



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



St Michael's Woolmer Green Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
London Road, Woolmer Green, Herts SG3 6JP

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 7th June 2007
Previous S23 Inspection: 26th-28th June 2002
URN: 117461
Headteacher: Mrs Mary Westley
SIAS Inspector Name: Mrs Mel Adams
SIAS Inspector No: 58

School Context

This small village school welcomes pupils of all faiths and none, primarily from the local community. The majority of the pupils live in the immediate area. Families may attend the parish church of St Michael's, local churches or other places of worship. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low, the number of those with learning difficulties broadly average and none are at the early stages of learning English. Most pupils are from white British backgrounds. Attainment overall is broadly in line with national averages.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Michael's Woolmer Green as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The absolute commitment of the Headteacher and Governing Body to Gospel values is clearly evident in all aspects of the life of the school community. There is clear cohesion between the daily Collective Worship, Religious Education, and the way staff and children work and play together. The Christian values are inspired by the clear belief that these are based on the example of the life and teachings of Jesus. As a result the behaviour of the children is excellent contributing to a calm and ordered environment for learning.

Established strengths

- The dynamic Christian leadership of the Headteacher
- The way in which the knowledge and understanding in religious education and the experience of Collective worship set very clear Christian values
- The impact of the Christian values on the whole school community, and in particular on the personal development, well being and learning experiences of the children

Focus for development

- To further develop assessment for learning in Religious Education to enable more thorough assessment of learning from religion.

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

The ability of the children to articulate with real conviction how the Christian values they learn and understand in Religious Education and Collective Worship affect their behaviour, decision making and the school as a family, is a clear indication of how the outstanding Christian character of the school meets the needs of all its learners. They see the importance of academic progress, but recognise that without the values they adopt, they would be unable to work and play together. Describing how friendship and forgiveness are inseparable and are the most important, they understand that they are following the example of Jesus. All children are at ease and feel safe in the Christian family atmosphere. Those new to the school, whether in foundation stage or later are welcomed and supported by staff and children. One parent described how this welcome had helped them as newcomers to become part of the wider community. Awareness of the needs of others leads children to fund raise for organisations locally and beyond. The development of a global perspective is further enriched by learning in Religious Education and visiting different places of worship, giving children a solid foundation for growing up in a multicultural society. Displays and artefacts in classrooms, including colourful crosses from El Salvador, and the prayer book in the hall, further support the Christian ethos. The distinctive Christian character of the school impacts on all who learn and work there. The very evident Christian values shape the children's personal development, and impact significantly on all relationships, and as a result, on learning in all areas.

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

Described by a child as, 'a place I can just go and be, and learn about God', Collective Worship is central to the life and work of the school. Children describe how the Christian values, 'doing things the way Jesus says', help them to make right decisions and solve problems. They also relate how the way in which they are treated with fairness and respect by all staff is because of the values they share together. All staff, and children of different faiths and none attend collective worship, participating fully in a calm atmosphere created by music, a candle they know to represent Jesus as the light of the world, excellent singing and prayer. Prayer is highly valued, and the prayer box, available for children to write and present their personal prayers, is commended weekly, both in an assembly and a church service. Fully supporting the weekly themes and the Anglican calendar, the Priest takes a weekly assembly, giving the children a growing understanding of the church as people, as well as a building. Festival times are celebrated in church, and the children have a developing awareness of the Eucharist through their knowledge of the bread and wine.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Along with Collective Worship, Religious Education is seen as underpinning the work of the school. Highly valued by children, they describe how the school would not be a Church school without Religious Education, as this is where they learn more about the values which steer their relationships and reaching out to others through their charity fund raising. One child talked of how Religious Education is about 'stories with a message' and how the messages 'pop into your head at other times and help you to decide what to do'. Children recognise that learning about different faiths helps their understanding and relationships now, and prepares them for their lives in the future. Where learning and teaching in Religious Education is good or better, children have opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding which are relevant both to them and to society. This is often created by good teacher questioning, helping children to make links to religious concepts, illustrated by the child who was able to say that Nelson Mandela's battle with apartheid made him like the Good Samaritan. Where recorded work is good or better, the children are able to write about their own understanding, such as 'What I have learned from Saul'. Where marking is good, it provides feedback on religious concepts. Cross curricular approaches such as drama,

making videos, and writing in a range of genres providing open ended task such as newspaper reports, enhances the learning about religious and faith concepts. Where these strategies are not used, and opportunities for observational assessment and assessment for learning are not as well developed, the children's learning can be limited. Parents from different faiths have contributed to the learning in RE, for example talking from a Muslim perspective. Visits to different places of worship are a regular feature of provision. The Church is regularly visited, contributing significantly to understanding of Anglican faith and practice.

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

The very strong partnership between the Governing Body, Headteacher and Priest, driven by values described as 'Gospel values' based on the life and example of Jesus, steer the shared vision and inform leadership and management decisions. The extent to which all those in leadership refer to the importance of prayer in decision making is dynamic. This is illustrated by the way in which the Priest and Headteacher were able to provide prayers and support in the church following the shock created when part of the school building collapsed. Church school self evaluation informs the School Improvement Plan. A significant part of the evaluation and planning process, RE is monitored by the Headteacher, who is the highly effective co-ordinator, and also the priest, keeping the Governing Body informed about developments and standards. The Headteacher leads with a powerful Christian purpose, which motives all aspects of her day by day work, decision making, and relationships with children, parents and staff. Children's personal development, including the academic, social, emotional and spiritual, steered by a clear Christian vision, are the core purpose for all in leadership, and this is shared by all staff. The Christian vision is seen to complement and support Every Child Matters, and this is most certainly the case in this outstandingly led distinctively Christian school. Parents are very supportive and clear what the school stands for, and appreciate clear communication, and consultation. They describe how the love of God and self, and the morals taught, are, 'like a river running through the school'. They find the Headteacher, staff and Governors approachable and available and their concerns are always dealt with. There are many effective links with the local community and children regularly, on their own initiative, fund raise for both local and national charities.