

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

New Christ Church Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Milman Road

Reading

RG2 0AY

Diocese of Oxford

LA: Reading

Date of inspection: 21st May 2007

Date of last inspection: 18th October, 6 November, 2002

School's Unique reference number: 132109

Name of Headteacher: Ms Maria Soulsby

Inspector's name and NS inspector's number: The Rev'd. Richard Peers (125)

Context

New Christchurch is a Voluntary Aided Primary School of 131 pupils just outside the centre of Reading near the University area of the city. A high proportion of pupils are in the early stages of learning English and a high number of pupils have special educational needs. The school community is culturally very diverse. There is considerable turbulence on the pupil roll and a high staff turnover.

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The distinctiveness and effectiveness of New Christchurch as a Church of England school is outstanding. Learners benefit from a culture that cares for each individual. The school provides an outstanding opportunity for pupils to develop spiritually and have permission to be themselves in the fullest sense.

Established strengths

- The outstanding Christian leadership of the Headteacher and Governors;
- The relationship with the local community which has a strong sense of the school as its school;
- The spiritual life of the school which shows a real and thoughtful holiness.

Focus for development

- Tracking progress in Religious Education (R.E.);
- Creating a portfolio of evidence of progress in R.E.

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

Pupils feel safe and very well cared for. They describe the school as a family to which everyone belongs. They want to share the special qualities of the school with others and are rightly proud of their school. They talk of the school as a place where love is the most important quality.

The school environment is outstanding and display is exemplary. Excellent use has been made of every available space. Pupils benefit from the Headteacher's vision of every successful civilization having a fortress, a temple and a market place: Pupils know that the school is safe place, that there are places and times for prayer and that they are in school to exchange ideas.

Pupils recognize that there are opportunities for them to exercise responsibility and to be independent learners. The Peer mediators system is well developed and strongly valued by pupils. Pupils know that the Rainbow Room is a special place to go when they are in need. They are, therefore, willing to take risks in their learning in an environment of safety and care.

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

There is very good evidence of evaluation of Collective Worship and of the drive to constantly improve it and match the needs of pupils.

Class groups use Candle Time very effectively to provide an opportunity for quiet reflection and prayer. Good records are kept of this and it is well evaluated. Pupils understand that Candle Time is different to Circle Time as a time to reflect on themselves and meet God. Pupils are encouraged to 'take the spiritual initiative' and to show leadership of their own spiritual development. Pupils are able to put this into their own words as being 'excited' to discover 'how much there is to know about God'.

An outstanding act of worship allowed the school to worship together with real devotion and attention and to apply the fruits of the Spirit to the day to day life of the school.

The pupil panel showed real wisdom in their understanding of God as 'a kind of love, just love', or as the 'special bit of everyone', 'everyone on earth is sort of God'. Pupils know that prayer is important and recognise it as a significant feature of life. On the day of the inspection a pupil asked a teacher if she could light a candle in church.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Religious Education is good. The R.E. Scheme of Work clearly identifies the different strands of learning about religion and learning from it and older pupils were able to explain the difference. There is a good awareness of progression in R.E. and an expectation that pupils will extend themselves through it. The Subject leader has an outstanding commitment to the spiritual development of pupils and leads a 'Sunday Club' on two lunchtimes each week preparing for the parish church's Family Worship. She also has a profoundly theological understanding of the importance of questions in R.E. and spiritual development.

All staff are supported by INSET such as a recent day run by the church schools in Reading and at which the Headteacher led one session. Pupils like R.E. and think they are taught very well. They described lessons as being fun and difficult, which they liked. They highlighted learning about other religions as a way of improving the world and stopping wars. Teaching seen in R.E. was outstanding and used elements of Godly Play as well as wonderfully prepared moments of real delight. Standards are high and elicit high level answers and vocabulary even from young children.

Levels are used in R.E. but there is not yet any tracking of progress across the school or formal monitoring of quality of teaching. The subject leader has a good understanding of the next steps for improvement in her subject.

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

The Headteacher has an outstanding understanding of what it means to be a church school, she is clear about the physical environment as a place where God can be met and experienced. The Head clearly understands her role as the school's 'spiritual leader'.

Pupils know that all the staff care for them and value them as individuals. The spiritual development of pupils has a high priority and is clearly identified in the life of the school.

The awareness of spirituality is developed at some depth and includes the 'darker side' of life 'a sense of transience and change' as well as 'awe and wonder'. Pupils understand that displays in the school represent a variety of religious faiths and know that this is a way of showing care for all people. Prayer areas in classrooms provide a good focus for the spiritual life of class groups and reflect the worship space of the whole school.

The Governors work hard for the school and bring a great depth of skills to it. They are able to articulate the very many strengths of the school and its links with the church.

Governors meetings begin with a time of reflection which is inclusive of a variety of faith commitments.

There are outstanding links with the parish church signified by the two parts of a puzzle kept one in the school and one in church and pointed out by pupils. As well as the school's pattern of worship in the church pupils and their families are joined at the parish's monthly family worship by the Headteacher and other staff. The Headteacher speaks movingly of the support the vicar and parish have given her. The school was used as a model in recent Culham Institute work on training parish clergy. Pupils know their vicar and understand

that he is their priest. They know that they belong to a wider church they could name the area bishop and the name of the diocese saying of the area bishop "you can just go up and say anything to him". Excellent links exist between the four church schools in Reading and senior staff meet very frequently.

SIAS report May 2007 New Christ Church Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School. Milman Road Reading RG2 0AY