

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Riseley Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School Church Lane Riseley Bedford MK44 1EL

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Bedfordshire
Date of inspection: 9th May 2012
Date of last inspection: 24th January 2007
School's unique reference number: 109624
Headteacher: David Dyson
Inspector's name and number: Alan Thornsby 137

School context

Riseley Lower School as a below average sized school that serves several local villages with a number of pupils travelling from the town of Rushden. Most pupils are of White British heritage from a mix of social backgrounds, with a greater proportion of boys than girls. Attainment on entry is in line with national expectations and during their time in school most pupils achieve above national expectations.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Riseley Lower as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The high profile of Christian values in the everyday life of the school results in an inclusive and caring learning environment. This promotes a great sense of community where everyone is valued as a unique individual, with strong emphasis on pastoral care. Pupils are given the skills to make good spiritual and moral development because they understand the importance of Christian values and the impact on everyone.

Established strengths

- The commitment of the headteacher, staff and governing body in the provision of a distinctive Christian learning situation
- The Christian love in action that is seen in the everyday life of the school.
- The quality of the pastoral care and impact on the spiritual and moral development of pupils.

Focus for development

- Give pupils greater opportunities to plan and deliver worship
- Collate the assessment procedures in religious education to inform a summary of progress and attainment by pupils.

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

The caring inclusive ethos reflects the Christian values in action that drive the life and policies of the school. This results in excellent relationships throughout the school community. Pupils are valued as individuals and given the challenge and support that enables them to achieve academic and personal success. Effective tracking procedures indicate that pupils make at least good progress. A typical comment from a child reflects the quality of relationships and attitudes to work 'Here teachers help us learn. They look out for you and treat you as an equal.' They also understand that although the school is a Christian school, it welcomes any faith to believe in the values 'just like Jesus did'. When conflicts arise they are quickly and fairly resolved. Pupils can list the values that underpin the ethos and recognise that 'love can include care, respect and trust.' A secure knowledge of the Bible enables pupils to relate the values to the teachings of Jesus, including 'Jesus said we should forgive someone seventy times seven.' The 'values tree' displayed in the hall records the names of pupils recognised for sharing a particular value. Pupils take responsibility for many aspects of school life, including the school council who 'help to make the school a better place,' helped by the Eco team and Litter patrol. Their awareness of service to others includes fundraising for a number of charities. They support the education of a child in India because 'we have much more that he does, so we try to make it fair,' Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent because of the rich creative curriculum, linked to worship and themes in religious education. Displays throughout school reflect and reinforce the distinctive Christian character of the school.

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

The well-planned acts of worship reinforce a monthly value and have secure links with Bible stories. The school council is involved in discussion to develop worship and a range of formats gives all pupils opportunities to fully engage with themes. Pupils have a sense of anticipation as they enter to reflective music which creates a reverent atmosphere. As part of the theme of relationships, the vicar skilfully retold the story of Jacob and Esau, as pupils enacted the story. Although pupils enjoyed the humour of the dramatization, they instantly returned to the quiet atmosphere when necessary. Questioning and discussion by talk partners enabled pupils to suggest the message of the story, as 'God always knows what will happen.' Worship is enhanced by a high standard of meaningful singing. Prayer is an important feature of worship as 'a time to talk to God to ask for help or say sorry'. Prayer at the end of the day gives everyone the opportunity to reflect on the events of the day. Pupils have an understanding of Anglican worship through visits to church and the involvement in festival services in church worship. The annual leavers' service gives older pupils opportunities to reflect on their lives in school and be presented with a Bible. The spiritual life of many pupils is broadened through 'The Aslan Club' run by the vicar and members of the church. The evaluation of worship by foundation governors, that includes visits, discussion and interviews with staff and pupils, indicates the positive impact and spiritual and moral development of the whole school community.

The effectiveness of religious education is good.

The conscientious coordinator has only been in post for a year. During that time she has reviewed the syllabus to provide consistent coverage and extended whole school units such as Easter and Christmas to ensure progression across the school. Thus, good practice in RE is becoming consistently embedded. Staff effectively annotate initial planning to make certain that lessons are appropriate for their class. They also used planning for initial evaluation and pupil assessments. The wide range of activities, including play scripts, poetry and art, allows pupil to learn in different ways. Effective use is made of photographs to record, for example pupils' expressions and emotions in response to empathy with other people. Pupils have a good knowledge of the Bible and the life of Jesus. After explaining values, several pupils recognise that St Paul said 'the greatest of these is love.' Links are consistently made with Christianity. For example, in a study of commitment, Y4 children compared confirmation and Bar Mitzvah. Their written work using 'commitment' as an acrostic showed a good understanding and mature use of language. Teachers carefully explain difficult ideas and concepts so that children can develop their understanding. An imaginary story about a fierce wind and storm that involved the school, the teacher and several of the class, fired the imagination of pupils before they enacted and made freeze frames of the reactions of the disciples at Pentecost. Books show a range of work, although worksheets occasionally do not provide sufficient challenge to further the reasoning of pupils. For example the question 'how did you feel?' does not give pupils the opportunity to extend their thinking of 'how or why'. Although planning and work is often levelled, information is not brought together to give a summary of achievement or progress. However, the school is very aware that standards are in line with other subjects and that some pupils perform better orally than in written work.

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

The headteacher, staff and governors share a commitment to a set of values that are securely linked to Christian teachings in every aspect of school life. There is a committed drive to further increase the profile of the distinctive Christian character of the school. Foundation governor effectively maintain an overview of the distinctiveness and the links with church. Staff and governors are involved in self-assessment and review of the school as a church school that ensure links between worship and RE and drive development. Questionnaires and interviews with adults and children show their positive attitudes and the impact of the ethos on the spiritual and moral lives of everyone. The impact of Christian values on pupils is at the heart of every decision. This ensures that any issues are addressed with sensitivity and compassion. There are good procedures for induction of staff and governors to enable them to understand working in a church school. This is continued through effective training for curriculum and personal development. Parents praise the work of the school and the way that Christian values are instilled in children from an early age. They welcome the range of communication that keeps them informed of values and work of the school. Typical comments from parents are 'here our children receive a good balance of moral values' and 'our children come home with questions that we can explore and find the answers together'. Parents show their support for the school through supporting the active PTA who ensure that events reflect the Christian foundation of the school. The school enjoys strong partnerships with the local village and church communities.