

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

The Thomas Coram Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Swing Gate Lane,
Berkhamsted,
Herts.
HP4 2RP

Diocese: St. Albans

LA: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: June 2006

Date of last inspection: March 2000

School's Unique reference number: 117559

Headteacher: Mr. E.Delasalle

Inspector's name and number: Catherine Large

School context

The Thomas Coram School is located on the south-eastern edge of Berkhamsted, a relatively affluent community. The ages of the pupils range from 9 to 13. Over 94% of the pupils come from white British ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The number of pupils with special educational needs is above the national average. This is partly as a result of parents from out of the catchment area choosing the school. For a variety of reasons, leadership of the school has undergone significant transitions in the last four years. A new headteacher has been formally in the post for two terms. During the same period, there have been changes and gaps amongst the local clergy. This position, too, has now been stabilised.

Summary Judgement

Overall, the Thomas Coram school is a satisfactory church school which has many good features, notably its caring and inclusive ethos. It is now in the early stages of re-defining and building up its distinctiveness as a church school. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these developments but the indications are that the school has the commitment and the capacity to become a really good church school.

Established strengths

- The caring and inclusive ethos which leads to pupils feeling valued;
- The overall good provision for collective worship and religious education which pupils recognise as being an important aspect of their church school experience;
- The personal development of pupils;
- The strong commitment of the Governing Body and staff to making the Christian character of the school more explicit and effective.

Focus for development

- The provision of further consultation and support for developments in relation to the Church school status;
- The continued development of strategies to ensure that all pupils make good progress in their learning across the curriculum;
- The implementation of monitoring procedures for collective worship so that its effectiveness can be evaluated;
- An increase in opportunities for pupils to visit and meet people from cultural and faith backgrounds different to their own.

How well does the school, through its distinctive Christian character, meet the needs of all learners?

The school makes satisfactory provision for meeting the needs of all its learners..)
(Overall grade 3)

There is a strong sense of community in the school and learners do feel cared for and respected. Christian values are promoted throughout the life of the school and this ethos creates a positive learning environment, leading generally to good relationships at all levels. This view is endorsed in parent and pupil surveys. Pastoral support is strong and pupils with special educational needs are particularly well supported. There is a good system of rewards which motivates pupils. Pupils are given a good range of opportunities to develop their personal and social skills through extra-curricular activities and a range of activities such as school productions, talent shows and educational visits. School Council is effective and there are increasing numbers of good opportunities for pupils to train as peer

mediators and buddies. The club run by Christian Youth Workers from the town is well regarded and supported. The school's self-evaluation is good. It recognises the need to continue with developments in teaching and learning and the use of tracking data to raise levels of achievement and progress for all learners. Early indicators are that this is beginning to have a positive impact. Pupils feel safe and confident with regard to issues of bullying. Behaviour is good on the whole although a significant minority of pupils express concern that a few pupils' behaviour impedes learning in some classes. The school is aware of this issue and has good strategies in place to ensure consistency in dealing with it. The social, moral and cultural development of pupils is good. Spiritual development and the celebration of cultural diversity are less secure. The school recognises the need to put in place training on spiritual development and to provide more opportunities for pupils to experience and encounter cultures and faiths different to their own.

What is the impact of collective worship on the school community?

The worshipping experience provided by the school is good.

(Overall grade 2)

Collective worship is well organised and provides a good balance of opportunities for pupils to reflect and pray. Statutory requirements are fully met. Appropriate themes are identified which reflect the Christian year as well as broader issues. Pupils are generally positive about worship and regard it as one of the two main indicators of the Christian status of the school. They confirm that they are given opportunities for prayer and reflection and most found this of personal value. Collective worship during the inspection was good. Pupils show respect for the occasion, entering quietly and being attentive. They participate well when given the opportunity. They particularly enjoy the worship led by local Christian Youth Workers and by their peers in the class-led weekly whole school worship. During the year, the school organises special acts of worship to welcome new pupils in Year 5 and to say goodbye to pupils in Year 8. These, and the Founder's day acts of worship, are valued by the pupils. The school has done its best to create an appropriate atmosphere conducive for worship by the use of music, focal points and banners. The school recognises the need to establish monitoring and evaluation procedures to identify the impact of worship in the life of the school. At present, there are insufficient occasions when worship reflects Anglican faith and practice. Pupils do experience worship in the local Upper School chapel but lack opportunity to worship in the main Parish Church.

How effective is the religious education?

The overall effectiveness of religious education is satisfactory with good features.

(Overall grade 3)

Religious education has a strong place in the curriculum and pupils recognise its contribution to the Christian character of the school. Standards in religious education are in line with national and local expectations. Overall progress is satisfactory. The best achievement is in relation to knowledge and understanding of Christian festivals and key aspects of the life of Jesus and in basic grasp of the main elements of some other world religions. As pupils move through the school, they make good progress in their ability to reflect on fundamental questions such as the existence of God and the questions raised by suffering. They develop good skills of communication and work well together in groups. In oral work, boys and girls were equally confident and engaged. Weaknesses in pupils' learning relate to a lack of understanding about how religion affects a believer in everyday life. Lessons observed during inspection ranged from satisfactory to good. Most were good. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Non-specialist teachers are well supported by the co-ordinator who has identified appropriate priorities for the development of the subject. Visits to local churches form a key element in the curriculum and increase pupils' knowledge and experience. Pupils' understanding of the impact of faith would increase through greater involvement of clergy and other visitors in their lessons and from visits to the places of worship of other faiths. The progress of pupils is being tracked through specific assessment tasks and the recording of data. The department recognises that this tracking now needs to be used more effectively to identify and to share with pupils what it is they need to do to improve.

How effective are the leadership and management of the school as a church school?

The leadership and management of the school as a church school is satisfactory.
(Overall grade 3)

At the time of inspection, developments in relation to the Church status of the school were at too early a stage to fully evaluate their effectiveness. However, the indications are that the school has the commitment and capacity to become a really good church school. The Governing Body, staff and School Council have already been involved in articulating their vision for the school and recognise the importance of involving parents and pupils in this process. Links with local clergy are being strengthened, adding to the effective ministry of the Youth Workers. Currently, there are some missed opportunities to involve clergy and Youth Workers in curriculum areas, particularly religious education. A link governor has been active and effective in asking questions and communicating key information and ideas to the governors about worship and religious education. Management decisions about staffing and the curriculum reflect well on the school's commitment to improve its Christian ethos. For example, a member of staff has been appointed to draw together areas broadly related to the Christian ethos of the school and the personal, social, health and citizenship (PHSCE) curriculum has been strengthened. There are strong links with local schools and smooth transition processes are in place. Overall, the school's self-evaluation of this section as satisfactory is fair, given that so many of the improvements are at an embryonic stage.

SIAS report June 2006 The Thomas Coram Church of England Voluntary Aided Middle School Swing Gate Lane, Berkhamsted, Herts. HP4 2RP