

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Offley Endowed Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
School Lane
Great Offley
Hitchin
Hertfordshire
SG5 3AT

Diocese of St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire
Dates of inspection: Friday, 21 January 2011
Date of last inspection: 10 July 2008
School's unique reference number: 117445
Headteacher: Karen Slack
Inspector's names and numbers: Lindsay Fraser 107 and Martin Willis

School context

Offley Endowed is a small, voluntary aided rural primary school. Most pupils come from a White British background with few speaking English as an additional language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is similar to other schools and the number with special educational needs / disabilities is in line with the national average. There is one Reception class and pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 are taught in three mixed age classes.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Offley Endowed Primary School as a Church of England school are satisfactory.

The school has a positive ethos which supports constructive relationships, good attitudes and behaviour. Christian values contribute towards this ethos. There is a growing respect within the local community for the Christian status of this village school. However, the school has yet to embed a distinctive Christian character securely based on Christian teachings.

Established strengths

- Good moral and social development of the pupils which results from the very good pastoral care and support given by the headteacher and staff
- The vision and commitment of the Religious Education subject leader
- The gradually developing partnership between the school and church which has led to increased enjoyment and participation by pupils and members of the community when celebrating festivals in the local church

Focus for development

- To share observations and feedback from all groups in the school community and the diocesan schools' team, making use of this information to help develop a distinctive church school vision
- Ensure that the distinctive Christian character is a priority within the school development plan which includes an action plan to be monitored and evaluated by the governing body and senior leadership team
- To raise standards and ensure good progress in Religious Education, establish and embed more consistent procedures for monitoring and evaluation which will involve teachers, senior management and governors
- Increase the spiritual impact of Collective Worship by:-
 1. Regular staff presence and support at most assemblies
 2. Shared planning for Collective Worship
 3. A cohesive approach to the development of Christian Values
 4. Greater support and input from the church community

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

An ethos of caring for each other, pupils, parents and staff, underpins a very positive culture within the school in which all members of the school feel valued. This is achieved through such actions as a wide and varied curriculum, a full programme of enrichment activities, an 'Open Door' policy followed by all members of staff and the weekly Achievement Assembly. The parents value the headteacher's care and support given to each pupil, especially those with special needs, and the willingness of Governors to listen to their views. Pupils are given a high degree of responsibility; the school council has been able to influence improvements within the school which have which resulted in appropriate action. Good provision for community cohesion exists within the school, at local and national level. This includes the African market day and links with a Polish school. There is a strong tradition of giving for charity rather than for the needs of the school itself which includes the recent successful Toy Box appeal. Pupils are involved within the local community through their practical support for the Sue Ryder home, their involvement leading the pupils to request further fund raising activities. Although Christian values are discussed informally throughout the school these are not yet underpinned by Christian teachings and there is no cohesive planning within the school to promote and encourage these values in all areas of the curriculum. The school does not always promote its distinctive Christian character through its publicity so members of the local community are not always aware of this school as a church school. There is some evidence through art work of pupils' spirituality, especially in the younger years. Opportunities exist within the rich physical environment of the school for developing spirituality; the younger pupils in particular are encouraged to reflect upon the splendour of their world. However, the school is aware that times for reflection within collective worship and the wider curriculum are not always used effectively and further guidance for pupils is required in this area.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

The school organises both key stage and whole school assemblies. The pupils particularly enjoy the whole school weekly achievement assembly which clearly develops their social and moral education and brings about a strong sense of community. Children in one class were keen to read a grace from their own book of prayers before lunch.

Worship is planned to include the celebration of major festivals, Christian values and PSHE themes. There is some joint planning with the church community for services in church (e.g. recent Harvest and Christingle services, which were well attended and enjoyed by both parents and pupils), but planning for worship in school is not often shared or strategic. The worship coordinator recognises that there is no formal evaluation of worship by staff, governors or pupils and that this is an area for improvement.

Pupils and staff sometimes derive inspiration from worship. Pupils can talk with enthusiasm about certain assemblies (e.g. a visitor who came to set up a travelling crib during Advent), but spiritual growth appears limited with pupils unable to identify many key messages in recent assemblies or recall times of reflection that were personally special to them. Lack of staff attendance at some assemblies reduces the potential value of these occasions and hinders coherent working and a sense of togetherness. The vicar leads services in church and very occasionally in school. There is scope for greater input to school worship from the church community and for pupils to develop further understanding of Anglican traditions and practice.

The effectiveness of religious education is satisfactory

RE is satisfactory overall with some good features. RE is enthusiastically led by a committed and well-informed subject leader who works hard to support other staff and raise the profile of the subject. Her skills and ideas in RE create a good foundation for the leadership to use in galvanising the Christian distinctiveness of the school. Last year, the school sent entries to a national 'Spirited Arts' competition and had two outright winners.

Standards are broadly in line with core subject standards but there is limited evidence to securely evaluate this at the end of KS2. The school recognises that progress and opportunities within RE are variable for different year groups. RE is considered an important subject in the school but has not been formally reviewed by the Governors recently. The Hertfordshire agreed syllabus for RE was introduced in September 2010. This syllabus has helped staff plan for both attainment targets at appropriate levels, which was a focus for development in the previous inspection.

Some RE teaching and learning is interactive and enjoyed by the pupils. A lower KS2 lesson about the meaning of parables gave pupils opportunities to explore moral and spiritual awareness, leading one pupil to reflect that "When Jesus told stories they were not just for listening – they were to make you do things!" Other lessons however do not always have the same positive impact and some pupils found it difficult to recall any key messages or meaning from a current or previous lessons. The school occasionally makes visits to the church for curriculum work. Pupils enjoy this experience and their understanding in RE would benefit from further opportunities to visit other religious buildings. Visitors from other religions or Christian groups and charities would also enhance learning.

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

The governors and headteacher are keen to establish this school as a strong village school which is an integral part of the local community. However, there has been in the past some reluctance to promote this school as a church school and to share the benefits of the school's distinctive Christian character with the local community. There are the beginnings of a partnership between the school and the church and the parents speak very positively about the way in which festivals such as Harvest, the Nativity and Christingle are celebrated in church. They appreciate the way in which these events have been organised to maximise participation by the children and attendance by the local community. The school is keen to use the skills of the local clergy and members of the worshipping community to enhance the spiritual experiences of the pupils. A group of pupils benefit from a bible reading club which takes place locally and is led by members of the church. In promoting the school as a church school, the Religious Education subject leader has shown good leadership through her endeavours to raise standards in Religious Education. However there has been little formal monitoring from foundation governors to support and challenge standards in this area and to monitor the quality and impact of Collective Worship. It is important that the development of a shared vision for the school as a church school is addressed in governing body meetings and that support is given to the headteacher to implement this vision. The headteacher has worked hard to introduce a Christian ethos to the school and further support from staff and governors will enable this ethos to be fully based on Christian teachings in order to address the spiritual needs of pupils.