



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



The Thomas Coram Middle School
Swing Gate Lane
Berkhamsted
Hertfordshire
HP4 2RP

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 8th September 2009
Previous S23 Inspection: June 2006
URN: 117559
Headteacher: Ed Delasalle
SIAS Inspector Name: Lyn Field
SIAS Inspector No: NS 151

School Context

This is a smaller than average Middle school that serves Berkhamsted and the surrounding villages. Pupils come from a number of local First schools and a range of social and economic backgrounds. Few are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as a second language but the proportion with special educational needs is just above average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Thomas Coram as a Church of England school are good.

The school's approach to the nurture and education of children is rooted in its Christian values. This is enriched by the active part the church plays in the life of the school. As a result pupils grow into responsible and compassionate young people who show respect and a keen interest in the beliefs and opinions of others.

Established strengths

- The strong Christian leadership of the headteacher and deputy
- The partnership between school and church
- Relationships that develop trust and honesty in pupils
- The importance placed on prayer and worship in the school day

Focus for development

- Make full use of assessment to ensure that pupils in all year groups make consistently good progress in all aspects of religious education.

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

The Christian values of the school clearly shape pupils' positive attitudes to diversity in society and prompt them to take their responsibilities in the community very seriously. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the attention given to the needs of individual pupils and feel this is prompted by the Christian ethos. Many choose the school for this reason and describe the caring and compassionate attitudes it nurtures in their children. The calm and orderly atmosphere in the school is impressive and demonstrates a genuine respect for others. Excellent relationships modelled by the staff create a culture of trust and pupils of all backgrounds feel able to express their opinions openly. This applies particularly to their own beliefs because faith is explicitly valued in the school. The regular presence of the assistant curate and church youth leaders in school and on school visits plays a vital role in helping pupils feel confident to engage with religious issues. Pupils have a good understanding of the core values of the school. They feel that its emphasis on friendship, the care of others and the sense of belonging will stay with them for life. They are able to connect these values to the stories of Jesus but are less confident in drawing on Christian beliefs to explain how they make personal decisions about their own conduct. The school already knows this and has made changes to the themes for worship to address this. Moral and spiritual development are good because pupils respond well to the growing range of opportunities that exist to enrich their learning. Displays throughout the school reflect this such as posters for peace but there is less to challenge pupils in their own personal reflection.

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

There have been significant improvements in worship since the last inspection and it now plays a central role in the life of the school. Patterns of Anglican worship are used meaningfully at different points in the day to focus pupils on spiritual issues. In all classes the day ends with prayer and everyone joins in the grace at the end of worship. Pupils and adults use this time effectively to quietly reflect and resolve tensions. Events in the life of the school as well as Christian festivals are celebrated in worship and the Christian teaching is explicit. This is absolutely clear in the Welcome Service for all pupils new to the school and their families where the school's responsibility to care for children is understood by everyone present as part of its Christian service to the community. On all occasions for worship there is a powerful sense of respect and reverence, whatever the setting or the form of delivery. This is because pupils have come to value the time for worship for the feelings of worth it gives them and, as one pupil explained, 'All groups come together as one big Christian family'. Pupils of all faith backgrounds feel affirmed and comfortable to join in. At the root of this is the strong leadership of the headteacher and deputy and their regular dialogue with the clergy team. They continually reflect on the impact of worship and take action to improve what pupils experience. For example, the assistant curate has produced an insightful evaluation of worship. Changes have been made to the planning framework so that there is greater cohesion between themes and Christian values to help pupils relate them to daily life. The governors are keen to support the role of worship in pupils' overall learning. They regularly attend and note how well pupils respond. The school therefore has excellent capacity to sustain the current high standards.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Pupils see religious education as important preparation for their lives beyond school and this motivates them to work hard in lessons. They enter the school with a broad range of experiences in RE. By the time they leave they are achieving high standards very close to the level of their core subjects and matching what is expected of pupils a year older. In spite of this, the school is right in recognising there is still room for improvement. The new appointment of a specialist teacher and the scrutiny of performance data show that the senior staff are intent on moving this forward. They have identified that the rate of pupils' progress accelerates as they move through the school and are beginning to analyse the reasons for this. Observations indicate that the quality of teaching is good because teachers use their skills effectively to create learning environments that bring out the best in pupils. Lessons have a clear and relevant purpose and activities engage pupils' interest so that they increasingly take responsibility for their own learning. The pace is energetic but objectives are not always reached because pupils' knowledge of key beliefs is not as accurate as it might be. In spite of this, they understand the nature of religious ideas and apply them well to ethical and moral questions, for example, in Year 7 work on discrimination. Pupils are aware of the levels they are aiming for but are less clear about the steps they need to take because marking in books provides minimal feedback. Visits to places of worship of Christianity and other faiths are popular. Thought provoking discussions and the involvement of clergy and youth leaders enables pupils to gain the most from these activities.

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

The headteacher, senior staff and governors are committed to living out Christian values in the way they lead and manage the school. They see their role in nurturing children as part of their Christian service to the community. This influences the decisions they make and is clearly conveyed to parents and pupils. An excellent partnership has developed with the church. This is an outstanding element of leadership and management and has been a key factor in the improvements made since the last inspection. The assistant curate, in particular, is actively involved in school life. His presence with pupils and his dialogue with senior staff contributes to the school's strategic planning. A closer relationship has developed with local parishes and the Baptist church and they are increasingly aware of the part they have to play in the school. The senior leadership team and governors have a good understanding of where the school is effective as a church school. Their self-evaluation is accurate although sometimes rather cautious in recognising the school's strengths. They each have a good perception of where improvement is needed and actions taken have been highly effective. However, the embedding of processes to monitor these and incorporate the views of all groups involved with the school is at an earlier stage. There is a good appreciation of how the school's needs might change in the future. This is already influencing thinking, if not yet an explicit part of development planning.