

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Hertingfordbury Cowper Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Birch Green,
Hertford
SG14 2LR

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire

SIAS Inspection: Monday 28 January 2008

Previous S23 Inspection: 23 June and 16 July 2003

URN: 117563

Headteacher: Alison Richards

SIAS Inspector Name: Bob Hopcraft

SIAS Inspector No: 484

School Context

Hertingfordbury Cowper CofE (VA) Primary School is a smaller than average primary school, housed in a mixture of traditional and modern buildings, set in rural surroundings close to the large towns of Hertford and Welwyn Garden City. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below the national average, as is the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. Pupil mobility is low and most pupils are of White British Heritage. The school benefits from a thriving trust fund, which significantly enhances the school's opportunities to provide a stimulating and exciting learning environment for its pupils.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Hertingfordbury Cowper CofE Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are good.

Hertingfordbury Cowper is a good Church school with many strengths. It is now outstanding in the way it promotes its Christian character and it provides a stimulating and exciting environment in which to grow and learn. Acts of worship encourage active participation by all and the clear focus on Christian values ensures that relationships are strong and supportive. Standards in Religious Education are good and the headteacher and governors provide strong and focused leadership for the school as a Church school.

Established strengths

- The clear vision of the headteacher and governors for the development of the school as a church school;
- The outstanding behaviour and attitudes of pupils;
- The strong values education programme which underpins the school's work;
- The good quality acts of collective worship, which are stimulating and thought provoking.

Focus for development

- Develop systems to ensure that the quality and impact of collective worship are consistently and regularly evaluated;
- Provide wider opportunities for pupils to study and understand other cultures;
- Ensure that the quality of pupils' written work in RE more closely matches their good oral and verbal understanding of the subject

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

This is because all learners feel valued and special, are encouraged to achieve their best and are well challenged. Pupils support one another well and are provided with many opportunities to use and develop their talents and interests, for example playing an instrument in the school orchestra during collective worship. Christian values underpin all that the school does, ensuring that pupils feel secure, confident and happy in school. One parent was moved to write: *"It strongly instils the caring and sharing nature of Christian life"*. Pupils show very high levels of self-esteem and maturity and have many opportunities to develop responsibility as they progress through the school. The School Council is a good example of this, providing an effective forum for pupils to discuss and influence the development of the school. Progress in spiritual, social and emotional development is outstanding. Progress in cultural development is good and the school has identified this as an area for future development. Relationships are outstanding at all levels and there are good systems in place to ensure that situations where conflicts may arise are avoided, for example *Active Lunchtimes* and *Playground Guardians*. New school buildings have been completed since the last inspection, enabling the school to provide a bright and stimulating environment in which to work. Displays, some of which are focused on RE, are designed to celebrate pupils' work and promote thought. The symbols of the Christian religion are clearly displayed around the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship plays a key part in the life of the school and underpins its Christian character. Acts of worship are stimulating and encourage pupils to reflect on a range of values and beliefs – but most of all they are fun and engaging. They are well planned, using the school's Values Education programme as a basis; as a result, pupils are able to talk about key Christian values and have a good knowledge of Bible stories and their meanings. However, the school does not currently evaluate the quality and impact of acts of collective worship consistently. Pupils participate actively in worship and older pupils lead worship on a regular basis. Through worship, pupils are encouraged to respect the views of others and many opportunities are provided for quiet reflection and thought. Prayer is used effectively and classes say and sing their own prayers, which can provide thought-provoking and moving moments during the school day, for example the sung grace in one classroom before lunch, which the children had written and developed themselves. There are very good links with the local Church and clergy visit regularly to lead worship with both older and younger pupils.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

This is because the majority of learners make good progress and attain above the expected levels in religious education (RE) by the end of their time in the school. Pupils' oral and verbal understanding is good and they are able to discuss a range of religious topics and ideas in some depth. However, the written work in their books does not always reflect this depth. Pupils enjoy RE and the curriculum is well planned, using the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus as a basis. Teaching in RE is good and teachers use skilful questioning, designed to encourage pupils to apply the ideas they are learning to their own lives. Assessment in RE is well developed and pupils' progress is tracked regularly, ensuring that all ability groups are well challenged. RE supports moral, social, spiritual and cultural development well and pupils are knowledgeable about a range of world religions. They have visited a variety of places of worship to support their studies, including a Sikh Gurdwara and the local Church. RE is well led and managed by the joint RE co-ordinators, who have a clear view of the strengths and areas for development within the subject.

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

All are clear about the school's Christian foundation; the vast majority of parents are supportive of this and the school's Christian status is now evident in its public documentation. The headteacher has played a key role in promoting the school's effectiveness as a Church school and in this she has been ably supported by staff, governors and clergy. Progress on the development of the school as a Church school is regularly reported to governors as part of the headteacher's written report, ensuring that governors monitor this area regularly and rigorously. Good use has been made of professional development opportunities, particularly those provided by the Diocese, to enhance and nourish the school's Christian character. Parents speak highly of the school and the school seeks their views regularly. The School Development Plan contains a section relating to the school's development as a Church School, which also provides a clear and strategic view of developments in collective worship and RE. There are very strong links with the local Church and the vicar plays a key part in the life of the school. Despite its relatively isolated geographical location, the school has strong links with the local community and pupils are being encouraged to look wider afield through developing links with a primary school in Rwanda. Pupils are encouraged to become involved in a range of charitable giving, designed to help their understanding of the needs of other groups.