



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



Meppershall Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School
High Street, Meppershall, Shefford SG17 5LZ

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Central Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection: November 16th 2010
Previous S48 Inspection: 23rd September 2008
URN: 109620
Headteacher: Mrs Lyn Fairweather
SIAS Inspector Name: Mrs Mel Adams
SIAS Inspector No: 58

School Context

The school is a lower school within walking distance of the parish church of St Mary the Virgin with whom they work closely. There are 5 classes covering Reception Foundation stage through to year 4. Standards throughout the school are good. Pupils are admitted largely on residency in the village along with church criteria which includes both Anglican and other denominations in the local area. The percentage of children from minority ethnic groups is below average and the majority have English as a first language.

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

Meppershall Lower school is an outstanding Church of England school because the continued impact of its distinctive Christian character permeates all aspects of school life. This ensures that day by day staff and children, inspired by the solid foundation of Christian values, are able to focus on the highest standards, and are inspired to draw on their understanding of the spiritual to further sustain and nurture relationships throughout the school and beyond.

Established strengths

- The outstanding leadership of the governing body, including the Rector, in managing the challenge of ensuring continuity of the school's distinctiveness and effectiveness as a Church of England school
- The ongoing impact of Christian values throughout the school community, ensuring excellent behaviour, attitudes to learning and spiritual development.

Focus for development

- To raise standards in RE by providing children with opportunities to record their learning at the same high level as their understanding
- To further develop community cohesion by ensuring that children have a clear understanding of both religious and cultural diversity
- To sustain and develop further the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school by systematically monitoring with all stakeholders

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

Christian values underpin the life of the school and have continued to develop since the previous inspection. Where there are difficulties, for example in managing behaviour, staff and children are able to draw on their values to engage and motivate towards resolution and reconciliation. This has supported and nurtured the ongoing vision for the school and the new Head teacher is leading dynamically to develop Christian values and the distinctive Christian character of the school. The celebration of very clear Christian values is evident immediately through the displays in the entrance hall and the hall. As a result, behaviour is excellent and children are able to express how their understanding of values such as respect and friendship ensure that 'relationships with everyone are good'. They have a clear understanding of their responsibilities towards each other and their contribution to the local area such as visiting a care home. There are excellent links with a number of local organisations, including ecumenical links with other denominations. Spiritual development is well nurtured through opportunities for reflection. One child was able to express how in collective worship they would 'pick out things that are said and try and do them' and through singing a song in worship, another child subsequently talked to their parent about what happens after death. Citizenship is developed in a number of ways with children able to contribute to the day to life of the school, such as helping to set up for worship. They also contribute at a more strategic level, illustrated by the child whose e-mail to the Rector resulted in an alternative Halloween party. Relationships throughout the school community are excellent. Newly created reflective areas in classrooms are recognised by the children but they have yet to be used throughout the school. The children are reminded through the lighting of the dandle in worship that 'God is with us'. This is the intention expressed in the new collective worship policy, and this awareness was evident in discussion with children and through observations throughout the inspection.

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

The impact of collective worship on the school is outstanding because all members of the school community participate and draw inspiration and motivation from it. During the inspection children were seen to be attentive, listening well and answering questions. They say they enjoy worship and that it is a peaceful part of the day. Worship extends beyond the daily assembly into the school day as children say they are able to pray either in their classrooms or sometimes outdoors. Children's spiritual development is well supported, as they appreciate what they hear about God and stories about Jesus, saying this helps them to be thoughtful. One child described reflections on 'how God made us and lets us be part of this school'. Another child described how they create an image of Jesus which makes them think how he felt when he went to the cross. Through ongoing excellent partnership with the church including weekly assemblies taken by the Rector and Curate, and services in church for festivals, children have a very good appreciation of Anglican faith and practice. This was well illustrated in the Reception class where they had built a model of a church labelled with the things they would see in church, along with photographs of weddings which they were learning about. The school has yet to systematically evaluate collective worship including Christian values with all stakeholders. Currently worship is planned in accordance with Diocesan guidelines and this ably supports the school's excellent values education.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is good overall because in discussion, children show good levels of understanding, concepts and skills which develop throughout their time in school. Children in year 4 were able to describe how through learning about the story of Zaccheus, they understood that God can make a difference in people's lives. Although children are able to show understanding through discussion, this is not reflected in their recorded work. Feedback through marking does not yet refer to religious understanding and although children are reflective, there are insufficient opportunities for them to self or peer assess. They enjoy learning about other faiths such as Judaism, but have yet to develop a clear understanding of the difference between faith and culture. Where higher order questioning is used, children's thinking is developed as in the year 1 lesson where a child was able to ask the question, 'What does it feel like to be in heaven?' and another, 'Why is there a future?' Children say they enjoy learning in RE and that it is really important as they are in a church school. They understand how what they learn contributes to their day to day lives, giving them an understanding of the spiritual: 'We know that God is there all the time and that we can pray'. They are also able to reflect on how the values they learn about helps them practically, looking after the school and taking care of equipment. The distinctive Christian character of the school is clearly affirmed through their learning as observed in the year 4 class where children, inspired by the story of the wise and foolish builders were able to identify how a range of Christian values form the foundations of their own lives. Although RE is important in the life of the school, it has yet to be systematically monitored and evaluated.

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

The leadership and management are outstanding because the Governing Body, including the Rector have worked tenaciously to ensure that the very good standards throughout the school including its distinctive Christian character, have been maintained following the untimely death of the previous Head teacher. With the interim head teacher they ensured that the school continued to evaluate developments including some aspects of its church school identity. Parents speak appreciatively of how the governing body were pro-active in keeping them informed of developments, making them feel they were in safe hands, and how the interim head ensured the children continued to enjoy and achieve. Through thoughtful succession planning, Governors were clear about their expectations that the new head teacher should be able to continue to develop the school in all aspects including its church school identity. The newly appointed Head teacher has rapidly evaluated the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school with staff and governors, forming an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. This has yet to involve all stakeholders systematically. Christian values continue to be central to the work of the school and motivate those in leadership. The school's mission statement: 'To provide the best possible education for each child within the context of a caring Christian community', inspires the vision for the school and is clearly evident through the very high standards, academic, pastoral and spiritual. As a result, children can clearly articulate how the values they learn help them to get on together and learn. One child said, 'We learn them in Reception and as we come up through the school we try to do them and make them a reality'. Parents express their appreciation of this understanding of how their children develop, saying they relate them to both spiritual and moral issues beyond the school. Parents express confidence in and great appreciation of the Governing Body and the new Head teacher.