



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Studham Church of England VC Lower School
Church Road, Studham, Dunstable LU6 2QD



Diocese of St Albans

LA: Central Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 16th November 2009
Previous S48 Inspection: 9th July 2007
URN: 109607
Headteacher (Interim): Marilyn Ravenor
SIAS Inspector Name: Lyn Field
SIAS Inspector No: NS 151

School Context

This is a very small rural lower school where pupils are mostly from White British backgrounds and the proportion with special educational needs is average. The headteacher has been absent due to illness for over a year and the school has been led by two interim headteachers and senior teachers. The current head took up post in April. Since September 2009 extended accommodation has enabled the school to manage children from 2 to 4 years old on site.

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

The school has developed a much clearer identity as a Christian school where the love of God comes through in the care of pupils and shapes expectations for how they behave towards each other. Children mature as compassionate and thoughtful young people who take issues of responsibility and justice very seriously.

Established strengths

- The strategic direction given by the governors and interim headteacher
- Pupils ability to reason and reflect using Christian values as a reference point
- The direction that worship gives to pupils' spiritual and moral development
- The joint support of the Anglican and Methodist churches in the village

Focus for development

- To establish links with schools in diverse communities, both nationally and globally, in order to develop pupils' understanding of the richness of other cultures and their spiritual heritage
- To make more use of symbolism and simple rituals to help pupils express the intangible nature of worship and spirituality

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

Pupils are comfortable to talk honestly and openly about faith and feel this is an important part of coming to a church school. They understand how they are expected to behave towards others because the staff are excellent role models and make explicit links to what Jesus taught. Parents value this and the way it motivates children to work hard for charity. The collection of gifts in shoe boxes for the 'Samaritan's Purse' appeal has prompted many pupils to research this further with their families at home. This has led to much discussion and careful thought to the wording of greetings to be placed inside. However, pupils' understanding of diversity in today's society is generally underdeveloped. Parents and governors recognise the need for this to be addressed through meaningful links with schools in other communities and this is a priority for action. Pupils are very perceptive in their observations about Christian values. They have a good grasp of concepts such as equality and fairness because they use Bible stories as a benchmark to measure what they encounter in the world around them. For example, one group referred to Jesus washing the disciples' feet in talking about justice in the world and this indicates the depth of their spiritual awareness. In the Reception class, a spiritual corner changes on a regular basis to retain children's interest. Elsewhere in school, a mural of the Creation story and RE displays highlight the school's Christian ethos but there is less consistency in what is provided for pupils to use independently for their own spiritual reflection.

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

Worship enriches pupils' spiritual and moral development because leaders consistently take a holistic approach and help them to see the relevance of Christian values in their own lives. Whatever their age they clearly enjoy coming together for worship and behaviour is excellent because the themes capture everyone's interest. Leaders make sure that older pupils continue to find subjects challenging by posing questions that tackle issues such as prejudice and stereotyping. The impact on pupils is even greater when the staff, who always attend worship, plan follow up activities in lessons. A moving example of this is the prayers that pupils wrote for Remembrance Day. Services in church and the regular involvement of local clergy gives due emphasis to Christian festivals. Pupils are gaining a deeper understanding of their meaning from activities in school that focus on Biblical teaching. They have an accurate theological understanding of many stories and make use of this, for example, to explain why they find candles helpful in worship and why forgiving leaves people feeling happier. Pupils are familiar with Christian symbols, common prayers and simple forms of liturgy used in special services. However, given their mature understanding of Bible stories this is underdeveloped and does not make enough use of pupils' visual learning in developing their spiritual awareness. They are reflective children and respond well to time for quiet thought because leaders provide them with prompts to guide their thinking.

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

The vicar and foundation governor have played a central role in the school's development as a church school since the last inspection. Their reflective response to the issues raised has resulted in positive changes and this improvement has accelerated under the current headteacher. Her strong direction has been welcomed by parents particularly for her clarity in what is expected of everyone involved in a Christian school. The governors are keeping a watchful and supportive eye on the school through the changes in leadership and have a good understanding of what is needed to sustain the Christian ethos in the future. Diocesan training has helped the headteacher and governors to focus their attention more closely on the impact the school has on pupils and the development plan makes it clear what they are trying to achieve. Their perceptive observations show that they know how the changes made have helped pupils to mature spiritually. However, too little attention is given to regularly gathering feedback from adults and children in order to decide where improvements are most needed. The partnership with local churches has been particularly effective and the vicar and Methodist minister have worked closely to increase the presence of the church in the school. They are both welcome and familiar figures providing practical help as well as spiritual support. This has drawn the school closer to the community and highlights its holistic approach to the care of children.