



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Diocese of St Albans



Barkway VA First School
High Street, Barkway, Royston SG8 8EF

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 14th May 2009
Previous SIAS Inspection: 25th May 2006
URN: 117422
Headteacher: Jenny Heinzelmann
SIAS Inspector: Lindsay Fraser
Inspector Number: 107

School context

Barkway First School serves a small village near Royston. The school's pupils, nearly all of whom are of White British heritage, are drawn from a fairly wide area and from a broad range of social backgrounds. A lower than average proportion has learning difficulties or disabilities. Attainment on entry is broadly average. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.

Summary Judgement

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Barkway C of E First School are satisfactory. This is a school in which the small numbers of pupils, the family atmosphere and enrichment activities enable the pupils to leave the school as well rounded and confident pupils.

Established strengths

- The strong partnership and involvement of the local clergy
- The provision of a wide range of enrichment activities and opportunities
- The care and support given to each child and their families

Focus for development

- To develop a greater understanding of the distinctive Christian character of the school as a church school
- To develop a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation in order to understand and improve the impact of Collective Worship and Religious Education on the pupils
- To ensure that Religious Education planning includes clear learning objectives linked to assessment which are clearly understood by all pupils.

The school is good in meeting the needs of all learners through its distinctive Christian ethos.

Parents speak highly of the school and its impact on the all round development of their children. One parent stated that 'children enter the school as individuals and leave as individuals whilst enjoying a well rounded education in the intervening years'. The all round education results from the emphasis on enrichment activities which are extensive for such a small school and include the classification of the school as a 'Flagship Community for Food for Life', a variety of clubs, visits, special events and a residential trip. The opportunities given to the children enable them to flourish as individuals giving them confidence as they move on to Middle School. Pupils behave well and relationships are good, although children do not necessarily connect behaviour and attitudes with the school's Christian values. Because this is a small school and the staff know and care for each individual pupil, their views and their personal education, social, moral and cultural development are good. Any conflicts are quickly resolved in a spirit of reconciliation without repercussion. This is appreciated by parents. Parents value the opportunities to speak to the staff and headteacher before school, enabling good communications. The school environment is well developed and includes an area devoted to the growing of food and to composting. The school environment and organised visits to other areas contribute to the spiritual development of the children.

The impact of Collective Worship on learners is satisfactory.

In the observed act of Collective Worship on 'keeping calm' the pupils were generally engaged and had the opportunity to be involved through actions in response to the story of Jesus calming the storm. However, responses were not easily forthcoming. Although there is a cross in the window and a small candle burning in the corner of the hall a greater visual impact is needed to engage pupils during Collective Worship. Whilst pupils see Collective Worship as an important part of school life they were unsure about how it made a difference to them, although a small number of children said that it helped them know more about Jesus. Some children have been able to relate stories from Collective Worship at home. At the end of each term pupils are now involved in preparing and participating in an Act of Worship at the local church and this is valued by the pupils. The pupils made reference to the occasional use of the Lord's Prayer. A recent innovation has been to include within planning for Collective Worship the themes from SEAL (The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning), used in PSHE throughout the school, enabling a Christian reinforcement of the teaching. It is important that the school introduces a system of monitoring and evaluation to assess the impact of this innovation on pupils' ability to express their thoughts and responses to the content of Collective Worship. Little professional development in the delivery of Collective Worship has taken place as yet. Pupils value the input of Rev. Hillman and Pastor Steve from Anstey Chapel and spoke enthusiastically about the gift of the Nativity story cube given to each pupil last Christmas. Parents also see this input as important in the lives of their children and particularly appreciate the fact that Rev Hillman greets each child by name out of school.

The impact of Religious Education on learners is satisfactory.

On the basis of discussion with the children and a limited amount of recorded work progress was judged to be average in Key Stage 1 and Years 3 and 4. A lesson observed in Foundation Stage 1 on Special Places was judged to be good because pupils had brought into school models, pictures and photographs of their special places. A sense of awe was created by the use of good quality resources representing a church and a synagogue. Religious Education is developing well in the Foundation Stage through topic work. Assessment of Religious Education is in its early stages in the school and monitoring of this subject is essential to ensure that the impact of teaching and learning on pupils' knowledge, understanding and personal response is effective. Pupils recognise the importance of Religious Education in school, but in Years 3 and 4 pupils had difficulty in recalling previous learning. Pupils in Key Stage 1 spoke enthusiastically about their recent visit to the church and were able to explain the significance of the different colours of the church year and they recognised some features of the church. There is some awareness amongst pupils of cultural diversity and other faiths. Whilst parents support the school in its aim to develop pupils' understanding of cultural diversity there were some parental reservations about the visit to a London mosque, although this a common and valued feature of most Church schools. A visit to school from an African prince was very well received by the pupils and its impact remained with the pupils for some time. The subject leader is enthusiastic about teaching and learning in Religious Education and has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to move the subject forward.

The leadership and management of the school as a church school are satisfactory.

The rector, Rev. Hillman, was appointed shortly before the previous inspection. Her monitoring of the distinctive Christian character has led to improvements in the promotion of the school as a church school, such as the making of an external cross for the entrance door, the display in the library and quiet areas in the classrooms. There are further plans to improve the promotion of Christian values through the website and school documentation. It is important that all school leaders and the local Christian community provide full support for developing the Christian vision for the school and ensuring that the vision is shared and promoted within the school and with all stakeholders. Currently the Governing Body assesses the impact of the school's Christian character through the positive response to the school by the local community. This will be enhanced through a shared understanding by the Governing Body and school leadership of the nature of a school's distinctive Christian character as a result of future training. This will enable clearer self evaluation as a basis for further developing the school's vision for itself as a church school.

There are strong partnerships with parents and the local community The friends of Barkway First School are very active in fund raising and in providing social activities for both parents and pupils. There are strong partnerships with the local clergy, the parish council and the school is involved in special activities such as the village fete, memorial services and art displays. It is clear that parents and carers are consulted on a range of issues and their opinions are listened to and acted upon.