

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Sutton Voluntary Aided Lower School

High Street
Sutton
Sandy
SG19 2NE

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority:	Central Bedfordshire
Dates of inspection:	24 th April 2012
Date of last inspection:	December 2006
School's unique reference number:	109626
Headteacher:	Sarah Stevens (Elizabeth Dun - Acting)
Inspector's name and number:	Catherine Large 482

School context

Sutton VA Lower School is a small village school with three classes, two of which have children from more than one year group. Pupils come from the village of Sutton and the surrounding area. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is below average. Nearly all pupils come from White British backgrounds.

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

Sutton VA Lower School is an outstanding church school. It provides a very caring and supportive environment for pupils and they flourish in their personal spiritual and moral development and in all aspects of their learning. All share a strong sense of the school's ethos being rooted in Christian values.

Established strengths

- The commitment of the leadership and management team, including the governors, to meeting the highest ideals for a church school
- The strong and effective links with the church community
- The high quality of relationships in all areas of the school community
- The effectiveness of teaching and learning in religious education

Focus for development

- Ensure that recent positive developments continue to strengthen the process of self-evaluation as a church school
- In religious education, increase opportunities for pupils to develop and show achievement in their skills of enquiry and reflection
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to take leadership roles in collective worship, both in whole school and class worship.

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

The school's programme of values education makes a strong contribution to the Christian ethos of the school. It has significant impact on the quality of relationships and working environment. Pupils grow in confidence and are happy in school. As they move through the year groups, their work is closely monitored by teachers and this means that pupils of all abilities make very good progress. Pupils are all very aware of the school's Christian status and they respond very positively to religious education and collective worship. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced by the good opportunities provided for participation in local, national and Diocesan events and competitions, strong links with a partner school in Kenya, and the frequency of daily moments of prayer and reflection. Music has a high profile in the school and pupils are enthusiastic about singing, winning an area competition recently. Behaviour is excellent, pupils contributing to their own classroom codes of conduct. There are strong bonds between the pupils themselves with Year 4 pupils taking their responsibilities seriously. Teachers respond to pupils' concerns and ideas and this is exemplified in the change from a School Council, involving small numbers of pupils, to a School 'Parliament' where all pupils have an opportunity to speak with the head teacher. The school grounds are exceptionally spacious and well equipped and include a sensory garden and area for pets. Pupils, clergy, staff and parents all value the wooden Gazebo in the grounds which is often used for worship. It is evident from displays around school that pupils are encouraged to be reflective about their own experiences in life. For example, in the Foundation classroom, there is a display on 'Wow' moments where pupils have described their own special times of wonder. Teachers recognise that these opportunities could be further strengthened throughout the curriculum and training is planned to highlight them in planning.

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

Pupils value collective worship and it promotes the Christian nature of the school very well. It is well structured and planned so that pupils experience a variety of styles and leadership. The local church is very active in supporting the school both through the priest in charge and through the congregation, members of whom participate in 'Open the Book' worship. There are also contributions from a local Baptist minister. Pupils respond well to opportunities to participate. They show respect and are reflective and thoughtful. They sing enthusiastically. Pupils are familiar with some aspects of Anglican worship and this is reinforced when the whole school community worships in the church. They value the experience of being blessed at the altar and speak of feeling that 'God is really close'. Whole school worship at the church takes place on three occasions during the liturgical year but many participate with the community at other times, such as at the Christingle and Mothering Sunday services. Clubs run by members of the church have resulted in additional contributions to community worship, for example, through drama and the flower festival. The close links with the church are having some impact on parents who speak of being reminded by their children of key Christian beliefs and there are also examples of families attending church and asking for their children to be baptised. The school is considering how these links with the church can be further strengthened. Since the last inspection, the school has started to formally evaluate the effectiveness of worship and is responding well to pupils' comments and suggestions. They recognise that pupils would like to take more active roles in planning and leading worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Religious education is very well regarded in the school. There have been significant developments over recent months as the new Agreed Syllabus has been introduced and teachers have been trained well. Planning across the classes is very thorough and the quality of teaching and learning is always good and often outstanding. Pupils show interest in their work and their attainment in many aspects of the subject, such as knowledge and understanding of Christianity and Judaism, is above average. They show interest in other world faiths but are not as confident in their understanding. They appreciate encountering members of other faith groups, for example, in their bi-annual visit to the Queen's Park faith Tour in Bedford. Pupils enjoy the range of activities and resources in religious education. For example, Years 1 and 2 were captivated by the telling of a Jewish story using the Godly Play method and resources and were able to explain the meaning of the story and the key information. They enter into discussion very well and are confident in expressing their own ideas and beliefs. There is not always sufficient opportunity in Key Stages 1 and 2 to develop the skills of enquiry and reflection in lessons and tasks do not always draw out this aspect of RE sufficiently for teachers to measure progress. The school recognises the need to strengthen this dimension. It is well established in the Foundation years. At the last inspection, assessment of progress was at an early stage. Teachers are now much more confident with the standards expected in the subject and are beginning to create portfolios of work to exemplify standards. The subject is very well managed and resourced.

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

There is a very strong commitment to the Christian vision for the school by all in leadership and management positions, including all teachers and the governing body. At the last inspection, this aspect was judged to be outstanding. Since then, a new head teacher has been appointed who, with the support of the team, has renewed the drive towards excellence, introducing strategies to ensure Sutton meets the highest expectations for church schools. Although many of these are still in early stages, evidence indicates that they are proving effective. The Values programme links clearly with the Christian ethos and pupils recognise the difference this makes to their school community. Relationships with the church are strong, pupils participating in worship and displaying work in the church. Parents speak highly of the school's impact on their children's development and learning. They appreciate the 'open door' policy and the contacts that are made through newsletters and surveys. Any uncertainties that emerge from surveys of pupils and parents are addressed by the school. Links with the Diocese are good although there is very little specific indication of this connection in displays in school. The school has close relationships with schools in the local area, often leading other teachers in areas of development. Teachers also have good opportunities to develop their expertise in aspects of church school management as a consequence of the strategies in place and the strong sense of teamwork that is so evident in the school.