



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



**Victoria Church of England First School
Prince Edward Street
Berkhamsted
Hertfordshire
HP4 3HA**

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 15th September 2009
Previous S23 Inspection: October 2006
URN: 117423
Headteacher: Anna Brown
SIAS Inspector Name: Lyn Field
SIAS Inspector No: NS 151

School Context

The school is set in the centre of Berkhamsted and is of average size. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and only a few speak English as an additional language. Most come from backgrounds that are socially and economically advantaged and the proportion with special educational needs is low. The school is a Fairtrade school and belongs to the Eco-Schools scheme.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Victoria First as a Church of England school are outstanding.

This vibrant and exciting school is constantly striving to do better. It draws on its Christian values to provide the richest experiences in which to nurture children. They thrive in this environment and show exceptional maturity in taking responsibility for each other and the world in which they live.

Established strengths

- The headteacher's leadership in constant improvement and innovation
- The exceptional quality of pupils' spiritual development
- The active partnership with the church
- The school's outreach to local and global communities that is rooted in Christian values
- Relationships that model Christian values in action

Focus for development

The school is constantly taking action to enhance its effectiveness as a church school. There are, therefore, no significant areas for development.

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

Pupils achieve the highest standards in their learning and personal development because Christian values are at the root of everything the school does. They shape the ideals to which pupils and adults aspire, the principles on which they are encouraged to judge what is fair and true and the manner in which they are taught and cared for. The spiritual and moral development of pupils is outstanding. In lessons they make the most of opportunities to understand themselves in relation to the society in which they live. Teachers know how to develop this awareness through reflection time and skilful questioning and constantly monitor and refine their strategies. Throughout the school interactive displays continue to challenge pupils long after lessons have ended. Pupils' responses are recorded in albums and they use these independently to return to issues that interested them. Parents notice that they develop a spiritual language that enables them to cope with difficult moments in life. Pupils understand what Christian values mean in daily life. They confidently draw on the teachings of Jesus to explain their commitment to Fairtrade and the community they support in Peru. It is clear this is more than a general concern for humanity but deeply held convictions about their own responsibilities. Relationships are excellent and even the youngest pupils show genuine and spontaneous concern for each other. They express feelings openly and honestly but with sensitivity. They learn this from the manner in which adults behave towards children and each other. Children are not only well cared for but are taught how to care.

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

The impact of worship continues to be outstanding and further developments have made a significant impact on the wider school community. These have arisen from the strong partnership with the church. More formal services take place that recognise times of significant change in the life of pupils and of the school. For example, the annual celebration of the school's founder, Thomas Bourne, gives pupils a sense of their part in the long history of a church school. An innovative approach to celebrating the key Christian festivals enables the school to provide a witness to its Christian ethos in the local community. The unique 'Palm Wednesday' procession to church clearly excites adults as well as children and brings Christian beliefs alive for them. Underpinning this is a conscious decision by the school's leaders to use more Anglican liturgy and make services in church more of a worshipping experience for everyone present. Pupils now have a greater understanding of the meaning of Christian symbols and rituals and a deeper grasp of the overall purpose of worship. This shows through when the pupils themselves lead worship and create an atmosphere of reverence that engages all children in school. Feedback from parents and pupils indicates these changes are popular. Pupils like the strong sense of belonging to a larger community and parents feel their children are better equipped to express their feelings about the big issues of life and death.

The effectiveness of the Religious Education is outstanding.

The teaching of RE is exciting. It inspires pupils to develop skills that enhance their learning in all areas of the curriculum. This is because lessons focus on pupils' ability to think and question and as a result they show exceptional maturity in applying their knowledge to issues of spiritual and global concern. From the time they start in nursery, time is allocated to developing children's skills in reflection and so they are able to make excellent use of the many displays around school that invite their thoughts and opinions. Their responses to questions such as 'What is God like?' and 'Why did God make a centipede?' demonstrate their ability to reason from their Biblical knowledge. The quality of teaching is consistently good and often outstanding because the staff are always willing to embrace new ideas that improve learning. The use of assessment has undergone several changes because the staff believe it is essential not just to evaluate pupils' knowledge but to probe their grasp of religious concepts. The current format, therefore, helps teachers in planning a more philosophical approach to lessons. This has raised pupils' spiritual and moral awareness and parents have noted their children's capacity to question and challenge statements for themselves. It is very clear why pupils make rapid progress from average starting points and by the time they leave have attained very high standards in RE that match those in the core subjects. The subject leader is passionate about her role and has a deep understanding of the nature and purpose of RE. She conveys this to colleagues and pupils alike so that RE plays a key role in shaping pupils' positive attitudes to diversity and ethical issues.

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

The school has continued to build on its outstanding effectiveness since the last inspection. Its distinctive Christian ethos shines through everything it does and is cherished by all stakeholders. The leadership of the school at all levels is highly reflective. There is no hint of complacency and there is a constant desire to tailor innovative projects to the needs of pupils. The rigour with which leaders tackle self-evaluation tends to underplay the distinctive strengths of the school and the actions for improvement are always sharply focused on enriching children's learning. The headteacher has established a culture where everyone is open to new ideas and experiences. This has enabled the school to continue to move forward with confidence because the Christian values of honesty and trust are embedded in the management of adults and children. The partnership with the church has a central role in school improvement. The regular dialogue between staff and clergy has prompted changes, such as those to public acts of worship, that strengthen the school's role in serving its community and reiterate its Christian values. The governors are acutely aware of the future needs of the school as a church school. They anticipate what may lie ahead and take advantage of any opportunity to sustain current standards. The Christian ethos is a key factor in the appointment of new staff and in the school's outreach to the community.