

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Hackthorn Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Main Street,
Hackthorn,
Lincoln.
LN2 3PF

Diocese: Lincoln

Date of Inspection: 11.06.07

Date of last inspection: October 6th, 20th and 21st 1999.

School's unique reference number: 120572

Name of headteacher: Mr. Mel Oyston

Inspector's name and National Society Number: Mr. Greg Marsden 381

School Context

Hackthorn Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School is situated in the Parish of St. Michael and All Angels in the village of Hackthorn, near Lincoln. It is a very small school with 44 children on roll at the time of inspection, with most pupils coming from Hackthorn and its environs. Eleven percent of the pupils have special educational needs. Because the school is so small, baseline assessment on entry indicates wide variations in the number of pupils attaining at around the nationally expected range of levels. A significant proportion of pupils join the school during Key Stage Two.

Summary Judgement

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Hackthorn Primary as a Church of England school are good.

This is a good church school where Christian values are found implicitly throughout its ethos and its leadership. The school has made significant progress in the planning and delivery of collective worship. Mutually supportive relationships with the local community are an important feature of the school's distinctive ethos, which is continuing to develop.

Established Strengths

- The high quality of relationships, making everyone feel valued and important.
- In collective worship, the good quality of planning and of singing.
- The approachability of the staff leading to the confidence of the parents.
- The high quality of the indoor and outdoor physical environments.

Focus for Development

- For the governors and staff to utilise the Section 48 Self-Evaluation Toolkit in providing a training day experience in support of further school development.
- Consider and implement ways of making more explicit the links between the values of the Christian Gospel and the good work that the school does.
- Improve the environmental context for collective worship by significantly increasing Christian symbolism around the school, and introducing more opportunities for pupil led prayer.

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

The Christian ethos of the school is implicit in both its written aims and in the ways in which they are delivered in practice. For example, the school aims to prepare the children for adult life by helping them to develop well-founded and long-lasting values, and Key Stage Two pupils report that this is evident in their circle time work. One pupil reported that, 'When something goes wrong, we forgive

each other and move on'. Pupils demonstrate pride in each other's achievements and feel well cared-for. One Key Stage Two pupil who is new to the school gave positive evidence of the care and seriousness with which his concerns had been dealt, in contrast to his previous experience in other schools. Parents appreciate the instant response of the school to their queries or concerns. One commented, 'The headteacher sorted the matter out by the end of the same day'. Parents feel that the school knows their children very well. 'Our children are acknowledged as nice people'. 'My child is a nicer person because of this school'. Parents also appreciate involvement in assemblies that make all feel special.

The school makes very effective use of the advantages that its small size gives it in setting targets for, and monitoring the progress of, individual pupils. Expectations are high, leading to good levels of progress. Outcomes in Religious Education are of a high standard; for example as evidenced in the sophistication of some pupil responses to the project, 'Opinions and Thoughts on the Meaning of God.'

The external environment of the school is well planned and supportive of the spiritual development of the pupils. Many pupils are keen gardeners and choose to spend their breaktimes tending the plants. They play a full part in planning this provision, which gives them good opportunities to reflect upon the beauty of God's creation. One area of the garden is specifically reserved as a quiet place for personal reflection, and pupils were observed making good use of this facility.

Religious Education provision at the school offers many well planned opportunities for these relatively isolated rural children to encounter other cultures and beliefs. Pupils visit a Gudwara and a Hindu temple as part of a carefully organised programme, and there is evidence of a good level of response in displays and photographic records. Children are enthusiastic about these opportunities, and are keen to reflect upon them.

The school takes its charitable responsibilities seriously, with recent active support given to Guide Dogs for the Blind, The Tsunami and Shoe Box Appeals, and Comic Relief. Pupils speak confidently about the importance of this work and their commitment to it.

Children are confident and natural in the way in which they relate to each other and to the staff. Standards of behaviour are very good because the staff carefully create and nurture a genuine family atmosphere, as outlined in the comprehensive Behaviour Policy. Pupils talk with confidence about how the staff respond positively to their ideas, for example one pupil stated, 'When you want to try a new sport, you just start a club and the teachers will help you'.

There is some evidence of Christian symbolism in a limited number of displays around the school and in the entrance. However, this area of the school's work is under-developed.

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

Clear and comprehensive collective worship policy documentation underpins practice. The policy aims 'to provide the opportunity for the children to experience a quiet time and a chance to pray, reflect or listen'. In the daily act of worship observed, pupils were respectful and attentive. They showed interest in the theme of 'names' and made sophisticated responses to questions. Every pupil was seen to engage fully, particularly during prayer. The standard of singing was very good, and the headteacher linked the material effectively to the themes in previous acts of worship, demonstrating good planning. There is no hall, and whole-school worship takes place in one of the classrooms. Apart from a candle lit during prayers, there was no clearly defined visual focussed backdrop, which made the area insufficiently stimulating as a special place for worship.

Acts of Worship are organised as a mixture of whole school and key stage formats. This assists with differentiating the material appropriately. Pupils report that they enjoy collective worship. They like stories from the Bible, and enjoy opportunities for silent reflection. Some pupils express the desire for more help with understanding how to pray. For although some pupils have contributed prayers of

a good standard to the school's printed prayer book, and all were observed to know and be able to recite The Lord's Prayer there is no provision made for pupils to engage their peers in prayer personal to their needs.

The school makes regular use of the church for worship, and this makes explicit to a good standard many aspects of the Anglican tradition. Most visits to the church are connected with the major festivals of the Church's year, for which there is a full programme. Children are able to talk with confidence about the church building and its functions, and like to be actively involved. The Vicar plays a full part in the collective worship programme by leading one session per week.

An annual visit is made to the Church Schools' Festival, which helps pupils to understand the position of their school within the Anglican family. Many pupils are very proud of the banner that they have made for this and other purposes and can explain to a high standard the symbolism behind their designs.

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

The headteacher expresses a clear overall vision for the school and is enabling it to become established at the core of the village life. In the view of the very supportive Bishop's Visitor, 'The school is very well thought of amongst the local community.' Governors feel included and part of the team, as do other members of staff. The Chair of Governors finds the headteacher approachable and helpful with regard to her role. She played a full part in the recent appointment of a new teacher, during which the Christian ethos of the school was a significant issue for discussion.

The headteacher's leadership has been instrumental in the significant improvements that the school has experienced in recent years with regard to its environment and its standards of teaching and learning. In this work he has been well supported by the governing body, and governors exercise their role as critical friends effectively through a well-planned system of monitoring. Governors have attended diocesan and local authority training in order to ensure that they are able to carry out their role effectively. However, they have not yet sufficiently developed their monitoring practice in relation to the distinctive Christian character of the school.

The partnership between the school, the Bishop's Visitor and the Vicar has led to very good links with St. Michael's parish. A fine example of this is the school's support for the new bells project where it was felt that 'the school really put itself out to help'. Parents affirm the quality of this relationship. 'The whole village supports the school's fundraising efforts'.

Staff speak of being part of a real team, and feel that their good practice and ideas for development are appreciated and acted upon by the headteacher and the governors. The overall commitment of the headteacher and the governors ensures that the capacity for further development as a church school is very good.