



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



Spellbrook Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
London Road, Spellbrook, Sawbridgeworth CM23 4BA

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 3rd July 2008
Previous S23 Inspection: June 2003
URN: 117405
Headteacher: Matthew Land
SIAS Inspector Name: Lyn Field
SIAS Inspector No: 151

School Context

This small school serves the village of Spellbrook and the surrounding area. The majority of pupils are White British and about 20% come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. When they start school pupils' attainment is broadly average and the proportion with learning difficulties or disabilities is higher than usual. This is the headteacher's first year in post.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Spellbrook as a Church of England school are good

Each child in the school is valued for their individual qualities. This is as important to pupils as to the staff and demonstrates the strong Christian values of the school. The dynamic leadership of the headteacher has focused everyone on taking responsibility for the quality of life in school. His clear vision is shared by the vicar and together they have given new direction to the school as a church school. The rapid progress made this year and the effective support of the staff indicate there is the capacity for this to become an outstanding church school.

Established strengths

- The headteacher's clear leadership and ability to bring about improvement
- The excellent relationships between children and adults
- The work of the vicar in raising the school's Christian profile
- The outstanding impact of worship on pupils' spiritual development

Focus for development

- To make use of pupils' views in planning the next steps for worship
- To include spiritual development in planning the curriculum and classroom organisation
- To include areas for improvement as a church school in the school's self-evaluation and development plan

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

Pupils of all ages work and play together as one big family. The youngest children are confident to approach the oldest pupils who give them firm but friendly guidance. It is clear that everyone is included. A typical comment was 'I feel everyone knows me and wants me to join in'. Pupils are rightly proud of this aspect of their school and have thought about how it happens. They explain that 'differences aren't a difficulty, you are not judged here, people are interested in you for who you are'.

Relationships between adults and children are excellent and provide a model that pupils follow for themselves. They understand the Christian values of love and trust that they are expected to show because these are clearly taught in worship. This gives older pupils the confidence to take an increasing amount of responsibility in school. The manner in which they guide pupils in assembly helps maintain the excellent behaviour in school.

Pupils are taking a more active role in their learning. For example, they have created sculptures and dens in the grounds from natural materials found there. The youngest children make rabbit and bird scarers to protect the fruit and vegetables they grow and then eat at snack time. Activities of this kind have the potential to enrich pupils' spiritual development but the opportunities for this are not recognised at the planning stage. This is true for the majority of subjects and there is little in classroom displays to challenge pupils with questions about faith or issues of deeper human concern.

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

The changes made over the last year have transformed pupils' attitudes to worship. On two days in the week, when the vicar and the headteacher lead worship, they are actively involved in a series of activities that mirror the pattern of Sunday worship. These include simple exchanges of welcome, an opening song and the Lord's Prayer delivered in a way that makes church liturgy accessible to children. The real sense of joy with which pupils respond clearly makes this an outstanding element of worship in the school. This development has been successful because the vicar and headteacher have a clear idea of what they are trying to achieve. Pupils recall the central meaning of stories long after they are told because the props are well chosen to represent important Christian messages. Good use is made of time for quiet reflection. For example, some pupils say they think about how they would cope in situations that faced characters in the stories they have heard. Others use the time to consider actions they are sorry about in preparation for the prayers that follow. Worship clearly makes a significant impact on the spiritual development of pupils. The school knows there are areas still to be addressed such as giving pupils and staff the chance to make a creative contribution to worship. It is clear, however, that the focus on a single area has been effective this year and has inspired both the vicar and the children. Pupils have gained more from worship than the school realises because insufficient attention has been given to gathering their views. This means the school does not have the best information available to help plan the next stage of development.

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

Pupils, staff and parents recognise that there has been a significant change in the Christian character of the school since the arrival of the new headteacher. His vision for Christian values as central to the school's effectiveness was a key factor in his appointment. The rapid improvements that have followed, particularly in worship, are the result of a strong partnership with the vicar and the support of the staff. The church congregation is now well informed about activities in the school and promotes its achievements in the local community. It provides practical and financial help, for example, for the purchase of a large cross and modern versions of the Bible. The school now has a second identity not just as the school serving Spellbrook but as the church school of Great St Mary's. The response of parents to a questionnaire gives clear pointers for development that match areas already identified. They are unanimous in their view that the school has clear strengths in the way it includes and values all pupils. There is clearly still improvement needed in the spiritual opportunities for pupils and the information parents receive about religious education. There is a growing awareness of being part of the Diocese. The adviser is working with the headteacher to raise standards in religious education and pupils understand how their local parish is part of a bigger picture. A few individual governors have a clear idea of how the school needs to move forward. However, the significance of its Christian ethos for the management and organisation of the school, has not been embraced by the governing body as a whole. As a result, the very positive impact this already has on pupils does not have a part in the overall development plan for the school.