

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Ravensden Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School

Vicarage Close
Church End
Ravensden
Bedfordshire
MK44 2RW

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority:	Bedfordshire
Date of inspection:	19 th January 2011
Date of last inspection:	November 2007
School's unique reference number:	109623
Headteacher:	Barbara North
Inspector's name and number:	Alan Thornsby 137

School context

Ravensden is a small school with the large majority of pupils of a White British heritage. Although the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is increasing, it is still below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also below the national average. The headteacher has been in post since September 2009.

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

Ravensden Lower School has a distinctive ethos rooted in Christian values that underpin practice and policy. Staff and governors actively share ideas to inform development to continue to nurture the Christian character of the school. This enables pupils to develop both academically and personally, within a caring and respectful school, giving them a secure foundation for their future lives.

Established strengths

- The commitment of the headteacher, staff and governors to further developing the Christian character of the school
- The impact of the religious education on the personal development of pupils
- The relationships between all members of the school community

Focus for development

- Ensure formal monitoring and evaluation of worship are quickly established
- Develop higher order thinking skills to allow pupils to express ideas and opinions to improve creativity in religious education
- Ensure the Christian values and character of the school are an explicit feature of policy and practice

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

The school has a welcoming ethos based on the Christian values of care and respect. These implicitly underpin all aspects of the life of the school. The good relationships result in a stimulating learning atmosphere because of the good behaviour of pupils and as pupils say 'the teachers make our lessons fun'. The high expectations and examples of staff as role models ensure children have positive attitudes to learning. All learners are challenged and supported to achieve by adults in school who model the strong moral code that pupils mirror. They readily empathise with the situations of others to express a good understanding of the importance of care and respect. They also understand the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation as part of conflict resolution. Pupils are confident and articulate in their discussion about how being part of the school helps their learning. The school council is active in sharing the voice of pupils to help school improvement. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good because of the high profile of religious education, the range of activities and the impact of Christian values on the everyday life of the school. Although displays and symbols throughout the school reflect the Christian character, pupils have insufficient opportunities to make reflective or interactive contributions

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

Worship is an important aspect of the school day as a time to explore and reinforce the Christian values of the school and the links to everyday life and the curriculum. Themes are drawn from the diocesan lectionary with others decided by staff and the vicar, who leads a weekly act of worship. This allows pupils to develop a good awareness of the liturgical calendar. Leaders engage most pupils by the use of a range of resources that maintain their interest. Worship themes impact on the daily life of the school because they are linked to curriculum areas and the experience of pupils. The lighting of a candle indicates the coming together of the whole school community. Pupils describe worship as 'a time to be together to respect God' and prayer as a time 'to close your eyes and concentrate to talk to God to say thank you or ask for help'. They write prayers for worship and for lunchtime grace. Older children make good use of a prayer box to share their personal prayers. Pupils and parents from other faiths acknowledge the inclusivity and affirmation of school worship. Although there is informal monitoring and evaluation of worship through staff discussion and children's comments the school is aware of the need to develop more formal procedures. This is currently in the early stages of implementation as part of the current school development plan. The school makes use of the local church for festival celebrations such as the rededication of the cross outside the church.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Religious education has a high profile in the life of the school because of the commitment of the coordinator who shares her enthusiasm, expertise and knowledge with staff. Themes from the locally agreed syllabus underpin the moral and spiritual life of the school. Ongoing evaluation and discussion has resulted in the school teaching weekly sessions of RE rather than in blocks of time as part of a creative curriculum. This has improved the religious knowledge of pupils. End of unit assessment indicates that standards of progress and attainment are comparable to those in literacy. A range of teaching strategies enables all pupils to successfully express their developing concepts because the school is now more successful in addressing learning about and learning from religion. Pupils enjoy RE a typical comment being 'it is important to learn about other faiths, so that we respect them.' The school is presently exploring the introduction of higher level thinking skills to further challenge pupils and enable them to engage with more practical and creative ways of learning. Pupils have a good knowledge and are confident asking questions because learning objectives and success criteria are shared during lessons. However, these are not recorded in pupils written work. Teachers challenge pupils' thinking and give opportunities for paired and mixed ability group discussion. Key stage two pupils explored literal and non-literal language before exploring metaphors and similes such as 'Jesus is the light of the world' and 'the Lord is my shepherd'. Younger pupils fully explored what makes people special before exploring why Jesus is special. However, sometimes direct links with biblical references are missed. Teaching assistants make excellent contributions to lessons by annotating planning to aid evaluation, supporting individual pupils and generally sharing a teaching role. Written work is generally well presented although teachers do not yet make sufficient use of comments relating to the RE learning to help pupils improve their work. The 'three faiths' trail in Bedford gives pupils direct experience of the similarities and differences between places of worship of major religions, as well as raising the esteem of pupils and parents who have the opportunity to share their own faith.

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

Since her appointment the headteacher has identified the school's strengths and areas for development and created the opportunities to review and revise the mission statement. As a result everyone is aware of the distinctive character of the school. Christian values that are embedded in the practice of the school are being made more explicit. Policy review is underway to ensure there are explicit references to Christian values and their impact. There is a secure staff team who respond to the challenge and support of the governing body and understand that the aspirations of everyone can be realised. The role of foundation governors is becoming more formal and discussion now better informs evaluation. Following the need to address the issue of governor appointment, the governing body has recognised the need to address succession planning for staff and governors. The accuracy of self-evaluation and areas for development clearly indicate a good capacity for future development because the ethos is firmly embedded. Parents praise the work of the school with a typical comment 'our children are happy because they are cared for as individuals and consider each other'. They also acknowledge the accessibility of the head and staff to meet and greet everyone each morning and to also resolve issues before they become problems. The school has good links with the diocese and makes use of diocesan training opportunities. There are also effective transitional links with the middle school to which most pupils transfer that maintain their involvement in Christian education, in addition to the links with other local cluster schools.