

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### Thomas Whitehead Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School

Angels Lane  
Houghton Regis  
Dunstable  
LU5 5HH

#### Diocese: St Albans

Local Authority:	Central Bedfordshire
Date of inspection:	17 <sup>th</sup> November 2011
Date of last inspection:	18 <sup>th</sup> November 2008
School's unique reference number:	109701
Headteacher:	Elaine Fairclough
Inspector's name and number:	Alan Thornsby NSIN 137

#### School context

Thomas Whitehead is an average sized school where most pupils are of White British origin. The proportion of pupils from other backgrounds is average as is the percentage of pupils with special needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly higher than the national average. The headteacher has been in post for two terms.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Thomas Whitehead as a Church of England school are good.

The appointment of the headteacher has given the school the opportunity to reassess its Christian distinctiveness and further address the development points from the previous inspection. There is a great sense of excitement at the opportunities for development of this school, where values impact on the personal and academic progress of pupils.

#### Established strengths

- The impact of the values on pupils and the school community
- The vision and leadership of the head
- The commitment of leadership and management to further the distinctiveness as a church school

#### Focus for development

- Ensure the school values are explicitly linked to Christian teaching
- Develop an effective system for the monitoring and evaluation of worship
- Improve standards in RE through rigorous assessment to inform planning and differentiation

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

The school has a distinctive Christian ethos that is underpinned by a range of values and themes from the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) with links to Christian teaching. This ensures a welcoming and caring school where children feel valued and supported. Their welcome for visitors is equally generous. Pupils know they are safe and understand the importance of forgiveness and fresh start because relationships are good. Children behave well and are polite and confident, explaining 'we forgive each other if we fall out.' They understand that being in a church school means 'we care for each other just like God loves all of us.' Pupils are increasingly more challenged and supported in lessons because teachers are gaining confidence in planning for differing abilities. The school is working to further increase opportunities to develop spiritual, moral social and cultural development with links across the curriculum. Effective displays throughout the school, for example the cross, candle and prayer box in the entrance area proclaim the Christian distinctiveness of the school. The values tree in the hall is a reminder of the range of values shared in the school and the display of crosses and stained glass windows in the reception class reflect how the Christian ethos is cross curricular.

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

Worship is underpinned by an informative policy that is reviewed annually. Themes are well planned by the headteacher and senior leadership team. Themes are based on 'Values in schools' and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' with secure links to Christian teachings. Pupils and staff consistently refer to themes during the day reflecting the impact of worship on the whole school community. Informal discussion informs evaluation and has for example resulted in the music coordinator being part of the planning team to ensure consistency and secure links with accompanying music. The school has rightly identified the need to introduce a more rigorous system of evaluation. Pupils enjoy worship and understand the need for reverence, explaining 'it is a special time to be quiet, think about how to behave and talk to God.' Their engagement in worship, posing question, some related to 'big questions' results in displays such as 'what would you ask Jesus?' The vicar leads worship in school each month and this with regular visits to the church for services and a place of learning develops pupils' awareness of Anglican worship. The school has also identified the need to further develop worship through a greater use of the Anglican liturgy. Pupils process to church carrying the school cross and candle to reinforce their awareness that 'Jesus is the light of the world.' Pupils have a good understanding of the value of and types of prayer and recognise the importance of 'Our Father'. Each week a group of pupils from each class is responsible for writing and sharing prayers for worship.

**The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory.**

Religious Education (RE) has an increasingly developing profile in the life of the school, with displays in every classroom. The joint coordinators have carried out an audit and created an action plan that informs the school development plan. This includes a revised syllabus based on the locally agreed syllabus and diocesan guidelines. Although teachers carry out basic assessment at the end of each topic, the results do not give sufficient information about pupils progress or attainment. However the school has recognised the need to develop more rigorous assessment procedures, based in levelling work, to give more information to inform planning and secure learning about and from religion. There are many good practices in the teaching of RE including planning and pace of lessons, the sharing of learning objectives and effective use of teachers questioning skills to develop the thinking of pupils. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and quickly assimilate new vocabulary and challenge of lessons. For example, pupils learning about the Passover Seder meal quickly began to use Jewish terms before exploring their own symbolic meals. Younger children explored the characteristics a good leader before recognising Moses as a special leader. However, despite the many good features of lessons, they are often only satisfactory. This is because teachers do not focus sufficiently on achieving learning objectives, but give pupils too much information, leaving them with little time to successfully tackle activities.

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

The headteacher has a clear vision to develop the school 'where children learn in a distinctive church school'. Since her appointment the school has made good progress in addressing the development points from the previous inspection. She is well supported by the senior leadership team and governors in achieving this. Staff and governors have undergone training in making values more explicit in the life of the school and this is to be extended to other adults working in school. A number of informal evaluations show that Implicit Christian values underpin the practice and policy of the school and inform decision-making. Staff and governors have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school. Foundation governors are aware of their role in developing the distinctive ethos of the school and further developing the links with church. Action plans, with realistic time scales reflect the commitment of the school to future development. There is a real sense of excitement in the school about these opportunities. Parents praise the work of the school and the impact of values on pupils attitudes to work and other people. Typical comments from parents, such as 'this is a lovely school where traditional values are taught' and 'my child comes home wanting to talk about things he has learned in school' reflect the distinctiveness of the school. The school has good links with the local Academy. Links with another church primary school are supporting the school to realize its potential through shared projects and training opportunities. The school also shares events such as Remembrance Day with the community