 25 and 26 January 2005
URN: 109613
Headteacher: Mrs Mary Harris
SIAS Inspector Name: Bob Hopcraft
SIAS Inspector No: 484

School Context

Milton Ernest is a voluntary controlled Church of England school, housed in traditional buildings in the heart of a thriving village community. It attracts pupils from the village itself and from the surrounding area. It is a smaller than average lower school and most pupils are of White British heritage. The school has a larger than average proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need, reflecting its inclusive ethos.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Milton Ernest CofE VC Lower School as a Church of England school are good

This is because of the strong commitment to Christian values, which underpins the work of the school and is evident in the high quality of relationships which exist within the school community as a whole. As a result, the school promotes its Christian character outstandingly well. The good quality acts of worship and the good leadership and management of the school as a Church school, coupled with the strong links with the local Church ensure that the school's status as a Church school lies at the heart of its development and ethos.

Established strengths

- The strong Christian values, which underpin the school's work;
- The outstanding links with the local Church and clergy;
- The high quality relationships within the school at all levels;
- The vision and leadership of the headteacher for the school as a Church school.

Focus for development

- Establish systems for the formal evaluation of the quality of collective worship and its impact on pupils;
- Ensure that the governing body takes a sharper strategic view of the development of the school specifically as a *Church* school.

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

This is because all pupils feel valued and special and are encouraged, through high expectations, to do their very best. Everyone is made welcome into the school and pupils talk with genuine gratitude of how welcome they were made to feel when they first entered the school. Behaviour is of the highest standard and pupils' respect for each other and for the adults within their community is evident at every turn. As a result, they are happy, secure and confident in school. Strong Christian values underpin all that the school does and are modelled by staff and pupils alike. Pupils show a mature understanding of the needs of others, resulting in an environment in which mutual support is the norm and independence is valued. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is outstanding overall and is well supported by the school Religious Education (RE) and PSHE programmes. The recent use of the SEAL (*Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning*) materials has further enhanced provision in this area, extending the vocabulary with which pupils can discuss and share their feelings. Many opportunities exist for spiritual development and the school's commitment to environmental education supports this aspect well. The school has worked hard since the last Section 23 inspection to provide opportunities to understand and experience other cultures, notably through visitors and planned visits and this is an ongoing aspect of its development. The strong team and family ethos ensures that all who work at the school share a common view of where the school is going and this spills over to the pupils, who work well collaboratively. The effective school council is closely involved in the school's development and there is a genuine commitment to listening to pupils' views and acting on them. An example of this is the recent focus on *Water Aid*, with the "tap tax" which has encouraged pupils and families to be actively involved in understanding the precious nature of water as a commodity and its importance within the wider world. Due to the traditional nature of the buildings, accommodation is limited, but the very best use is made of what space is available and good use is made of displays to promote RE and general learning. It is clear from the school's published materials and from its environment that this is a Church school, moving one parent to write "*It is so obviously a church school with a Christian ethos and one they are not ashamed of*". The signs and symbols of the Christian religion are clearly displayed in key locations throughout the school.

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

The daily act of worship is an important feature of the school's life and strongly underpins its Christian character. Acts of worship are lively and stimulating and pupils take as active a part as space will allow: they are well planned and have a strong impact on the lives of pupils, who demonstrate good knowledge of a range of bible stories, Christian festivals and symbols and are able to relate these to their everyday lives. While the school undertakes informal evaluation of the quality and impact of worship on the school community, this is currently not done in any formal way. Pupils are positive about worship – "*Assemblies are great – really cool!*" being typical of their reaction when asked about their experiences. Behaviour is very good and pupils respond actively to questions and opportunities for quiet reflection. Prayer plays an important part in worship and extends beyond assembly time to encompass grace before lunch and pupils sing a range of modern and traditional hymns enthusiastically. The Lord's Prayer is well known to pupils and Anglican responses are used well to signal the start and end of worship. A particular strength is the regular worship in church to which parents are invited, encouraging one parent to refer to "*... the pleasure and constructiveness of Church assemblies*".

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

This is because the headteacher has a clear vision for the development of the school as a Church school and is well supported in this by the staff and clergy. There are outstanding links between the school and the local clergy, which nourish and support the school at every turn. Governors are closely involved in monitoring the school's overall development, but have not yet begun to take a regular, strategic view of the school's development specifically as a *Church* school. The school is genuinely inclusive and celebrates diversity and difference in positive ways. As a result, there is a genuine awareness of the needs of others on the part of all who learn here. Recruitment and induction procedures make it very clear that this is a Church school and what that means and the views of stakeholders are sought positively and regularly. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and its ethos and there are very productive links with the local community, as a result of which the school's open day and Church fete have now become a combined event, encouraging even closer links between the two. Pupils take an active role in charitable giving and demonstrate a developing community and global perspective.