

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Berkswell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Church Lane
Berkswell
Coventry
CV7 7BJ

Diocese: Coventry

Local authority:	Solihull
Dates of inspection:	30 th April 2009
Date of last inspection:	February 2006
School's unique reference number:	104093
Headteacher:	Alison Wellings
Inspector's name and number:	Lyn Field 151

School context

The school has a history of five hundred years as a church school. It serves the village of Berkswell and its surrounding area and places are usually oversubscribed. Almost all pupils are White British and speak English. They start school with abilities above what is expected for their age.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Berkswell as a Church of England school are outstanding

This is an exceptional church school in every way. It remains outstanding because of the dynamic leadership that ensures it continues to evolve and provide a rich and challenging Christian education for its pupils. Recent initiatives go well beyond the areas identified by the last inspection and the spiritual dimension is deeply embedded. Children develop as mature and compassionate people ready to play leading roles in the communities in which they find themselves.

Established strengths

- The headteacher provides inspiring spiritual leadership
- Pupils have a significant role in organising and leading worship
- The whole staff team implements the ethos of the school
- Governors ensure that the school is well placed to sustain strong Christian leadership in the future
- There is enthusiasm for the open discussion of faith and spiritual matters that leads to high standards in Religious Education

Focus for development

Given the constant attention that senior leaders give to the Christian ethos of the school, there are no significant areas for development.

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

The spiritual dimension to learning permeates all aspects of school life and is evident around every corner. Plans for what and how pupils are taught draw strongly on the creative arts so that they are able to articulate feelings about the bigger issues of human experience. A series of stunning paintings illustrating the stations of the cross, has inspired every child to follow a trail around the school and reflect on the meaning of the pictures. Pupils show a real interest in talking about issues of faith. Over lunch, for example, a discussion developed about

spiritual gifts. This demonstrates how pupils speak openly about their personal beliefs and have a genuine respect and curiosity for other religious traditions. The Q club, a lunchtime group led by a member of the church to explore religious questions, leaves pupils buzzing. Parents report that these thought provoking discussions continue at home. Unsurprisingly, they have complete confidence in the way their children are cared for. They rightly point to 'a dynamic staff, fired up by what they do' and who listen carefully to pupils and feedback their ideas into the decision making processes of the school. Relationships are excellent and prompt pupils to care for each other and to identify with the vision of organisations they support such as Dr Barnardos. They are motivated to achieve their best in everything but this is not expressed in terms of being 'top dog'. It is more about developing the skills to contribute the best they can to the school family and communities where they might find themselves in the future.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is a rich and inspiring element of school life for all members of the community. Parents value the insight services give them into how children build an understanding of faith. They see it as an additional way of communicating feelings that they themselves find uplifting. The quality of leadership is exemplary because everyone involved pays close attention to the spiritual needs of children and is never complacent. Plans are in place, therefore, to introduce the Eucharist and develop worship outdoors. Pupils can be trusted with the leadership of worship because they understand the distinctive nature of worship from their own experience in school. The Year 6 worship group regularly change the series of images they project as pupils enter the hall so that these remain fresh and capture pupils' interest in the theme. Equally, the prayer tree is well used because the group finds ways for the youngest children to express their thoughts. The 'Open the Book' scheme is exceptionally well delivered by members of the church so that the messages of Bible stories are remembered long afterwards. Singing and music are of the highest quality. Two part harmonies, real attention to the words and instrumental playing add to the special atmosphere that is created. This was summed up by one pupil who said, 'There are real wow moments that send shivers down my spine'. Prayer and reflection are elements of worship that spill out into school life especially as pupils are left with a 'thought for the day' that is often followed up in classrooms. They understand how the symbols they use and the pattern of services reflects the Anglican tradition of their school.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

The high standards in RE have been maintained since the last inspection and the subject continues to make a significant impact on the spiritual and moral development of pupils. They understand that certain places and objects often hold special significance because lessons include practical activities that are far more meaningful than mere learning of facts. This enables lower ability pupils who may be less confident in literacy skills to achieve well. The care taken to prepare displays, such as the one of a Hindu shrine, models respect for other faiths. Consequently, pupils develop positive attitudes to diversity because they learn that beliefs affect what people do in their daily lives and that this may mirror what happens in other faiths. The willingness of adults to share their personal faith strengthens this understanding and pupils listen intently to the school cook's excellent description of how she was brought up as a Hindu. The commitment of staff and governors to the importance of RE is fully matched by the enthusiasm shown by pupils. They use religious language to ask perceptive questions that indicate the depth of their knowledge. Standards are well above average and pupils make consistently good progress in all classes. The inclusion of RE in the school development plan demonstrates the constant drive to improve. However, the current targets do not reflect the senior staff's insightful understanding of the impact of RE. Choices about how RE fits into the new Berkswell Global Curriculum have created meaningful links with other subjects. Themes such as 'Dubai or not Dubai' enable pupils to see the place of religion in decisions that affect the whole of humanity.

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

The energetic and spiritual leadership of the headteacher is central to the school's success. She is strongly supported by a team of staff and governors who have the interests of children at the heart of everything they do. There is an exceptionally strong structure in place to sustain the success of the school as a church school. Rigorous attention is given to ensuring that any staff appointed are able to contribute to the Christian ethos by supporting the importance placed on faith. Governors make a clear financial commitment to developing the leadership skills of teachers by making full use of the diocesan training programme. The same attention is given to the appointment of governors. As a result of this, decisions made on behalf of the school are well informed and scrutinised in the light of the school's Christian foundation. Governors are fully supportive, for example, of changes being made to RE and worship, because they see how these prepare pupils for life in contemporary society. All children receive a booklet 'Your school is a church school' when they start in nursery and care is taken to make the distinction clear to families. Parents feel the regular links with the church benefit their children and provide them with values for life.

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