



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



**Wilden Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School
High Street, Wilden, Bedford MK44 2PB**

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Bedford Borough
SIAS Inspection: 21 October 2009
Previous S48 Inspection: June 2007
URN: 109627
Headteacher: Jenny Overs
SIAS Inspector Name: Alan Thornsby
SIAS Inspector No: 127

School context

Wilden Lower is a small rural school that serves a wide catchment area. The majority of pupils are White British and a fewer than average number have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has gained the International Schools and Healthy Schools Awards.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Wilden Lower as a Church of England school are good.

The secure foundation of Christian love in action and resulting relationships means that everyone in school is recognised as being unique. This allows pupils to develop academically and personally because of the way pupils are encouraged to explore and express their thoughts in a safe and secure environment.

Established strengths

- The caring ethos of unconditional love that nurtures the lives of pupils and adults in school
- The impact of religious education and worship on the development of pupils' moral and spiritual thinking
- The very effective links with the local community
- The 'learning platform' that supports the learning of the whole community

Focus for development

- Identify, make explicit and celebrate the specific Christian values that underpin the ethos and practice of the school
- Provide an area in school to enhance the opportunities, raised in religious education and worship, for pupils' reflection and spiritual development

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

The school has an outstanding welcoming atmosphere that allows visitors and pupils to immediately feel part of this inclusive learning environment. This results in excellent relationships between all members of the school and wider community. Everyone is regarded as being unique and the school goes to great lengths to ensure the specific needs of each individual are recognized and supported by all. Although unconditional love, care and respect are key features seen in action in the daily life and routines of the school, they are often implicit in the documentation. The constant reference to WWJD (What would Jesus do?) gives pupils the opportunities to explore and express their opinions and actions within the context to the teachings of Jesus and make links between worship, religious education and their daily lives. The school makes excellent use of a learning platform that provides resources, links and information for the whole school community. The spiritual moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good because of links with and visits to local and international schools, the culture of music and language teaching and the impact of worship and religious education in informing pupils choices and decision-making. The school council ably represents the views of the school in areas such as suggesting improvement and charity support. The use of the school as a polling station and the involvement of pupils during the day increased their understanding of citizenship. Although there are opportunities for reflection during worship and in class, the school currently has no areas for pupils to withdraw for quiet reflection during the day.

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

Worship is a key feature of the school in developing values and the responses of everyone. There is a well-planned cycle of themes that is regularly evaluated to review impact and future developments. Pupils' thinking is challenged because of the well-established format for worship that is used by the range of leaders that includes all staff and the vicar who is a regular visitor to the school leading school and church services. Pupils have a good understanding of the Christian year and plan and deliver festival services in church. The school engages the whole community in sharing faith through, for example, their involvement in the construction of a display over a weeklong exploration of the creation story. Pupils of other faiths use such opportunities to share aspects of their faith. Pupils have a good understanding of the value of prayer as talking to God to ask for help, say sorry and 'we don't even have to speak out loud and God still hears'. Pupils place their prayers on the prayer wall and these are shared during worship. The prayer board also gives them opportunities to share their explanation of the parables of Jesus. The high profile and importance of 'thinking time' in the school, both in worship and in lessons is well used even by the youngest children. This was well illustrated by the young voice exclaiming 'don't forget to turn the light off' as the candle was lit.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Pupils enjoy religious education and end of unit assessment and tracking procedures show they make good progress. Achievement is comparable with that in other core subjects. This is supported by pupils' written work and includes marking comments that further challenge their thinking. The coordinator has ensured the syllabus is suitable for the school by blending themes from both the diocesan and local authority syllabus. The youngest children are able to relate learning to their own experiences, such as acts of worship or visits to church. This is reinforced by the use of suitable story books such as 'Puddles the Church cat'. Older pupils are able to develop their thinking and reasoning skills when, for example, exploring the arguments for and against choices related to Bible stories. The school now makes very effective use of information technology in religious education that includes a range of homework-based activities. Pupils have a growing awareness of the diversity of faiths within the community because of a visit to Queens Park to visit different places of worship and the contributions made in school by parents and pupils of other faiths. Pupils value the opportunities to share their knowledge and personal beliefs as a way of valuing each other.

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

The head has a clear vision, shared with the whole community, for the school to be a place of welcome where, as the head stated, everyone is 'free to be themselves'. All are given opportunities to grow in faith and make decisions based on their response to and experience of worship and the stories of Jesus. The School Development Plan indicates the need to ensure the ethos is embedded throughout all areas of school life, including displays. Although these are securely founded on Christian principles, the school has not explored the impact of specific Christian values on the practice of the school. The foundation governors however, do understand and ensure the school maintains and develops its distinctive Christian character. Staff and governors are able to work and plan as a team because of the size of the school. This allows them to accurately identify and evaluate future development and training needs and ensures effective succession planning. Parents praise the school for its happy atmosphere where Christian values promote caring and sharing. They describe the school as 'being part of a big family'. Parents and pupils of other faiths enjoy the privilege of being able to share and discuss their faith with others. The school has many links with the village community and shares the organisation of the annual May Day celebrations.