



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Henlow Church of England Voluntary Controlled Middle School
Church Road, Henlow SG16 6AN

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 29th June 2009
Previous S23 Inspection: 4th July 2006
URN: 109697
Headteacher: Ray Payne
SIAS Inspector Name: Catherine Large
SIAS Inspector No: 482

School Context

Henlow Church of England Middle School caters for pupils between the ages of 9 and 13. The school draws its 561 pupils from a predominantly rural area. This area includes a military base and this leads to more changes in the school roll than is usual. Nearly all of its pupils come from white British backgrounds. It has an above average number of pupils with special educational needs.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Henlow Middle School as a Church of England school are good.

Henlow School's very positive ethos has an excellent impact on the personal development of its pupils. It has a number of outstanding qualities. There is some lack of clarity in the minds of pupils and parents and in strategic planning about what makes Henlow School distinctively Christian. This has not been helped by the current absence of a local priest and two foundation governors, factors beyond the school's control.

Established strengths

- The caring ethos embedded in the school, exemplified in the quality of relationships at all levels and led by the headteacher and all staff;
- The contribution of religious education to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils;
- The wide range of opportunities for pupils to participate in the life of the school and to respond to the needs of others.

Focus for development

- Undertake an evaluation, at all levels, of the school's distinctive Christian character, and build this into strategic planning and cycles of review;
- Strengthen pupil participation in worship, increase opportunities for groups to experience worship in the church and establish a process for evaluation.

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

Pupils are very positive about their school experience. As one pupil said. 'I love my school'. They feel safe and well taught. They have high levels of self-esteem because the school promotes positive behaviour and achievement very well. The Code of Behaviour, planned with the pupils, is well supported and implemented. Pastoral care is excellent. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school and the needs of different groups, such as those who are gifted and talented or who have special educational needs, are well met. The curriculum offers an extensive range of experiences, including educational visits and 'super learning days' which develop new and varied skills. Extra-curricular activities are a strong feature of school life. There is a real sense of community at the heart of the school and relationships are excellent. The School Council is very active and effective. Pupils respond exceptionally well to charity fund raising both locally and globally, for example, the 'Operation Christmas Child' initiative brought an overwhelming response. RE makes a major contribution to their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through its curriculum and programme of visits and visitors. Whilst most pupils know the school is a church school, they have difficulty in identifying how this makes any significant difference to their experience.

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

There is a clear policy for worship and a plan that identifies appropriate weekly themes and an annual calendar of Christian festivals. Opportunities for worship include fortnightly year group and termly whole school gatherings. Across the school, class groups meet with their teachers for daily reflection time. Some good materials have been produced to support class teachers with this role. Pupils in Year 6 responded well to this time, listening to music and identifying their thoughts and feelings. Worship reflects the strong sense of community and togetherness that exists in the school. For example, teachers, including the headteacher, are willing to share their own experiences with pupils who clearly value the input. They are respectful, attentive and respond well when given opportunity. During the course of the year, pupils do experience some worship led by clergy but this has been hampered by changes in local church leadership. This factor has also hindered the frequency of opportunities for pupils to experience worship in the local church context, although pupils do visit the church as part of their RE lessons. Pupils find the quiet times at the start of the day helpful but their experience does vary. There are not always opportunities for worship or reflection and some express the desire for more pupil participation in the planning and leading of worship. There is a shared commitment to the importance of collective worship but currently there is little formal evaluation of its delivery and impact. This was an issue at the last inspection.

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

The school's church status is evident in documentation and in the pupils' uniform logo. The leadership and management and the staff of the school are clearly committed to some core Christian values that underpin the caring ethos of the school. They live these values out in the day to day life of the school and this is why pupils are so happy at the school. Staff have good opportunities for general professional development and their well being is a high priority. There is very good communication with parents, pupils and the local community. Links with feeder schools are also very good and the headteacher leads the local Learning Community of schools which means Henlow is well placed to respond to educational initiatives. The school plays an active part in the local community. Links with the Parish and the Diocese are satisfactory but the lack of two appointed foundation governors creates a void which is difficult for the school. However, there are good initiatives in place to strengthen the links with other local church schools and the Parish. The headteacher has attended Diocesan training and the RE co-ordinator has been influential in the development of Diocesan RE resources. Currently, members of the governing body and the senior leadership team have some uncertainties about how the distinctiveness of a church school can be expressed. Parents surveyed are overwhelmingly happy with the school and support its core values although about half are not clear about the significance of church status. The school is well placed to address this key issue of church school distinctiveness and to strengthen its evaluation processes in overall planning. This was an issue at the last inspection.

SIAS report June 2009 Henlow VC Middle School, Henlow, Bedfordshire. SG16 6AN