



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Ursula Taylor Church of England Voluntary Controlled Lower School
High Street, Clapham, Bedford MK41 6EG

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 26th March 2009
Previous S23 Inspection: February 2006
URN: 109597
Headteacher: Mrs Lindsay Fraser
SIAS Inspector Name: Catherine Large
SIAS Inspector No: 482

School Context

Ursula Taylor Church of England Lower School caters for pupils between the ages of 4 and 9. It is an average sized lower school drawing the majority of its pupils from the village of Clapham, just north of Bedford. Pupils come from a wide range of social and economic and cultural backgrounds. A Children's Centre has been built in the school grounds in recognition of the levels of deprivation in the village. The majority of pupils come from white British backgrounds but there is a significant minority of pupils from other ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below national averages. A few speak a first language other than English. The school is a modern building with spacious grounds and a heated swimming pool. There are nine classes, including two for the Foundation Stage. Extended provision is provided from 8.00am to 6.00pm. The current headteacher has been in post for one year.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ursula Taylor Lower School as a Church of England school are good.

The ethos of the school supports its core Christian values very well. It is a happy and calm place where pupils and staff feel valued. It has some outstanding features, including the leadership of the headteacher. There is an increasing recognition of its Christian status. This has developed significantly over the last year with the support of the staff and Christian community. The school is now well placed to strengthen it further in ways it has already identified.

Established strengths

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher whose example sets a positive tone for the school.
- The high quality of relationships at all levels which are underpinned by core Christian values and have a very good impact on the personal development of pupils.
- The care and support for learning for pupils of all abilities, which leads to good progress and raises self-esteem.
- The support of the local clergy and Christian community which strengthen the Christian ethos.

Focus for development

- Build in a process of review in the planning cycle of development to further strengthen the Christian identity of the school and to monitor its effectiveness.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to experience worship in the church.
- Provide more training opportunities for staff and governors to explore the nature of a Church community school.

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

The school is a very happy place where learners feel cared for and valued. This creates a very positive and effective learning environment for pupils of all abilities and needs. The school works hard to support the learning needs of all its pupils, including the most vulnerable and those who are gifted and talented. There is evidence to show that these efforts are leading to very good progress by all pupils. Attitudes and behaviour are very good and pupils are eager to learn. The Values programme permeates school life and reinforces core Christian values. Pupils can talk about these values and identify ways in which they help them in their lives. Parents support this view. Through its various reward systems the school promotes values of kindness and effort as well as attainment. The 'Golden Book', which acknowledges these achievements, is a highly regarded feature of Friday assemblies often mentioned by pupils. Pastoral care is outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants know their pupils well and pupils speak of the care and help they receive. Parents feel confident in discussing issues with teachers. The School Council is well structured and effective and its members are articulate in describing their contribution to school life, for example, the plans for fund-raising. There are clear codes of conduct and pupils feel confident that the few incidents of bullying of which they are aware are dealt with effectively and in the context of clear anti-bullying policy. There have been no reported incidents of racism and overall the school is a very harmonious community. As they move through the school, pupils take on an increasing number of responsibilities, such as being playground friends. There are excellent and wide-ranging opportunities for extra-curricular activities and visits, for example, to a gurdwara and mosque. The pupils respond very well to opportunities for fund raising for charity. The school has a very special link with a project in Uganda through which it funds the education of two children in a deprived area. At harvest time, they support local elderly residents with food parcels, extending their contributions to day centres for local homeless people. Their social and moral skills are outstanding and they have strong beliefs about what is right and wrong. Their spiritual development is good and strengthened through the Values programme, worship, links with the Christian community and religious education. Their awareness of the wider global community is developing and is strengthened by special weeks to promote their knowledge and understanding, and links with another school whose pupils come from very different cultural backgrounds. Currently, older pupils do not have a residential experience and the school has identified this as an area for development.

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

Worship enhances pupils' spiritual development. Pupils enjoy worship and talk about the feelings they have meeting with others, listening to stories, singing and just 'being quiet'. The singing of the choir and the school generally, is exceptional. The quality of the experience has been improved by the use of the screen and artefacts to provide a focus for the theme. The effective display of values is a very good backdrop. Music on entry and on departure helps to create the special atmosphere. Pupils enjoy the Friday worship that includes the 'Golden Book' and recognises individual and class achievements over the week. They are particularly pleased as increasing number of parents are attending. There is variety in the provision and this makes an impact. Pupils talk about their enjoyment of the visits from the clergy and the 'Open the book' team who tell Bible stories using drama and props to stimulate pupils' interest. Pupils do experience worship in the church from time to time but this is limited by the size of the building. There are some missed opportunities for smaller groups of pupils to worship in the church, for example, for blessing of new pupils or for a leavers' service. There is a strong commitment to the importance of collective worship by the school and the local clergy. An overall plan identifies appropriate themes which link the Values programme to Christian beliefs. Key festivals in the Christian calendar are observed as well as festivals from other world faiths. Currently, pupils are not using the Lord's Prayer but are exploring the meaning in order to do so with understanding. Over the course of the year, the school has introduced a time of prayer at the end of the school day and the saying of grace at lunchtime. These special times are valued by the pupils who often take turns in leading or requesting prayers. Staff and parents speak of the impact that this is having on the pupils' spiritual development. Governors often attend worship and a foundation governor has undertaken a review of worship with some pupils. The staff do show a commitment to worship and there is on-going discussion about ways to strengthen the spiritual dimension. However, there is not a systematic approach to reviewing and evaluating collective worship. There have not been any specific training opportunities or planned sharing of good practice in leading or facilitating worship. This would bring more confidence to the school. However, there is good potential for further improvement as pupils and staff display very positive attitudes to this aspect of school life.

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

The school has a growing confidence in its Christian identity. Over the course of the last year, the new headteacher has shown outstanding qualities of leadership, particularly in the wise and sensitive way in which her Christian vision for the school is taking root. Staff, parents and governors speak of the growth in the spiritual dimension of the school. They speak of the way the 'feel of the place' has been influenced as evidenced in relationships and attitudes. There is a positive response to this development. Not all parents are clear about what to expect of a church school but they express trust in the leadership and management. Teachers and other adults working in the school have been supported in their professional development and this is having a positive impact on achievement. Religious education is well embedded in the curriculum. The governing body is very active and supportive and engages well with the pupils. There is a strong sense of teamwork at all levels, including non-teaching staff. Parents feel welcome in the school and find staff approachable. There is strong, practical support from the PTFA. Involvement with the local community is also very good. School newsletters are informative and often reflect aspects of the school's Christian character. Community links are fostered through contributions to the village magazine as well as village events. Planning for the new Children's Centre on the school site already recognises good potential for the school and community to work together for mutual benefit. Members of the local clergy and Christian community have an established and strong presence in the school and the pupils know them well. This relationship is a strength of the school. The school's status is evident in some

documentation and display but is not embedded in policies and on the main signage for the school. This is under consideration. Links with the diocese, through the headteacher, are good. The governors and staff have not yet all received training on their role in a church school that serves its local community. However, there is a recognition of the need to explore what the church status means and initial steps have been taken to review the school's mission statement and aims. The governing body is very supportive of the Christian vision for the school but current development planning does not include a regular opportunity to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its church school status. The school has good capacity to challenge itself in some form of regular self-review and to build on what has already been achieved.

SIAS report March 2009 Ursula Taylor VC Lower School, Clapham, Bedfordshire. MK41 6EG