



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Giles Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Blanche Lane, South Mymms, Potters Bar EN6 3PE

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 21st May 2007
Previous S23 Inspection: March 2002
URN: 117564
Headteacher: Sally Bishop
SIAS Inspector Name: Lyn Field
SIAS Inspector No: NS 151

School Context

This is a small school where recent improvement means it is now over-subscribed. A few children are of minority ethnic origin and are learning English as a second language. The attainment of pupils when they enter the school is about average and the proportion with learning difficulties is slightly above.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Giles' School as a Church of England school are good

Trust has been re-established between all groups in the school community and parents are now confident that their children are nurtured and develop spiritual and moral values that will have life long impact. At the heart of this improvement is the headteacher whose clear vision and incisive management have given new direction to the school.

Established strengths

- The vision and leadership of the headteacher
- The quality of self-evaluation that identifies clear steps for improvement
- Links with the church support the curriculum and reinforce the school's role in the community
- Christian values underpin the school's strengths in listening and nurturing children

Focus for development

- To maintain the momentum in worship by exploring further imaginative and creative projects
- To focus the monitoring of religious education on the progress in children's learning

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

The introduction of Values Education and a programme for Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning is clearly supporting pupils' personal development although the school intends to make further evaluations of their impact. The focused review of teaching and learning is now a regular part of management and is a key factor in recent improvement in standards. Children are becoming skilled in describing emotions so teachers can now pose challenging questions like, for example, the distinction between jealousy and anger. This is reinforced by posters and captions around the school that encourage children to express their feelings with honesty and sensitivity. Teachers are excellent models in the way they care for pupils and as a result, children spontaneously support each other. Self-esteem is high and they are motivated to learn and actively participate in lessons which ensures they make good progress. Their heightened awareness of values challenges materialistic attitudes and this is welcomed by parents who feel the school supports them in their role. The Christian context of values is implicit in the way behaviour is managed and children can explain how reconciliation is important in resolving any tensions. Good links between subjects such as literacy and RE, are helping children to make natural connections that give rise to fundamental questions about the bigger issues in life. These links are not yet sufficiently well embedded in planning to make a substantial impact on spiritual development.

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

The headteacher and the vicar have developed a good working relationship and a new pattern of worship is emerging. Their fresh and imaginative approach to the Christian festivals and the seasons and colours of the church year is giving children a real sense of Anglican tradition. A striking worship table indicates the point in the church year and includes contributions from children. It is a constant reminder that the hall is regularly a distinctive place of reverence in the school day and has raised the whole profile of worship. This work of the headteacher and vicar is still evolving but by working step by step and evaluating every stage, they are shaping an aspirational model of worship that precisely meets the needs and characteristics of this community. This school listens carefully to pupils and a good example is the discussions around collective worship and RE that have been recorded. This has already provided valuable feedback about children's attitudes and what they understand but the school still intends to use a more open style of questioning to provide even more precise information to inform the development plan. The routines of prayer and reflection are well established in worship and have an impact beyond the school day. Children use personal prayer and talk about the key messages of worship and their favourite hymns at home.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

The standards that pupils achieve are broadly average and are improving because the good quality of teaching in the early years is raising expectations and creating very positive attitudes to the subject. Lessons are challenging but they have a clear structure that acts as a scaffold for children to follow in grasping difficult concepts. Teaching assistants model good learning habits and all children remain engaged throughout the lesson because they are offered a variety of ways in which to respond to questions such as facial expressions, mind maps and talking with a partner. In Links with literacy and PSE help children learn more effectively. In Years 5 & 6, for example, they can extract factual information from an interview with the vicar about her role and distinguish this from the emotional responses to understand the spiritual dimension of her work. The headteacher and co-ordinator both observe lessons but their monitoring focuses too strongly on the range of teaching strategies and not enough on what difference teaching makes to how well children learn. This makes it difficult to identify exactly where improvement should be made. Older pupils know how well they are doing and like the balance between the time they spend on Christianity and on other faiths because it is good preparation for life beyond school.

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

The headteacher inspires people to constantly strive for improvement. Her self-evaluation is perceptive and therefore, any actions taken show a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve. Staff listen effectively to children in order to nurture their development. As a result the trust of the community has been re-established in the school after a period of instability. The school is again seen as playing its rightful role in the village through its association with the church. This is about more than combined village events because the presence of the church in the school is making a difference to pupils' all round development. The creative partnership between the headteacher and the vicar is what they describe as an 'organic model of growth'. It is indeed evolving in a way that allows the Christian ethos to contribute to the broad curriculum and children and parents of all faith backgrounds value being part of a worshipping community. Foundation governors ensure that decisions are in the spirit of the Christian faith and the context of the village. The impact of the headteacher's leadership is an outstanding feature of the school and explains why the school is making rapid progress as a church school.