

Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

**Northill Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School
Bedford Road, Northill, Biggleswade SG18 9AH**

Diocese of St Albans

LEA:	Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection:	19 December 2006
Previous S23 Inspection:	
URN:	109621
Headteacher:	Liz Simpson
SIAS Inspector:	Alan Thornsby NSIN 137

Context

Northill Lower School is a small rural school that serves pupils from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, including a number of traveller children. Pupils enter school with a very wide range of abilities although overall the number with learning difficulties is average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Northill Lower School as a Church of England school is good.

This is because the ethos of the school ensures that all are included and supported to achieve well. Worship, religious education and prayer are central to this ethos and enable pupils to show great maturity in their thoughts and actions in their daily lives and relationships.

Established strengths

- The family atmosphere that reflects inclusion and Christian values in action
- The vision of the headteacher realised through shared management and learning opportunities
- The quality of the personal and spiritual development of the pupils

Focus for development

- To improve assessment of RE so that standards continue to rise
- To find creative ways to express the ethos and Christian foundation of the school

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

This is because the school has a firmly rooted ethos of care and respect that underpins a family-like learning environment. Children are happy in their learning and can relate their personal values to future success. Recently reviewed policies reflect the Christian foundation of the school and Christian values are seen in action in the daily lives of everyone in school. All are valued as members of the school community. Pupils speak of their enjoyment in sharing and finding out about other people and their beliefs both at school and home. Pupils display excellent behaviour and confidently articulate the range of rewards and sanctions that underpin this. The inclusive nature of the school ensures that the talents of all are recognised and celebrated in a weekly assembly. Relationships throughout school are based on the practical application of Christian values, all adults providing role models that are mirrored by children. Staff have high expectations of the academic and personal progress of pupils. Their knowledge of each individual enables them to provide the levels of support to enable all pupils to achieve. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural opportunities are made through cross-curricular links and especially through collective worship and religious education where pupils are able to empathise with the feelings of others. Thus spiritual development of pupils is very good, as are moral and social development, which reflect the values found at the heart of the school. School rules and values are displayed in each classroom but there is little to identify the specifically Christian character of the school. This makes it difficult for children to identify the Christian principles that underpin behaviour and relationship. Although displays sometimes reflect Christian character and some reflective questions raise questions, the school does not fully exploit opportunities to celebrate the values and foundation of a Christian school.

The impact of worship on the whole school community is good

Collective worship has a central role in the life of the school and is enjoyed by staff and pupils. It is led by a range of staff and church members, including the vicar. Each member of staff plans a half termly theme that is evaluated by both staff and pupils. They enter quietly and begin with the joyful singing of a 'Good morning' greeting. The sense of worshipping together is strengthened by the way in which both pupils and staff are asked to share contributions, for example 'how are you cared for?' and 'how do you care for young children?' This furthers the understanding of children in sharing life experiences within their community. Good use is made of a CD-rom version of the Bible. Children read aloud accurately and confidently and the projection helps everyone to understand the reading. Pupils understand role of prayer in asking for help and saying please and thank you to God. They have opportunities to write and share prayers in class and worship. They are also responsible for the organisation of resources for worship. They sing enthusiastically to recorded music when the pianist, a visitor from church is not present. Pupils, some of whom have a personal faith commitment, say how worship helps them respect other people and learn how to live their own lives. The pupils' awareness of the Anglican tradition is developed by the use of a candle and liturgical colours draping the central table.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is good

This is because greater attention has been given to RE as a result of the recent revision and evaluation of the revised syllabus which has been cascaded to all staff and has increased confidence in assessment and peer mentoring. Staff and pupils enjoy the subject, which helps to underpin Christian values of the school, especially respect. Christianity is the central area of study and allows other religions to be compared. The quality of teaching is enhanced by the use of creative approaches such as hot seating and freeze frame role-play. These give pupils opportunities to empathise with story lines and characters, so that they learn from religion and are able to relate to their own experience. In a Y3/4 lesson about the influence of Jesus on peoples lives, pupils were able to understand the feelings of different people in the story of Zaccheus and relate learning as 'to be grateful for what you have', 'be kind to all; and 'be

forgiving'. Standards are judged to be in line with other subjects and national expectations for the age of pupils. The quality of marking is improving and is beginning to refer to the religious ideas children need to know. Pupils occasionally respond to this and this is a valuable development in helping pupils reflect on their own work

The leadership and management of the school as a church school are good

The headteacher has a collegiate leadership style, which is appropriate for the size of the school. The recently revised mission statement has enabled joint understanding and ownership because of the input from different groups in the school community. The roles of coordinators are becoming more effective. Everyone understands the importance of collective worship and religious education in reinforcing the schools' Christian values. Prayer is said in worship, lunchtime and end of the day, giving pupils opportunities to write and share their prayers. The headteacher is very committed to raising the spiritual development of pupils using cross-curricular opportunities. Adults in school are role models in their relationships with others that are reflected in the relationships of the children. Communication with parents is via a weekly newsletter and parents know that the staff are readily available to discuss issues that are quickly resolved. The voice of the pupils is heard through the suggestions box and pupils' council, in which even the youngest children are confident in making contributions. The governing body are supportive and work with staff to ensure a shared vision. There are good links with the church that is used for termly services and as a teaching resource. The vicar is dedicated in his commitment to the school and gives strong spiritual support. His commitment and the spiritual dimension of the school have resulted in exploratory discussion about the celebration of the Eucharist in school. The school makes contributions to the well-supported village carol service as well as enjoying the village tradition of maypole dancing. Members of the village have made a number of wall hangings for the school showing Biblical scenes, and shared with pupils the enjoyment of working together, which is a key value of the school.