

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Berkley Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Berkley Street,
Berkley,
Frome
BA11 5JH

Diocese: Bath and Wells

Local authority: Somerset County

Dates of inspection: 29th April 2008

Date of last inspection: March 2005

School's unique reference number: 123745

Headteacher: Mrs Carole Brautigam

Inspector's name and number: Mr Andrew Rickett - 201

School context

Berkley Church of England School is a rural first school with 92 children arranged into three class groups. The majority of the children come from the nearby town of Frome. All children come from a white British heritage. The number of children with learning difficulties or disabilities is close to the national average. The headteacher took up a permanent post in September 2007 following a period as acting headteacher.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Berkley Church of England First School as a Church School are good.

Berkley is a school that demonstrates a clear commitment to each child by respecting their individuality and encouraging their spiritual development. This stems from the vision of the headteacher who ensures that the Christian character of the school has an impact on the learning and personal development of each child.

Established strengths

- The level of care that exists between all members of the school community.
- The impact of collective worship on the lives of the children.
- The clear leadership of the headteacher.

Focus for development

- Involve governors in the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the revised vision to enhance the school's distinctive Christian ethos.
- Create opportunities to deepen children's understanding in Religious Education.
- Look for opportunities to involve the rector in the spiritual life of the school.
- Review the behaviour policy so that it reflects the school's approach to relationships.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is good in the way it meets the needs of all learners.

Relationships at Berkley are rooted in the Christian values of care and respect. This is seen in the way that children work and play together. During lessons they collaborate well when working in pairs or small groups by listening to and respecting the opinions of others. At play they share with each other and all ages freely mix together. This is a reflection of the emphasis which is put on valuing the individual and appreciating their unique qualities. Children are made aware of the love that God has for each one of them. For example, in one lesson they were encouraged to think about why they are special and to celebrate this. Through this approach, children at Berkley develop the confidence to express their thoughts

and beliefs openly in an environment which accepts the children for who they truly are. There are many opportunities for children to develop their spirituality throughout the day with the integration of specific values which are acknowledged throughout the whole curriculum. During the inspection, 'forgiveness' was the focus and children described how they found it helpful in their daily lives. Attitudes towards learning are positive because children know that they will be listened to by the adults who respect their opinions and encourage them to do their best. Children of all abilities progress well because lessons are thoroughly planned. Those RE lessons which are very good, use creative ways through which children can learn and employ a wide variety of teaching styles. Children say that they feel safe and secure at a school which is happy and where everyone is a friend.

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

Collective worship has an impact on the lives of the children. They are able to explain how the messages they hear, such as loving your neighbour, are relevant to their lives and say that they remember them when they are worried about something. Children have a good understanding that acts of worship are part of being a church school and are a special time in which they learn about Jesus and pray to God. They have a clear grasp of how prayer can be used to thank God or to ask Him for comfort and support, especially at a personal level. For example, one child commented that when she prays, 'God gives you courage to let your anger out.' This shows a quite profound understanding of prayer for children so young. Children generally respond well to prayer in acts of worship and show respect during these occasions. They know the Lord's Prayer and can repeat it confidently as well as the words of welcome which are regularly said at the beginning of worship. Children demonstrate their spiritual understanding during an exciting part of each act of worship when they are given the opportunity to say extempore prayers. They do this eagerly and even the youngest child will stand at the front and make up a short prayer. The school uses the advantage of being next to the parish church by holding regular services there each week. This proximity helps to remind children of their links with the church. Children are therefore very familiar with the building and think of it as an extension to the school. The Rector and a local Baptist minister are involved in leading collective worship by sharing alternate weeks. Children say that they enjoy these times and appreciate the different styles in which local clergy deliver worship. Major Christian festivals are celebrated throughout the year and these help to raise awareness among children of their significance to the Christian faith.

The Religious Education is satisfactory.

Religious Education is an important part of the curriculum. The school acknowledges its special qualities and the unique contribution it can make to a child's learning. To ensure that this continues to develop, the school recognises that there needs to be more challenge when exploring children's beliefs and opinions so that there is a greater depth to their thinking in RE lessons. The school has already identified that this can be achieved by creating stronger links between spiritual growth and the themes from collective worship. Standards of written work in RE are comparable with other core subjects and children achieve well overall. Children of all abilities make good progress because lessons are carefully planned to ensure that all children have the opportunity to succeed. The best teaching was seen when the pace kept children motivated and engaged. Where the lesson was delivered in small steps, children clearly followed the learning intention as it was gradually developed. This encouraged children to become engaged in their learning which was evident in the good level of response to the teachers' questions. Attitudes towards RE are positive and children say that they particularly enjoy learning about the similarities between other faiths and Christianity. The syllabus has been carefully organised so that it complements what is covered in the local middle schools. In addition, there is an effective assessment of children's progress which looks at children's knowledge and what they have learnt from their studies.

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

The headteacher has recently led the school through a review of its vision and values. She has introduced a clear plan that highlights the direction that needs to be taken to enable the school to develop the school's Christian ethos further. The school has all the right elements that make it a distinctive church school; a Christian foundation to its aims and vision, collective worship that promotes the vision and a school community which supports it. The headteacher, together with the governors, understand that drawing all of these together will in time provide a powerful mechanism through which they can realise their vision. The headteacher is committed to the Christian character of the school and has a good grasp of how it can make a difference to the lives of the children. In this she is ably supported by the foundation governors. They understand that the vision is a key part of the school and agree that they need to have a more strategic role in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the Christian ethos as well as that of RE and collective worship. The Rector was appointed in September 2007 following an interregnum and having chosen not to be a governor, recognises that he could make a valuable contribution to this Christian community through his support of its pastoral and spiritual life. He now needs to implement these ideas. Links with the wider church community are good and these have been maintained through the period without a vicar. The headteacher has temporarily taken on the role of RE Coordinator until a new coordinator is appointed in the new academic year. She ensures that RE has a high profile within the curriculum and that its special focus becomes important to the lives of the children. Parents agree that the school provides their children with a good foundation in their moral development and appreciate that the headteacher leads her staff in valuing children as individuals. The school is valued as a key part of the local community and makes an important contribution to the life of the village.

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